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Chapter 45

Cities and the Geographies of "Actually Existing Neoliberalism"

Neil Brenner and Nik Theodore

Introduction

The linchpin of neoliberal ideology is the belief that open, competitive, and unregulated markets, liberated from all forms of state interference, represent the optimal mechanism for economic development. Although the intellectual roots of this "utopia of unlimited exploitation" (Bourdieu 1998) can be traced to the postwar writings of Friedrich Hayek and Milton Friedman, neoliberalism first gained widespread prominence during the late 1970s and early 1980s as a strategic political response to the sustained global recession of the preceding decade. Faced with the declining profitability of traditional mass-production industries and the crisis of Keynesian welfare policies, 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 all sectors of society. In this context, neoliberal doctrines were deployed to justify, among other major industries, assaults on organized labor, the reduction of corporate taxes, the shrinking and/or privatization of public services, the dismantling of welfare programs, the enhancement of interna-

tional capital mobility, the intensification of inter-locally competition, and the criminalization of the urban poor.

If Thatcherism and Reaganism represented particularly aggressive programs of neoliberal restructuring during the 1980s, more moderate forms of a neoliberal politics were also mobilized during this same period in traditionally social democratic or social christian democratic states such as Canada, New Zealand, Germany, the Netherlands, France, Italy, and even Sweden. Following the debt crisis of the early 1980s, neoliberal programs of restructuring were extended globally through the efforts of the USA and other G-7 states to subject peripheral and semiperipheral states to the discipline of capital markets. Bretton Woods institutions such as the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT)-World Trade Organization (WTO), the World Bank, and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) were subsequently transformed into the agents of a transnational neoliberalism and were mobilized to institutionalize this extension of market forces and commodification in the Third World through various structural-adjustment and fiscal austerity programs. By the mid-1980s, in the wake of this dramatic U-turn of policy agendas throughout the world, neoliberalism had become the dominant political and ideological form of capitalist globalization.

The global imposition of neoliberalism has, of course, been highly uneven, both socially and

geographically, and its institutional forms and sociopolitical consequences have varied significantly across spatial scales and among each of the major supraregional zones of the world economy. While recognizing the polycentric and multiscalar character of neoliberalism as a geopolitical and geoeconomic project, [our] goal . . . is to explore the role of neoliberalism in ongoing processes of urban restructuring. The supraregional and national parameters of neoliberalism have been widely recognized in the literatures on geopolitical economy. However, the contention that neoliberalism has also generated powerful impacts at subnational scales – within cities and city-regions – deserves to be elaborated more systematically.

This introductory essay provides a “first cut” towards theorizing and exploring the complex institutional, geographical, and social interfaces between neoliberalism and urban restructuring. We begin by presenting the methodological foundations for an approach to the geographies of what we term “actually existing neoliberalism.” In contrast to neoliberal ideology, in which market forces are assumed to operate according to immutable laws no matter where they are “unleashed,” we emphasize the contextual *embeddedness* of neoliberal restructuring projects insofar as they have been produced within national, regional, and local contexts defined by the legacies of inherited institutional frameworks, policy regimes, regulatory practices, and political struggles. An understanding of actually existing neoliberalism must therefore explore the path-dependent, contextually specific interactions between inherited regulatory landscapes and emergent neoliberal, market-oriented restructuring projects at a broad range of geographical scales. These considerations lead to a conceptualization of contemporary neoliberalization processes as catalysts and expressions of an ongoing creative destruction of political-economic space at multiple geographical scales. While the neoliberal restructuring projects of the last two decades have failed to establish a coherent basis for sustainable capitalist growth, they have nonetheless profoundly reworked the institutional infrastructures upon which Fordist-Keynesian capitalism was grounded. The concept of creative destruction is presented to describe the geographically uneven, socially regressive, and politically volatile trajectories of institutional/spatial change

that have been crystallizing under these conditions. The essay concludes by discussing the role of urban spaces within the contradictory and chronically unstable geographies of actually existing neoliberalism. Throughout the advanced capitalist world, we suggest, cities have become strategically crucial geographical arenas in which a variety of neoliberal initiatives – along with closely intertwined strategies of crisis displacement and crisis management – have been articulated.

Spaces of Neoliberalization (3): Cities

The preceding discussion underscored the ways in which the worldwide ascendancy of neoliberalism during the early 1980s was closely intertwined with a pervasive rescaling of capital-labor relations, intercapitalist competition, financial and monetary regulation, state power, the international configuration, and uneven development throughout the world economy. As the taken-for-granted primacy of the national scale has been undermined in each of these arenas, inherited formations of urban governance have likewise been reconfigured quite systematically throughout the older industrialized world. While the processes of institutional creative destruction associated with actually existing neoliberalism are clearly transpiring at all spatial scales, it can be argued that they are occurring with particular intensity at the urban scale, within major cities and city-regions.

On the one hand, cities today are embedded within a highly uncertain geoeconomic environment characterized by monetary chaos, speculative movements of financial capital, global location strategies by major transnational corporations, and rapidly intensifying interlocality competition (Swyngedouw 1992). In the context of this deepening “global-local disorder” (Peck and Tickell 1994), 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-terrist forms of interspatial competition, place-marketing, and regulatory undercutting in order to attract investments and jobs (Leitner and Sheppard 1998). Meanwhile, the retrenchment of national welfare state regimes and national

intergovernmental systems has likewise imposed powerful new fiscal constraints upon cities, leading to major budgetary cuts during a period in which local social problems and conflicts have intensified in conjunction with rapid economic restructuring.

On the other hand, in many cases, 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 – including their suburban peripheries – have become increasingly important geographical targets and institutional laboratories for a variety of neoliberal policy experiments, from place-marketing, enterprise and empowerment zones, local tax abatements, urban development corporations, public-private partnerships, and new forms of local boosterism to welfare policies, property-redevelopment schemes, business-incubator projects, new strategies of social control, policing, and surveillance, and a host of other institutional modifications within the local and regional state apparatus. . . .

[T]he overarching goal of such neoliberal urban policy experiments is to mobilize city space as an arena both for market-oriented economic growth and for elite consumption practices. Table 45.1 schematically illustrates some of the many politico-institutional mechanisms through which neoliberal projects have been localized within North American and western European cities during the past two decades, distinguishing in turn their constituent (partially) destructive and (tententially) creative moments.

Table 45.1 is intended to provide a broad overview of the manifold ways in which contemporary processes of neoliberalization have affected the institutional geographies of cities throughout North America and Western Europe. For present purposes, two additional aspects of the processes of creative destruction depicted in the table deserve explanation.

First, it is important to underscore that the processes of neoliberal localization outlined in the table necessarily unfold in place-specific forms and combinations within particular local and national contexts. Indeed, building upon the conceptualization of actually existing neoliberalism developed above, we would argue that patterns of neoliberal localization in any national or

local context can be understood adequately only through an exploration of their complex, contested interactions with inherited national and local regulatory landscapes. The contributions to this volume provide abundant evidence for this proposition with reference to diverse pathways of neoliberal localization. . . . [T]he 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 *intencations* of such projects with inherited 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.

A second, equally important 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. Drawing upon the periodization introduced by Peck and Tickell (2002) . . . , we have already alluded above to the various mutations that neoliberalization processes have undergone since the late 1970s. The essential point at this juncture of our discussion is that these mutations of neoliberalism have unfolded in particularly pronounced forms within major cities and city-regions. Indeed, we would argue that each of the broader phases of neoliberalization outlined by Peck and Tickell has been anchored and fought out within strategic urban spaces.

- During the initial phase of “proto-neoliberalism,” cities became flashpoints both for major economic dislocations and for various forms of sociopolitical struggle, particularly in the sphere of social reproduction. Indeed, the problematic of collective consumption acquired such political prominence during this period that Castells (1972) interpreted it as the sociological essence of the urban phenomenon itself under capitalism. In this context, cities became battlegrounds in which preservationist and modernizing alliances struggled to influence the form and trajectory of economic restructuring during a period in

Table 45.1 (Cont'd)

Mechanisms of Neoliberal Localization	Moment of Destruction	Moment of Creation
Rehabilitation of intergovernmental relations	<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 new tasks, burdens, and responsibilities to municipalities; creation of new incentive structures to reward local entrepreneurialism and to catalyze "endogenous growth"
Retrenchment of public finance	<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 of municipalities upon local sources of revenue, user fees, and other instruments of private finance
Restructuring the welfare state	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Local relays of national welfare service-provision are retrenched; assault on managerial-welfareist 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 urban welfare recipients; new (local) forms of workfare experimentation
Reconfiguring the institutional infrastructure of the local state	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Dismantling of bureaucratized, hierarchical forms of local public administration Devolution of erstwhile state tasks to voluntary community networks 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" Establishment of new institutional relays through which elite business interests can directly influence major local development decisions
Privatization of the municipal public sector and collective infrastructures	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Elimination of public monopolies for the provision of standardized municipal services (utilities, sanitation, public safety, mass transit, etc) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Privatization and competitive contracting of municipal services Creation of new markets for service delivery and infrastructure maintenance Creation of privatized, customized, and networked urban infrastructures intended to (re)position cities within supranational capital flows
Restructuring urban housing markets	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Razing public housing and other forms of low-rent accommodation Elimination of rent controls and project-based construction subsidies 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Creation of new opportunities for speculative investment in central-city real estate markets Emergency shelters become "warehouses" for the homeless Introduction of market rents and tenant-based vouchers in low-rent niches of urban housing markets
Reworking labor market regulation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Dismantling of traditional, publicly funded education, skills training, and apprenticeship programs for youth, displaced workers, and the unemployed 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Creation of a new regulatory environment in which temporary staffing agencies, unregulated "labor corners," and other forms of contingent work can proliferate Implementation of work-readiness programs aimed at the conscription of workers into low-wage jobs Expansion of informal economies
Re-regulation of urban civil society	<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"> Creation of free trade zones, enterprise zones, and other degenerated spaces within major urban regions Creation of new development areas, techparks, and other new industrial spaces at subnational scales Mobilization of new "glocal" strategies intended to rechannel economic capacities and infrastructure investments into "globally connected" local/regional agglomerations
Re-representing the city	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Postwar image of the industrial, working-class city is recast through a (re-)emphasis on urban disorder, "dangerous classes," and economic decline 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Creation of new privatized spaces of elite/corporate consumption Construction of large-scale megaprojects intended 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 Diffusion of generic, prototypical approaches to "modernizing" reform among policymakers in search of quick fixes for local social problems (eg welfare-to-work programs, place-marketing strategies, zero-tolerance crime policies, etc) Imposition of decontextualized "best practice" models upon local policy environments Mobilization of zero-tolerance crime policies and "broken windows" policing Introduction of new discriminatory forms of surveillance and social control Introduction of new policies to combat social exclusion by reinserting individuals into the labor market Mobilization of entrepreneurial discourses and representations focused on the need for revitalization, reinvestment, and rejuvenation within major metropolitan areas
Interlocal policy transfer	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Erosion of contextually sensitive approaches to local policymaking Marginalization of "home-grown" solutions to localized market failures and governance failures 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Adoption of the principle of "highest and best use" as the basis for major land-use planning decisions Diffusion of generic, prototypical approaches to "modernizing" reform among policymakers in search of quick fixes for local social problems (eg welfare-to-work programs, place-marketing strategies, zero-tolerance crime policies, etc) Imposition of decontextualized "best practice" models upon local policy environments

systematically undermined throughout the older industrialized world. Consequently, local economic initiatives were adopted in many older industrial cities in order to promote renewed growth from below while maintaining established sociopolitical settlements and redistributive arrangements.

During the era of "roll-back" neoliberalism in the 1980s, the dominant form of neoliberal urban policy shifted significantly. In this era of lean government, municipalities were increasingly constrained 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 costs of state administration, capitalist production, and social reproduction within jurisdictions, and thereby to accelerate inward investment. Traditional Fordist-Keynesian forms of localized collective consumption were rethought, in this context, as fiscal austerity measures were imposed upon local governments by neoliberalizing national state apparatuses. Under these conditions, enhanced administrative efficiency and 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 evident throughout North America and Western Europe. In addition to its highly polarizing consequences for major segments of local, regional, and national populations (Keil 2002; Macleod 2002), the effectiveness of such strategies for promoting economic rejuvenation has been shown to decline quite precipitously as they are diffused throughout urban systems (Cheshire and Gordon 1996; Leitner and Sheppard 1998).

The subsequent consolidation of "roll-out" neoliberalism in the early 1990s may be viewed as an evolutionary reconstitution of the neoliberal project in response to its own inherent contradictions and crisis tendencies. Throughout this decade, a marked reconstitution of neoliberal strategies occurred

the basic neoliberal imperative of mobilizing economic space – in this case, city space – as a purified arena for capitalist growth, commodification, and market discipline remained the dominant political project for municipal governments throughout the world economy. Indeed, as Weber (2002) . . . indicates, state institutions during this period became even more directly involved in the creative destruction of urban built environments (see also Hackworth and Smith 2001). On the other hand, the conditions for promoting and maintaining economic competitiveness were reconceptualized by many urban political and economic elites to include diverse administrative, social, and ecological criteria (Jessop 2002; see also Harloe 2001). The institutionally destructive neoliberalisms of the 1980s were thus apparently superseded by qualitatively new forms of neoliberal localization that actively addressed the problem of establishing nonmarket forms of coordination and cooperation through which to sustain the accumulation process (Gough 2002; Peck and Tickell 2002).

Under these circumstances, the neoliberal project of institutional creation is no longer oriented simply towards the promotion of market-driven capitalist growth; it is also oriented towards the establishment of new flanking mechanisms and modes of crisis displacement through which to insulate powerful economic actors from the manifold failures of the market, the state, and governance that are persistently generated within a neoliberal political framework (Jones and Ward 2002). Just as crucially, these mutations have also entailed a number of significant institutional realignments at the urban scale, including: (a) the establishment of cooperative business-led networks in local politics; (b) the mobilization of new forms of local economic development policy that foster interfirm cooperation and industrial clustering; (c) the deployment of community-based programs to alleviate social exclusion; (d) the promotion of new forms of coordination and inter-organizational networking among previously distinct spheres of local state intervention; and (e) the creation of new regional institutions to promote metropolitan-wide place-marketing

2002; Jessop 2002; Jones and Ward 2002; Leitner and Sheppard 2002).

Clearly, then, as this schematic discussion indicates, the creative destruction of institutional space at the urban scale does not entail 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 change involve a contested, trial-and-error searching process in which neoliberal strategies are being mobilized in place-specific forms and combinations in order to confront some of the many regulatory problems that have afflicted advanced capitalist cities during the post-1970s period. However, as several contributors . . . aptly demonstrate, even in the contemporary "roll-out" phase, neoliberal strategies of localization severely exacerbate many of the regulatory problems they ostensibly aspire to resolve – such as economic stagnation, unemployment, sociospatial polarization, and uneven development – leading in turn to unpredictable mutations of those very strategies and the institutional spaces in which they are deployed (Jones and Ward 2002; Keil 2002; Macleod 2002). Consequently, the manifold forms and pathways of neoliberal localization . . . must be viewed, not as coherent, sustainable solutions to the regulatory problems of post-1970s capitalism, but rather as deeply contradictory restructuring strategies that are significantly destabilizing inherited landscapes of urban governance and socioeconomic regulation throughout the older industrialized world.

Conclusion: From Neoliberalized Cities to the Urbanization of Neoliberalism?

It would appear, then, that cities are not merely localized arenas in which broader global or national projects of neoliberal restructuring unfold. On the contrary . . . cities have become increasingly central to the reproduction, mutation, and continual reconstitution of neoliberalism itself during the last two decades. Indeed, it might be argued that a marked urbanization of neoliberalism has been occurring during this period, as cities have become strategic targets for an increasingly broad range of neoliberal policy experiments, institutional innovations, and politico-ideological

become the incubators for many of the major political and ideological strategies through which the dominance of neoliberalism is being maintained (see Smith 2002).

The causes, trajectories, and ramifications of this urbanization of neoliberalism remain a matter of intense discussion and debate among critical geographers and other radical scholars. The contributions . . . may therefore be interpreted on at least two different levels: first, as attempts to document the manifold ways in which cities have figured in the reproduction and transformation of neoliberalism; and second, as attempts to analyze the complex, confusing, and often highly contradictory implications of this ongoing neoliberalization of urban political-economic space. While the contributions represent a range of theoretical, thematic, and political perspectives, they share a common concern: to decode the learner and meaner urban geographies that have emerged throughout the older industrialized world during the last three decades. It is hoped that such critical decodings may also, in some modest way, help open up new perspectives for imagining and ultimately implementing strategies for pushing back the current neoliberal offensive, both at the urban scale and beyond.

At the present time, it remains to be seen whether the powerful contradictions inherent within the current urbanized formations of roll-out neoliberalism will provide openings for more progressive, radical democratic reappropriations of city space, or whether, by contrast, 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 engage aggressively in mutually destructive place-marketing policies, in which transnational capital is permitted to opt out from supporting local social reproduction, and in which the power of urban citizens to influence the basic conditions of their everyday lives is increasingly undermined. As we contemplate this rather grim scenario of a neoliberalized urban authoritarianism, Harvey's (1989:16) suggestion from over a decade ago remains as urgently relevant as ever to contemporary struggles to work towards alternative urban futures, grounded

upon the priorities of radical democracy, social justice, and grassroots empowerment:

The problem is to devise a geopolitical strategy of interurban linkage that mitigates interurban competition and shifts political horizons away from the locality and into a more generalisable challenge to capitalist uneven development. . . . [A] critical perspective on urban entrepreneurialism indicates not only its negative impacts but its potentiality for transformation into a progressive urban corporatism, armed with a keen geopolitical sense of how to build alliances and linkages across space in such a way as to mitigate if not challenge the hegemonic dynamic of capitalist accumulation to dominate the historical geography of social life.

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Chapter 46

China's Urban Backward into the

John Friedmann

... This final section . . . is therefore of stock-taking than a conclusion. I learn from the past that might be stand what is happening in China touched on a variety of topics that I aim facets of urbanization: new mobility, rural industrialization, urban governance. Many other paths have been left out. Of these, perhaps important is "sustainability" . . . The of transformation has put the enormous stress. In the last section I will identify the nature of these challenges. . . .

The Difficult Path Ahead

The most challenging task is not to specifics of policy but to move along *path of transformation* between the ever-present danger: the lapse into the reimplosion of a totalitarian stasis. These poles are not nearly forty years of the republic, a ever-present reality in Chinese life faced again during the difficult Cultural Revolution. As for totalita perhaps best symbolized by the cell the city of *danneri*, the wall compounds of the urban landscape Zedong that reached a kind