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Neoliberal Urbanism: Models, Moments, Mutations

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In this article, we analyze the connections between neoliberalization processes and urban transformations. Cities have become strategically central sites in the uneven, crisis-laden advance of neoliberal restructuring projects. However, in contrast to neoliberal ideology, our analysis draws attention to the path-dependent interactions between neoliberal projects of restructuring and inherited institutional and spatial landscapes. Accordingly, we emphasize the geographically variable, yet multiscalar and translocally interconnected, nature of neoliberal urbanism. We also suggest that cities are sites of serial policy failure as well as resistance to neoliberal programs of urban restructuring. For these reasons, urban regions provide an important reference point for understanding some of the limits, contradictions and mutations of the neoliberal project since the 1990s.

Introduction

In this article, we analyze the connections between neoliberalization processes and urban transformations. Cities have become strategically central sites in the uneven, crisis-laden advance of neoliberal restructuring projects. However, in contrast to neoliberal ideology, our analysis draws attention to the path-dependent *interactions* between neoliberal projects of restructuring and inherited institutional and spatial landscapes. Accordingly, we emphasize the geographically variable, yet multiscalar and translocally interconnected, nature of neoliberal urbanism. We also suggest that cities are sites of serial policy failure as well as resistance to neoliberal programs of urban restructuring. For these reasons, urban regions provide an important reference point for understanding some of the limits, contradictions and mutations of the neoliberal project since the 1990s.

We begin by presenting the methodological foundations for our analysis, which are summarized through the concept of “actually existing neoliberalism.” Whereas neoliberal ideology assumes that market forces operate according to immutable laws no matter where they are unleashed, the concept of “actually existing neoliberalism” draws attention to the contextual

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embeddedness and path-dependency of neoliberal restructuring projects. In particular, this concept offers an analytical basis on which to explore the *production* of such projects within distinctive national, regional and local contexts, defined by the legacies of inherited institutional frameworks, policy regimes, regulatory practices and political struggles. These considerations lead to a conceptualization of contemporary neoliberalization processes as catalysts for and expressions of an ongoing creative destruction of political-economic space at multiple geographical scales. Finally, we consider the role of urban spaces within the contradictory, chronically unstable and evolving geographies of actually existing neoliberalism. We argue that cities have become increasingly central to the reproduction, reconstitution and mutation of neoliberalism itself since the 1990s.

The Neoliberal Turn and the Rule of Markets

Neoliberal ideology rests on the belief that open, competitive and unregulated markets, liberated from state interference and the actions of social collectivities, represent the optimal mechanism for socioeconomic development. Neoliberalism first gained prominence during the late 1970s as a strategic political response to the declining profitability of mass production industries and the crises of Keynesian-welfarism. In response to the breakdown of accumulation regimes and established systems of governance, national and local states throughout the older industrialized world began, if hesitantly at first, to dismantle the basic institutional components of the postwar settlement and to mobilize a range of policies intended to extend market discipline, competition and commodification throughout society. In this context, neoliberal doctrines were deployed to justify, *inter alia*, the deregulation of state control over industry, assaults on organized labor, the reduction of corporate taxes, the downsizing and/or privatization of public services and assets, the dismantling of welfare programs, the enhancement of international capital mobility, and the intensification of interlocality competition.

Pinochet's Chile represented the first example of neoliberal 'shock treatment', while Thatcherism and Reaganism were amongst its defining, vanguard projects. More moderate and muted forms of a neoliberal politics have also been mobilized in traditionally social-democratic or Christian-democratic states such as Canada, New Zealand, Germany, the Netherlands, France, and Italy. Furthermore, following the debt crisis of the early 1980s, neoliberal programs of restructuring were extended selectively across the global South through the efforts of US-influenced multilateral agencies to subject peripheral and semi-peripheral states to the discipline of capital markets. By the mid-1980s, in the wake of this uneven but concerted realignment of policy agendas throughout the world, neoliberalism had become the dominant political and ideological form of capitalist globalization.

While neoliberalism is often equated with global pressures, its quintessentially political character is underscored by its strong associations with various national projects of institutional restructuring over the past 30 years. However, neoliberalism is very much a multiscalar phenomenon: it

reconstitutes scaled relationships between institutions and economic actors, such as municipal governments, national states and financialized capital; and it leads to the substitution of competitive for redistributive regulatory logics while downloading risks and responsibilities to localities.

Actually Existing Neoliberalisms

Neoliberal ideology rests upon a starkly utopian vision of market rule, rooted in an idealized conception of competitive individualism and a deep antipathy to forms of social and institutional solidarity. Yet there are serious disjunctures between the *ideology* of neoliberalism and its everyday political operations and societal effects.¹ While neoliberalism aspires to create a utopia of free markets, liberated from all forms of state interference, it has in practice entailed a dramatic intensification of coercive, disciplinary forms of state intervention in order to *impose* versions of market rule and, subsequently, to manage the consequences and contradictions of such marketization initiatives. Furthermore, whereas neoliberal ideology implies that self-regulating markets generate an optimal allocation of investments and resources, neoliberal political practice has generated pervasive market failures, new forms of social polarization, a dramatic intensification of uneven spatial development and a crisis of established modes of governance. The dysfunctional effects of neoliberal approaches to capitalist restructuring, which have been manifested at a range of spatial scales,² include persistent if uneven economic stagnation, intensifying inequality, destructive inter-locality competition, wide-ranging problems of regulatory coordination and generalized social insecurity.

Crucially, the manifold disjunctures that have accompanied the transnational extension of neoliberalism—between ideology and practice; doctrine and reality; vision and consequence—are not merely accidental side-effects of this disciplinary project; rather, they are among its most diagnostically and politically salient features. For this reason, an essentialized or purely definitional approach to the political economy of neoliberal restructuring contains significant analytical limitations. We are not dealing here with a coherently bounded ‘ism’, system, or ‘end-state’, but rather with an uneven, contradictory, and ongoing *process of neoliberalization*.³ Hence, in the present context, the somewhat elusive phenomenon that needs definitional clarification must be interpreted as a historically specific, fungible, and unstable process of market-driven sociospatial transformation, rather than as a fully actualized policy regime, ideological apparatus, or regulatory framework. Neoliberalization thus refers to the *prevailing pattern* of market-oriented, market-disciplinary regulatory restructuring, one that is being realized across an uneven institutional landscape and in the context of heterogeneous, coevolving political-economic processes. From this perspective, an adequate understanding of contemporary neoliberalization processes requires not only a grasp of their politico-ideological foundations but, just as importantly, a systematic inquiry into their multifarious institutional forms, developmental tendencies, diverse sociopolitical effects and multiple contradictions. While the ideology of neoliberalism rests on a deference to

a singular, ahistorical and uniquely efficient market, the infinitely more murky reality is that actually existing programs of neoliberalization are always contextually embedded and politically mediated, for all their generic features, family resemblances, and structural interconnections. Analyses of neoliberalization therefore confront this *necessary hybridity*, since it is not only difficult, but analytically and politically misleading, to visualize neoliberalism in ideal-typical terms, characterized by incipient or extant systemicity.

Moreover, rather than standing alone, neoliberalism tends to exist in a kind of parasitical relation to other state and social formations (neoconservatism, authoritarianism, social democracy, etc.). The form and consequenc-

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es of neoliberalizing strategies of restructuring are shaped precisely in and through these hybrid contexts.⁴ Just as the notion of a freestanding, self-regulating market has been exposed as a dangerously productive myth,⁵ it is equally important to recognize that neoliberalism's evo-

cation of a spontaneous market order is a strong discourse⁶—that is, a self-reinforcing myth rather than an accurate depiction of neoliberal statecraft. For this reason, processes of neoliberalization are inescapably embedded and context-contingent phenomena—even as their own discursive (mis) representations routinely seek to deny this very context-embeddedness.

In light of this, neither deep forms of neoliberalization, nor the ecological dominance or tendential hegemony of neoliberalism at the global scale,⁷ necessitate simple convergence in regulatory forms and institutional structures. Instead, neoliberalization is both predicated on and realized through uneven spatial development—its 'natural state' is characterized by an intensely variegated and persistently unstable topography.⁸ Convergence

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on a unified and monolithic neoliberal end state should not be anticipated, let alone held up as some kind of litmus test for determining the extent of neoliberal transformation. Likewise, the long-run sustainability of any given neoliberal policy project (such as trade liberalization or welfare reform) is not required for there to be a neoliberaliza-

tion of policy regimes; neoliberalization operates through trial-and-error experimentation, more often than not under conditions of crisis, leading in turn to deep regulatory failures and highly dysfunctional, disruptive consequences. Congruence and coherence across policy domains, therefore, are not prerequisites for an active program of neoliberalization to be under way. Rather, the critical signifiers of deep neoliberalization include: the growing ecological dominance of neoliberal structures, discourses, routines, and impulses within state formations; the intensification of regulatory re-

structuring efforts and crisis-driven responses within neoliberal parameters; and the mutual interpenetration, heightened congruence, and increased complementarity of neoliberal reforms.

We conceptualize these ongoing, contextually embedded processes of neoliberalization through the concept of *actually existing neoliberalism*. This concept is intended to underscore not only the contradictory, destructive character of neoliberal policies, but also the ways in which neoliberal ideology systematically misrepresents the real effects of such policies upon the macroinstitutional structures and evolutionary trajectories of capitalism. Two issues in particular deserve attention. First, neoliberal doctrine represents states and markets as if they reflect diametrically opposed principles of social and economic organization, rather than recognizing the politically constructed character of all economic relations. Second, neoliberal doctrine is premised upon a one-size-fits-all model of policy implementation which assumes that identical results will follow the imposition of market-oriented reforms, rather than recognizing the extraordinary variations that arise as neoliberal reform initiatives are imposed within contextually specific institutional landscapes and policy environments. Neoliberalism, in these respects, both *exploits and produces* sociospatial difference. Uneven development does not signal some transitory stage, or interruption, on the path to 'full' neoliberalization; it represents a coevolving and codependent facet of the neoliberalization process itself.

An analysis of actually existing neoliberalism, then, must begin by exploring the entrenched landscapes of capitalist regulation, derived from the Fordist-Keynesian period of capitalist development, within which neoliberal programs were first mobilized following the geoeconomic crises of the early 1970s. From this perspective, the impacts of neoliberal restructuring strategies cannot be understood adequately through abstract or decontextualized debates regarding the relative merits of market-based reform initiatives or the purported limits of particular forms of state policy. Rather, an understanding of actually existing neoliberalism requires an exploration of:

- the historically specific regulatory landscapes and political settlements that prevailed within particular (national) territories during the Fordist-Keynesian period of capitalist development;
- the historically specific patterns of crisis formation, uneven development and sociopolitical contestation that emerged within those territories following the systemic crisis of the Fordist-Keynesian developmental model in the early 1970s;
- the subsequent interaction of market-oriented, market-disciplinary (neoliberal) initiatives with inherited regulatory frameworks, patterns of territorial development and sociopolitical alliances; and
- the concomitant evolution of neoliberalizing policy agendas and restructuring strategies through their conflictual interaction with contextually specific political-economic conditions, regulatory arrangements and constellations of social and political power.

In the remainder of this article, we analyze the spatialities and temporalities of contemporary neoliberalization processes. After emphasizing the

path-dependent character of neoliberal reform initiatives, we call attention to the destructive and creative moments of the neoliberalization process. We conclude by considering the ways in which cities have become strategically essential arenas for neoliberalizing forms of policy experimentation and institutional restructuring. This, we argue, signals an important mutation in the nature of neoliberalization processes themselves since the early 1990s.

Path-dependent Neoliberalization

The notion of actually existing neoliberalism is intended to illuminate the complex, contested ways in which neoliberal restructuring strategies interact with pre-existing uses of space, institutional configurations, and constellations of sociopolitical power. As we have emphasized, neoliberal programs of capitalist restructuring are never imposed in a pure form, for they are always introduced within politico-institutional contexts that have been molded significantly by inherited regulatory arrangements, institutionalized practices and political compromises.⁹ In this sense, the evolution of any politico-institutional configuration, following the imposition of neoliberal policy reforms, is likely to demonstrate strong properties of path-dependency in which established institutional arrangements significantly shape the scope and trajectory of reform. In this context, pre- or non-neoliberal institutions should not be seen simply as anachronistic institutional residues, for their interpenetration with neoliberal forms of restructuring will shape pathways and outcomes in distinctive, generative, and contradictory ways. It follows that each hybrid form of neoliberalization—each actually existing neoliberalized formation—can be expected to be associated with its own, distinctive emergent properties. Varieties of neoliberalism, then, are more than contingently variable; they represent contextually specific, yet globally interconnected, conjunctural formations. This calls for situated analyses of specific hybrid formations in relation to broader, worldwide neoliberalization tendencies rather than attempts to catalogue the various ‘types’ of neoliberalism or to assess degrees of divergence from a putative American ‘norm’.¹⁰

Neoliberal policy agendas have themselves been transformed through their intensive, conflictual interaction with inherited institutional landscapes and power configurations during the last three decades. Neoliberalism has evolved considerably during the last three decades from a relatively abstract economic doctrine (its emergent form in the 1970s) and a means of dismantling established Keynesian-welfarist arrangements (its prevailing form in the 1980s) into, most recently, a reconstituted form of market-guided regulation, intended not only to animate surges of financialized economic

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growth, but also to manage some of the deep sociopolitical contradictions induced by earlier forms of market-disciplinary policy intervention. In the present context, the key point is that these politico-ideological shifts have emerged along a strongly path-dependent evolutionary trajectory. While first deployed as a strategic response to the crisis of an earlier political-economic framework (Fordist-Keynesian capitalism), neoliberal policies were subsequently modified qualitatively to confront a growing number of governance failures, crisis tendencies and contradictions, some of which were endogenous to neoliberalism as a politico-regulatory project itself, and some of which followed from context-specific regulatory dilemmas confronting particular hybrid formations. The transition from the orthodox, radically anti-statist neoliberalisms of Reagan and Thatcher in the 1980s to the more socially-moderate and ameliorative neoliberalisms of Blair, Clinton and Schröder during the 1990s may therefore be understood as a path-dependent adjustment and reconstitution of neoliberal strategies in response to endogenous disruptions, dysfunctions and crisis tendencies. Even if, in an abstract sense, the broad contours of neoliberal projects exhibit a series of defining features—such as an orientation to export-oriented, financialized capital; a preference for non-bureaucratic modes of regulation; an antipathy towards sociospatial redistribution; and a structural inclination toward market-like governance systems or private monopolies—the actually existing neoliberalisms of today are markedly different from their early 1980s predecessors. Correspondingly, we can expect the stakes, sites, structures and subjects of contemporary neoliberalization to be meaningfully different in, for example, Berlin, Johannesburg, Seoul and Chicago. These localized neoliberalizations have each been rooted in distinctive crises of, and reactions to, their respective extant institutional orders, and they each signify unique conjunctural trajectories.

Creatively Destructive Neoliberalism

In order to grasp the path-dependent interactions between existing institutional forms and emergent neoliberal projects, we propose to analyze actually existing neoliberalism with reference to two dialectically intertwined but analytically distinct moments—first, the (partial) *destruction* of extant institutional arrangements and political compromises through market-oriented reform initiatives; and second, the (tendential) *creation* of a new infrastructure for market-oriented economic growth, commodification, and capital-centric rule. Concrete programs of neoliberal restructuring tend to combine the *rollback* of oppositional institutional forms through the dismantling of collectivist, progressively redistributionist systems and the contradictory deregulation of economies, along with the *rollout* of new modes of institutional regulation and new forms of statecraft.¹¹

In this sense, neoliberalism should not be visualized as a coherent successor to Keynesian-welfarism in the Atlantic Fordist countries or, for that matter, as a successor to developmentalist states in the global South. For, in practice, programs of neoliberal restructuring are substantially ab-

sorbed with, first, the long-run and always-incomplete task of dismantling inherited institutional forms, and second, the challenge of managing the attendant economic consequences and social fallout from previous programs of neoliberalization. In contrast to the pristine discourses of competition and liberty that frame and legitimate neoliberal strategies, these forms of institutional reaction are not only more prosaic, they necessarily also entangle each and every neoliberal restructuring strategy with an enduring set of institutional legacies and coevolving conditions. This is not just to make the point that neoliberal strategies echo domestic politics, that they are path-dependent in some merely contingent manner, but rather to advance the much stronger claim that neoliberal strategies are deeply and indelibly shaped by diverse acts of institutional dissolution—in short, that the rollback face of neoliberalism is more than simply a ‘brush-clearing’ phase; it is integral to the dynamics, logics and trajectories of the regulatory transformations that are thereby unleashed.

All actually existing neoliberalisms strongly bear the imprint of past regulatory struggles, which recursively shape political capacities and orientations, and future pathways of neoliberal restructuring. And no single path or model should be considered paradigmatic (from which ‘deviations’ can be measured), since actually existing neoliberalisms are always, necessarily, conjuncturally specific. Conceptually, this speaks to the nature of neoliberalization as an open-ended *process*, rather than a phase or end state. Politically, this underlines the character of neoliberalization as a set of intersecting *strategies of restructuring*, rather than a stable and free-standing system.

Two important caveats must be immediately added to clarify this conceptualization. First, while our emphasis on the tendentially creative capacities of neoliberalism is at odds with earlier studies that underscored its destructive character, we would argue that this double-pronged, dialectical conceptualization can help illuminate the complex, often highly contradictory trajectories of institutional change that have been generated through the deployment of neoliberal political programs. The point of this emphasis, however, is not to suggest that neoliberalism could somehow provide a basis for stable, reproducible capitalist growth, but rather to explore its wide-ranging, transformative impacts upon the inherited politico-institutional and geographical infrastructures of advanced capitalist states and economies. This latter issue must be explored independently of the conventional question of whether or not a given institutional form promotes or undermines sustainable capitalist growth. Even when neoliberal policy reforms fail to generate short- or medium-term bursts of capitalist growth, they may nonetheless impose much more lasting evolutionary ruptures within the institutionalized rules of the game and unevenly developed policy regimes associated with capitalist regulation.

Second, it should be recognized that the destructive and creative moments of institutional change within actually existing neoliberalism are intimately and inextricably interconnected in practice. Our use of the term ‘moments’ to describe these interconnections is therefore intended to highlight conflictual yet mutually related elements within a dynamic,

dialectical process, rather than as a description of distinct temporal units within a linear transition. Again, the forms of actually existing neoliberalisms—and indeed some of the defining features of neoliberalization itself as a real abstraction—are ‘reactive’ in the sense that they are shaped as much by their antipathies and antitheses (e.g., to Keynesian redistribution or to institutions of social solidarity) as by their stated, intrinsic goals of market transformation, the ‘end point’ of which is socially, ecologically, and indeed economically unrealizable.

Neoliberal Urbanization and Its Mutations

The dynamic of creative destruction never occurs on a blank slate in which the ‘old order’ is abruptly obliterated and the ‘new order’ is unfurled as a fully formed totality. It occurs, rather, across a cluttered and contested institutional landscape in which newly emergent ‘projected spaces’ interact conflictually with inherited regulatory arrangements, leading in turn to new, unforeseen and often highly unstable layerings of political-economic space.¹² These recombinant amalgamations of inherited and emergent institutional arrangements also redefine the political arenas and stakes through which subsequent struggles over the regulation of capital accumulation, and its associated contradictions, will be articulated and fought out.

The processes of creative destruction outlined above have been unfolding at a range of geographical scales and in a variety of institutional sites since the early 1970s. We argue that *cities* have become strategically important arenas in which neoliberalizing forms of creative destruction have been unfolding. The central place of cities in Fordist-Keynesian systems of production and reproduction defines them as key arenas (if not as targets) for neoliberal rollback strategies. Just as crucially, the strategic significance of cities as loci for innovation and growth, and

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as zones of devolved governance and local institutional experimentation, likewise positions them at the institutional and geographical forefront of neoliberal rollout programs. This is not to claim that the urban realm has achieved some form of scalar primacy in these after-Keynesian times, but simply to suggest that cities have become critical nodes, and points of tension, in the evolving scalar politics of neoliberalization. While the processes of institutional creative destruction associated with actually existing neoliberalism are clearly at work across all spatial scales, we argue that they are occurring with particular intensity at the urban scale.

On the one hand, cities today are embedded within a highly uncertain geo-economic environment, characterized by monetary instability, speculative movements of financial capital, global location strategies by major transnational corporations and intensifying interlocal competition.¹³ In

the context of this deepening global-local disorder, most local governments have been constrained, to some degree independently of their political orientation and national context, to adjust to heightened levels of economic uncertainty by engaging in short-termist forms of interspatial competition, place-marketing and regulatory undercutting in order to attract investment and jobs.¹⁴ Meanwhile, the retrenchment of national welfare-state regimes and intergovernmental systems has likewise imposed powerful new fiscal constraints upon cities, leading to budgetary austerity in the face of profound socioeconomic dislocation and new competitive challenges. And in the face of this relatively weak fiscal capacity, cities must today manage a broad array of ‘downloaded’ regulatory responsibilities and socioeconomic risks, not least across the interrelated fields of economic development, social welfare and environmental sustainability.

On the other hand, neoliberal programs have also been directly ‘interiorized’ into urban policy regimes as newly formed territorial alliances attempt to rejuvenate local economies through a ‘shock treatment’ of deregulation, privatization, liberalization and enhanced fiscal austerity. In this context, cities and their suburban zones of influence have become increasingly important geographical targets and institutional laboratories for a variety of neoliberal policy experiments, from place-marketing, enterprise zones, local tax abatements, public-private partnerships and new forms of local boosterism, through to workfare policies, property redevelopment schemes, new strategies of social control, policing and surveillance, and a host of other institutional modifications within the local state apparatus. The overarching goal of such policy experiments is to mobilize city space as an arena both for market-oriented economic growth and for elite consumption practices, while at the same time securing order and control amongst marginalized populations.

Urban political-economic infrastructures have thus become basic preconditions for neoliberalized forms of capital accumulation and after-Keynesian strategies of regulation, even as they are simultaneously undermined, destabilized and devalued in the process. Table One illustrates some of the many politico-institutional mechanisms through which neoliberal projects have been promoted in North American and western European cities during the past two decades, distinguishing in stylized form their constituent destructive and creative moments. Two aspects of the processes of creative destruction depicted in the table deserve explication.

First, the different pathways of neoliberal urban restructuring that have crystallized throughout the older industrialized world reflect not only the diversity of neoliberal political projects, but also the contextually specific interactions of such projects with inherited and coevolving frameworks of urban political-economic regulation. An examination of the diverse pathways through which neoliberal political agendas have been imposed upon and reproduced within cities is therefore central to any comprehensive inquiry into the geographies of actually existing neoliberalism. This raises the distinct possibility that the ‘family’ composed of diverse, putatively ‘hybrid’ neoliberalisms may be populated not only by national ‘varieties’ or

Table 1. Destructive and creative moments of neoliberal urbanization

| Mechanisms of neoliberal urbanization | Moment of ‘destruction’ | Moment of ‘creation’ |
|--|--|---|
| <i>Recalibration of Intergovernmental relations</i> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Dismantling of earlier systems of central government support for municipal activities | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Devolution of tasks and responsibilities to municipalities · Creation of new incentive structures to reward local entrepreneurialism and to catalyze ‘endogenous growth’ |
| <i>Retrenchment of public finance</i> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Imposition of fiscal austerity measures upon municipal governments | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Creation of new revenue collection districts and increased reliance on local revenues, user fees, and other instruments of private finance |
| <i>Restructuring the welfare state</i> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Local relays of national welfare service provision are retrenched; assault on managerial-welfarist local state apparatuses | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Expansion of community-based sectors and private approaches to social service provision · Imposition of mandatory work requirements on welfare recipients; new (local) forms of welfare experimentation |
| <i>Reconfiguring the institutional infrastructure of the local state</i> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Dismantling of bureaucratized, hierarchical forms of local public administration · Assault on traditional relays of local democratic accountability | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · ‘Rolling forward’ of new networked forms of local governance based upon public-private partnerships, ‘quangos’ and the ‘new public management’ · Incorporation of elite business interests in local policy and development |

Table 1. Continued

Mechanisms of neoliberal urbanization

Moment of ‘destruction’

Moment of ‘creation’

Privatization of the local public sector and collective infrastructures

- Elimination of public monopolies for the provision of municipal services (e.g. utilities, sanitation, mass transit)

- Privatization and outsourcing of municipal services
- Creation of new markets and inter-urban networks for service delivery infrastructure maintenance

and

Restructuring urban housing markets

- Razing public housing and other forms of low-rent accommodation
- Elimination of rent controls and project-based construction subsidies

- Creation of new opportunities for speculative investment in central-city real estate markets
- Transitional and ‘emergency’ provision for the homeless
- Introduction of market rents and tenant-based vouchers in low-rent niches of urban housing markets

Reworking labor market regulation

- Dismantling of traditional, publicly funded education, skills training and apprenticeship programs for youth, displaced workers and the unemployed

- Creation of a new regulatory environment to encourage/sustain contingent employment
- Implementation of work-readiness programs aimed at the conscription of workers into low-wage jobs
- Expansion of informal economies

Restructuring strategies of territorial development

- Dismantling of autocratic national models of capitalist growth
- Wind down compensatory regional policies

- Creation of free trade zones, enterprise zones and other ‘deregulated’ spaces within major urban regions

- Increasing exposure of local and regional economies to global competitive forces
- Fragmentation of national space-economies into discrete regional systems
- Creation of new development areas, technopolis and other 'new industrial spaces' at subnational scales
- Mobilization of new 'glocal' strategies intended to rechannel economic capacities and infrastructure investments into 'globally connected' agglomerations

Transformations of the built environment and urban form

- Elimination and/or intensified surveillance of urban public spaces
- Destruction of working class neighborhoods to make way for speculative redevelopment
- Retreat from community-oriented planning initiatives
- Creation of privatized spaces of elite/corporate consumption
- Construction of mega-projects to attract corporate investment and reconfigure local land-use patterns
- Creation of gated communities, urban enclaves and other 'purified' spaces of social reproduction
- 'Rolling forward' of the gentrification frontier and the intensification of sociospatial polarization
- Adoption of the principle of 'highest and best use' as the basis for major land use planning decisions

Inter-local policy transfer

- Erosion of contextually sensitive approaches to local policymaking
- Marginalization of 'home-grown' solutions to localized market failures and governance failures
- Diffusion of generic, prototypical approaches to 'modernizing' reform among policymakers in search of 'quick fixes' for local social problems (e.g., welfare programs, zero-tolerance crime policies)
- Imposition of decontextualized 'best practice' models derived from extra-jurisdictional contexts

Table 1. Continued

**Mechanisms of
neoliberal urbanization**

| | Moment of ‘destruction’ | Moment of ‘creation’ |
|--|--|--|
| <i>Reregulation of urban civil society</i> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Destruction of the ‘liberal city’ in which all inhabitants are entitled to basic civil liberties, social services and political rights | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Mobilization of zero-tolerance crime policies and ‘broken windows’ policing · Introduction of new discriminatory forms of surveillance and social control · Introduction of policies to combat social ‘exclusion’ by reinserting individuals into the labor market |
| <i>Re-representing the city</i> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Performative discourses of urban disorder, ‘dangerous classes’ and economic decline | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · ‘Entrepreneurial’ discourses and representations focused on urban revitalization, reinvestment and rejuvenation |

'models', but may also include a series of characteristic *urban* formations and conjunctures, from core metropolises such as London and New York City to newly ascendant cities such as Lagos, Mumbai or Shanghai.

A second issue concerns the evolution and/or reconstitution of neoliberal forms of urban policy since their initial deployment in North American and western European cities during the late 1970s and early 1980s. Urban spaces have played strategically significant roles in successive waves of neoliberalization. During the initial ascendancy of neoliberalism, cities became flashpoints both for major economic dislocations and for various forms of political struggle, particularly in the sphere of social reproduction. They were also among the principal battlegrounds for political struggles over the form and trajectory of economic restructuring during the protracted crisis of the Fordist-Keynesian growth regime. Consequently, local economic initiatives were adopted in many older industrial cities in order to promote renewed growth 'from below', while at the same time seeking to defend established sociopolitical settlements and redistributive arrangements.

However, during the 1980s, when the rollback face of neoliberalism was often the dominant one, prevailing forms of urban policy shifted significantly. In this era of 'lean government', municipalities were increasingly induced or impelled to introduce various kinds of cost-cutting measures—including tax abatements, land grants, cutbacks in public services, the privatization of infrastructural facilities and so forth—in order to lower the short-term costs of administration and production within their jurisdictions, and thereby, to lubricate and accelerate external capital investment. Traditional Fordist-Keynesian forms of localized collective consumption were retrenched as fiscal austerity measures were imposed upon local governments by neoliberalizing national states. Under these conditions, enhanced administrative efficiency, coupled with direct and indirect state subsidies to large corporations and an increasing privatization of social reproduction functions, were widely viewed as the 'best practices' for promoting a 'good business climate' within major cities. The contradictions of this zero-sum, cost-cutting form of urban entrepreneurialism are now clearly evident. In addition to their highly polarizing consequences, the effectiveness of such strategies for promoting economic rejuvenation has been shown to decline quite precipitously as they are diffused throughout the global urban system.¹⁵ Ironically, the dominant response to these 'diminishing returns' of neoliberal urbanism has taken the form of redoubled efforts in the sphere of interurban competition.

The subsequent consolidation of various forms of rollout neoliberalism since the early 1990s may be viewed as an evolutionary reconstitution of the neoliberal project in response to its own immanent contradictions and crisis-tendencies. In the last 15 years, a marked reconstitution of neoliberal strategies has occurred at the urban scale too. To be sure, the basic neoliberal imperative of mobilizing economic space as an arena for capitalist growth, commodification and market discipline has remained the dominant political project for municipal governments. Indeed, state institutions have been drawn into ever more explicit forms of the creative destruction of urban built environments in order to promote even more intensively marketized

land-use regimes.¹⁶ However, amidst these market-disciplinary urban policy initiatives, the conditions for promoting and maintaining economic competitiveness have been reconceptualized by many local political-economic elites to include diverse administrative, social, and ecological criteria.

The institutionally destructive neoliberalisms of the 1980s have thus been unevenly superseded by qualitatively new forms of neoliberal urbanization that actively address the problem of establishing non-market forms of coordination and governance, through which to sustain market shares, competitive assets, and continued accumulation. Under these circumstances, neoliberal forms of institutional creation are no longer oriented, in a pure sense, towards the promotion of market-driven capitalist growth. Increasingly, they include efforts to establish various sorts of ‘flanking mechanisms’ and modes of crisis displacement designed to insulate powerful economic actors and interests from endemic failures in markets and governance regimes. Just as crucially, these mutations have also entailed a number of significant institutional realignments at the urban scale, including: the empowerment of business-led networks and agencies in distributive struggles over resources; the mobilization of new forms of local economic development policy that embrace interfirm cooperation and industrial ‘clustering’; the deployment of community-based programs and shadow-state initiatives to combat social exclusion; the promotion of new forms of coordination and interorganizational networking among previously distinct spheres of local state intervention; and the creation of new regional institutions to promote metropolitan-wide place-marketing and (limited forms of) inter-governmental coordination.

It follows that the creative destruction of institutional space at the urban scale does not take the form of a linear transition from a generic model of the ‘welfare city’ towards a new model of the ‘neoliberal city’. Rather, these multifaceted processes of local institutional transformation entail a contested, trial-and-error searching process, in which an ascendant repertoire of experimental strategies is being mobilized in place-specific forms and combinations.¹⁷ However, even in their mature form, these strategies of neoliberal localization often exacerbate the regulatory problems they ostensibly seek to resolve—such as economic stagnation and un(der) employment—leading in turn to further rounds of unpredictable mutation. Consequently, the manifold forms and pathways of neoliberal urbanization should be seen not as coherent, sustainable solutions to the entrenched regulatory dilemmas and contradictions of contemporary capitalism, but rather as deeply contradictory restructuring strategies that are significantly destabilizing inherited landscapes of urban governance and socioeconomic regulation. The institutional landscape of neoliberal urbanism is consequently a churning, dynamic one, the continued turbulence of which is reflective of neoliberalism’s *contradictory creativity*—its capacity to repeatedly respond to endemic failures of policy design and implementation through a range of crisis-displacing strategies, fast-policy adjustments, and experimental reforms. The landscape of neoliberalization—its topographical surface—is therefore both uneven and unstable.

Conclusion: From Neoliberalizing Cities to Neoliberal Urbanism?

It is important to recognize that cities are not merely localized arenas in which externally generated projects of neoliberal restructuring are imposed. On the contrary, cities have become increasingly central to the very reproduction, extension and mutation of neoliberalism itself. Indeed, a marked *urbanization of neoliberalism* has been occurring, as cities have become strategic targets and proving grounds for an increasingly broad range of neoliberal policy experiments, institutional innovations and political projects. Under these conditions, cities have become the incubators for, and generative nodes within, the reproduction of neoliberalism as a ‘living’ institutional regime. Moreover, just as cities are frequently positioned at the frontiers of neoliberal policy formation, experimentation and implementation, so too do they become sites of concerted resistance to global, national and local neoliberalization projects.¹⁸ Resistance, therefore, cannot be simplistically located ‘after’ neoliberalization—as an *ex post facto* response to an otherwise smoothly operating regulatory regime. On the contrary, a dialectics of intense, often bitter contestation have shaped each facet of, and moment in, the evolution of neoliberalism, from the earliest struggles around fiscal austerity and ‘rollbacks’ to the most audacious forms of late-neoliberal ‘rollout’.

It remains to be seen whether the powerful contradictions inherent within the current urbanized formation of rollout neoliberalism will provide openings for more progressive, radical democratic reappropriations of city space, or if market-disciplinary, neoliberal agendas will be entrenched still further within the underlying institutional structures of urban governance. Should this latter outcome occur, we have every reason to anticipate the crystallization of still leaner and meaner urban geographies, in which cities are compelled to engage aggressively in mutually destructive place-marketing policies, in which transnational capital is relieved of its responsibilities for local social reproduction, and in which urban citizens are increasingly deprived of the power to shape the basic conditions of everyday urban life. In the short to medium term, these conditions largely define the terrain for struggles against neoliberalism in all its forms. It is worth recalling that just as neoliberalism exploited, and drew energy from, the crises of the Keynesian welfare state, it is equally likely that deepening crises within and around the project of neoliberalism will open up new strategic opportunities for both reformist and counter-hegemonic movements. There is nothing preordained about such struggles, of course, but it seems certain that the urban terrain will be a decisive battleground. Local struggles around fair housing, living wages, land use regimes and environmental justice, each in their different ways, expose pointedly relevant, progressive alternatives to neoliberalism. Rolling back neoliberalism, however, will also entail a pervasive *reregulation* of cities themselves, in the form of measures to tackle the corrosive effects of interurban competition, regressive redistribution and market-based development. One of the keys to the transcendence of neoliberalism is, therefore, the construction of new forms of urban solidarism, between as well as within cities.

Notes

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