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URBAN GOVERNMENT

For ***Handbook of Urban Politics and Policy***

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Abstract

Urban government poses a range of definitional challenges, particularly regarding how to define the 'urban'. Here we focus on municipal, local or city government, as a functional, spatial, legal, economic, political and administrative jurisdiction. We locate city government within its wider, inter-governmental context which determines and delimits the powers accruing to it within the vertical state hierarchy. We consider the political autonomy of city government in terms of its capacity to make choices about governance priorities in the context of power relations between different tiers of the state, with an examination of the use of 'localism' in the UK. Considering the relative power of 'the local' in determining place-based visions and values benefits from critical scholarship's focus not only on the formal institutions of government but on everyday forms of politics, and how these combine in new municipalisms.

Key words: city government; municipalism; governmental systems; autonomy; localism; everyday local state.

Studying urban government: an overview

Urban government poses a range of definitional challenges, particularly regarding how to define the 'urban'. Here we focus on municipal, local or 'city' government, as a functional, spatial, legal, economic, political and administrative jurisdiction.

Municipalism is a form of local self-government. Taking the UK as an example, autonomous local government stems from the chartered merchant towns and cities of the sixteenth century. But it was not until the 1830s that the rapid urbanisation arising from industrialisation necessitated a series of reforms to the patchwork of urban government. The introduction of compulsory elementary education, new transport, sanitation and sewage authorities led to the consolidation of government in major cities. The need to educate, control and tax an expanding urban population required new institutions of territorially-based government that, to be incorporated into the nation

state, had to be subject to control while permitting a measure of self-government - creating the local state. Thus the way cities were governed was transformed from a system of locally initiated, semi-private structures with scant state or democratic supervision, to unified and democratically elected municipal bodies with circumscribed powers (Doyle 2001, 287). In the UK, as in Europe and North America from the late nineteenth to the mid-twentieth century, municipalism entailed municipal control over some political and economic resources (Thompson 2021, 320). Two broad forms can be discerned which presage core debates about what city government does and what it should do: one form is more collectivist ('municipal socialism'), linked historically to the emergence of organised labour movements; the other is more akin to municipal trading, wherein city government operated private markets catering for different groups who paid directly for goods or services (Leopold and McDonald 2012, 1840).

Ways of thinking about urban government vary between and within disciplines, according to worldview and according to the time and location within which theories were formulated. Theories from the Global North have predominated. In broad terms attention has been paid to the institutional forms taken by city government and where these fall on a continuum between elitist and pluralist processes and between managerial and entrepreneurial styles of governance. Relatedly, different approaches focus on the role of cities in processes of social reproduction, and in processes of economic growth and development.

Early studies conducted by political scientists into 'who governs' US cities identified an elitist city politics. But Dahl (1961) found that as New Haven, Connecticut had grown and its demography and economy diversified, a wider range of groups were able to mobilise, resulting in a more pluralist system. The resultant 'community power' debate on whether power is dispersed or concentrated in urban communities continues to resonate.

As urban political economy and sociology approaches developed in the 1970s, critical scholarship began to consider the wider economic, social and political forces shaping cities. David Harvey's urban political economy remains highly influential (Harvey 1973). Its emphasis on the commodified nature of land, and the conflict between use values and exchange values, aids understanding of urban power structures. But Harvey's reductive focus on class struggle was critiqued (Fainstein 2014, 2). A tension emerged between neo-Marxist urban political economy approaches, which explain cities in terms of the operation of capitalism as a mode of production; and urban political sociology approaches which saw merit in empirically investigating the relative power wielded by a

variety of urban actors. The extent to which there is policy choice at the city level given broader power structures, flows and processes remains an overriding debate.

The collective city

Manuel Castells, a sociologist, aligned with neo-Marxist approaches in stressing the role of cities in social reproduction - the delivery of services and goods by the state to support the reproduction of labour power. He argued that the lives of the urban poor are shaped by crises of collective consumption (Castells 1983, xviii). Here cities are spaces where the state directly or indirectly delivers goods and services that are or can be collectively consumed – like housing, transport, education and training, health care, social welfare and public safety (police, fire and building and food health and safety standards). Indeed, public perceptions and expectations of city government tend to centre collective provision as its principal function. Which services are delivered or overseen by city or higher levels of government vary in different governmental systems. And forms of collective provision vary. Some (like waste collection, roads or policing) involve the majority of households and therefore tend to stay on the political agenda. Others (such as public housing) are allocated on the basis of need or merit and tend to figure lower politically. Goods and services in turn are organised into public or private provision (for example, roads tend to be directly provided by the state but toll roads entail market provision) and public and private consumption (for example, using roads by taking a public bus or driving a private car) (Short 2006, 12). The state's role is to co-ordinate and regulate across collective provision and consumption.

The collective project varies over time and across space. Through the twentieth century, government intervention in terms of public goods and services provision increased. But more recently – and around the world – there has been a shift from public to private provision and consumption which has undermined the collective organisation of the city (Short 2006, 13), despite the vital role public services and basic infrastructure play in the city's everyday social and economic life. Neoliberal policies of privatisation, fee-based services and a general rollback of the state's social welfare function create political conflicts between those propagating profit-seeking and those favouring welfare via state support for collective good provision.

The city as growth machine

In the US, sociologist Harvey Molotch investigated the power wielded by coalitions of interests seeking city economic growth, with the city cast as an urban investment vehicle or 'growth machine' (Molotch 1976, 309). Political scientists also emphasised growth, Paul Peterson (1981, 25) arguing

that ‘urban politics is above all the politics of land use’ as cities need to compete for growth to gain the tax base to be able to provide public goods. These theories argue that the focus of urban politics is economic growth and the realisation of profit through land and property development. The tension between growth coalitions seeking to advance exchange values and those looking to protect use values has become ever more palpable in current debates playing out in cities worldwide regarding for example gentrification and displacement, densification and the loss of public open space.

City governments seek co-ordination

At city level, two theories underline the inherent tension between elitism and pluralism in considering how the local state (city government and its agencies) partners with non-governmental actors to implement policy agendas. In both it is understood that city government cannot undertake the task of governing the city alone, as the local state’s institutional capacities are insufficient to address the challenges facing the city such as economic development, public service delivery and modernising infrastructure (Pierre 2014, 867, 873).

The first, urban regime theory, derives from political scientist Clarence Stone’s studies of Atlanta in the US. Like growth coalition theory it was influenced by the community power debate, but growth coalition theory starts with the private sector and considers its influence on government, whereas regime theory starts with government, acknowledging the lead role played by city political elites as agents of coalition formation and partnership development. Here city governments seek to increase their ‘capacity to act’ through forging long-term alliances with resourceful societal actors (Stone 1989, 229). The urban regimes which result are ‘the informal arrangements by which public bodies and private interests function together in order to be able to make and carry out governing decisions’ (Stone 1989, 6).

The second theory of urban governance has European origins and suggests a shift in analytical focus from formal structures of city government to its role in co-ordinating actions with a wide range of actors in forms of network or collaborative governance. Governance is thus more than government, encompassing state processes of influencing and negotiating with a range of other actors. A useful definition is governance as ‘processes through which public and private resources are co-ordinated in the pursuit of collective interests’ (Pierre 2011, 20). Governance redefines the traditional notion of public policy as being what governments do, as it is also about what other, non-state actors do in making and delivering public policy, and government’s role in steering these processes of societal co-

ordination. Hence governance theorising does not entail a retreat of the state but rather a reconfiguration of its role. Therefore, while scholars vary in how they perceive the centrality of political institutions or the significance of collaborative forms of governance, government remains 'a key actor - if not *the* key actor - in governance' (Pierre 2011, 19). The role of formal political institutions may have become blurred given the emphasis on partnership and collaboration but the greater need for political control and accountability which results is seen to affirm the importance of city government. As Pierre (2011, 23) argues, as long as we think that citizens' input and electoral accountability matter, representative institutions remain critical at the urban level.

Managerialism

A public management perspective shows that local state reforms mirror the changes mapped in other disciplinary approaches. In a Global North context, Gerry Stoker (2011, 18) explains three 'eras of local governing', which in practice overlap and of which elements sustain in different spatio-temporal assemblages. The first, traditional public administration, dominated in the 1950s and 1960s (the industrialised, Keynesian period); coming under pressure from the second, New Public Management (NPM) from the 1970s onwards (aligning with the post-industrial era); and joined since the 1990s by the rise of governance with its emphasis on networks and collaboration in theory and practice.

In traditional public administration, the role of city government is to extend social welfare and collective consumption for the entire city population, seen as clients. In the UK for example, the state expanded a wide range of public services free at the point of delivery (such as education, health care, public open space, policing, waste management and social security); plus a range of public services requiring some service user payment (such as social housing, sports facilities and public transport). However, the old certainties of the industrialised period broke down with the advent of the post-industrial era. In the 1970s the 'traditional' approach became framed as overly bureaucratic, paternalistic and expensive.

The 1980s and 1990s saw the rise of NPM and associated public sector reforms, particularly in the UK, the US, Australia and New Zealand, which had significant effects at the local level. Reform measures characteristic of NPM include: the transfer of private sector management principles to the public sector; privatisation with the transfer of public sector enterprises to private ownership; contracting out of service delivery to private for-profit or non-profit organisations; and the establishment of semi-autonomous agencies responsible for implementation, justified on efficiency

grounds in terms of isolating implementation from political pressures. Under NPM, the role of the state was framed as 'steering' or co-ordinating, rather than 'rowing' or engaging in direct service delivery (Osborne and Gaebler 1992, 25). Thus under NPM the local state increasingly engaged in public-private partnerships and emphasised competition to enhance efficiency. These changes heralded a shift in the understanding of the role of the local state from ensuring social welfare for the city population to strengthening measures to ensure the city's economic competitiveness. Fainstein and Fainstein (1982, 9) contrast the vision of 'urban areas as residential areas for the mass of the population' (cities as places to live) with 'urban space as a vehicle for accumulation' (cities as growth machines in which the goal of profit-seeking dominates).

From managerialism to entrepreneurialism

Those taking an urban political economy approach described a shift 'from managerialism to entrepreneurialism' (Harvey 1989, 3). Cities which have to 'fend for themselves' through greater reliance on their own, local tax base have to be more entrepreneurial. In national governmental systems where cities are more reliant on fiscal transfers of tax revenue from higher levels of government, a more managerial style could be expected as cities have to be accountable to higher government levels for the effective management of funds. But a reduction in transfers of funds from higher levels of government, along with globalisation and capital mobility, have incentivised city governments to be more entrepreneurial in pursuing economic growth to solve fiscal problems.

The shift in city government priorities from the equity of Keynesian commitments to collective consumption towards the efficiency of what the OECD (2007) terms the 'entrepreneurial paradigm in spatial development' has been sufficiently pronounced to be described as the 'New Urban Politics' (MacLeod and Jones 2011, 2444). The political economy of cities has been rearticulated in terms of the 'competitive city'. The rise of competition between cities for investment, jobs and fiscal resources has induced city governments to introduce a range of policy initiatives, such as enterprise zones, urban development corporations, and public-private partnerships, intended to make the city more attractive to investors. Richard Florida (2005) posited 'the creative class' as a driving force for the economic development of post-industrial cities, a proposition that has had significant policy influence in efforts to attract 'creative' workers and been subject to critique as 'cappuccino urban politics' (Peck 2005, 760) given the distributional impacts on other city residents such as the poor and unemployed.

Neoliberalism and the competitive city

It is no surprise that the conception of the entrepreneurial, competitive city is so common in scholarship and policy. It is intertwined with scholarship which critically considers how neoliberal ideology is applied to cities. Neoliberalism refers to a set of ideological values in which the state's primary role is envisaged as ensuring the smooth operation of the market. It does not necessarily mean less government, but rather that government's role changes to align with and seek to facilitate what the market, and private interests, need (Cahill and Konings 2017, 3). Peck and Tickell (2002, 384) identify two interrelated phases of neoliberalism. The first phase, 'roll-back' neoliberalism, refers to 'the active destruction or discreditation of Keynesian-welfarist institutions'. It involves privatisation, including sale of public assets, public service cutbacks, and contracting out of services to for-profit and non-profit agencies – the 'marketisation' of social and economic relations. The second phase, 'roll-out' neoliberalism, refers to 'the purposeful construction and consolidation of neoliberalised state forms [and] modes of governance'. This includes policies and programmes, such as welfare-to-work, which are coercive in that they seek to discipline and control poor and marginalised social groups.

Neoliberalism manifests in cities in an emphasis on the necessity of economic growth, the primacy of business interests in achieving growth and the need to focus state intervention on creating the conditions for economic growth (Burton 2014, 3241), along with more punitive policies targeted at and seeking to manage the urban poor. The neoliberal consensus to generate economic growth is critiqued in terms of how it is presented as common sense, the only 'responsible' mode of 'good governance' (MacLeod 2011, 2632). This links to debates about whether we are in a 'post-political' era (Swyngedouw 2010, 215) as the 'new conventional wisdom' (Gordon and Buck 2005, 1) has become hegemonic, and the policy preferences which result from the prevailing neoliberal (pro-growth, pro-market) ideologies and governance goals have become widely shared.

Political autonomy: a core concern for city government

The broad field of scholarship about urban government has been preoccupied with elitism and pluralism; and managerialism, entrepreneurialism and neoliberalism. From these debates emerges a core concern regarding the capacity of city government to make choices about governance priorities. Choice is certainly constrained by the urban political economy. Drawing from urban regime and urban governance theory, the general consensus is that political actors are capable of pursuing policy preferences, but that policy choice is deeply embedded in economic structures. Structural factors 'set the stage, but do not write the script of the play' (Stone 2004, 11). But constraints also

derive from the constitutional arrangements of urban government. Here we focus on the political autonomy of city government in the context of power relations between different tiers of the state.

Power in the vertical state hierarchy

The political status of city government relates to its position in the vertical hierarchy of its governmental system, shaping its capacity to employ resources in pursuit of an agenda that deviates from that of upper tiers of government. But cities rarely have much political or legal authority to act. Many national constitutions do not recognise municipalities as entities that are guaranteed autonomy, rather they are 'creatures of the state' which can only do what higher-level government prescribes or allows. Scandinavian countries and Japan are the exception, with fairly strong, autonomous local government.

Fiscal powers play an important role in shaping municipal autonomy. Competencies (the ability to make expenditure to realise each government level's responsibilities) and fiscal instruments (the ability to raise revenue, particularly in terms of being able to borrow and levy taxes, user fees and charges) are allocated across levels of government. Fiscal autonomy is determined by municipal borrowing powers and taxation caps, revenue autonomy refers to the proportion of revenues raised through local taxation versus transfers from other levels. Thus local political autonomy relates to the locality's economic vitality and taxability, the extent to which higher government levels determine spending patterns through transfers, ring-fencing and deciding what are statutory and non-statutory functions, and the rules governing municipal borrowing. The specific combination of these elements contributes to determining the effective political autonomy city government can exercise in deciding how much to spend, from what sources, on what, and when. As cities tend to have limited authority to raise revenue they tend to rely heavily on fees and property taxes, which further encourages an emphasis on growth and governance relationships with private interests. Relatedly, extremely complex layers of scalar authority operate in cities. City governments usually only have relevant authority over a few policy realms whereas higher government tiers control an array, whether concertedly urban-targeted or with urban consequences. Transport and other forms of major infrastructure often become a key point of leverage for the state hierarchy as cities lack requisite resource.

Local 'fiscal crises' occur when national government passes down competencies (responsibilities which involve spending) while retaining fiscal instruments (and thus a large proportion of tax revenue). In the US, for example, Peck (2017, 24) describes a pattern in which fiscal stress has been

'localised and urbanised', due to a combination of factors including increased reliance on local tax revenues with the decline of federal transfers, state-imposed limits on local (property, sales and income) taxes, and the privatisation of municipal borrowing. These measures have been accompanied by 'moralising… scapegoating' narratives that municipalities in fiscal crisis have forfeited the right to self-governance (Peck 2012, 24). He concludes that financial control is being centralised while many of the costs and risks are being devolved. In the US, UK and around the world, city governments pursue greater self-determination by seeking to draw down new powers from higher government levels to be able to levy taxes and retain a greater proportion of taxation revenue, as well as to develop new self-financing mechanisms.

Different governmental systems

These processes play out within a huge variety of governmental systems (see OECD and United Cities and Local Government 2016), where urban governments have varying jurisdictions, forms of political representation, participation and decision-making processes, financial resources, assets and fiscal powers. Systems broadly share a three-tier (national, regional and local or municipal) structure, whilst some (such as France, Germany and China) also have an intermediate level between the regional and local levels.

In simple terms, it is useful to contrast (decentralised) federal states with (centralised) unitary states in terms of how power is distributed. This relates to debates about which level is best for making decisions about public spending and taxation. All national states make fiscal transfers to sub-national governments, but these transfers are more significant in more centralised systems. In terms of the regional level, federal states (e.g. the US, Australia and Germany) have powerful sub-national, regional tiers of elected government with budgetary and legislative powers and the right to levy taxes. In 'classic' unitary states (e.g. Greece, Ireland and Portugal), any regional tiers are not elected, have no budgetary powers and no right to levy taxes – meaning that all financial resources are transferred from 'the centre' (national government).

In between these two extremes are two intermediate types of system, in which the regional level has some decision-making power about how to allocate national transfers within their territories. In regionalised states (e.g. Spain and Italy) the regional level has an elected parliament with limited budgetary powers and limited rights to levy taxes. In devolving unitary states (e.g. the UK and France), the process of devolution - a type of decentralisation in which national governments transfer authority to elected forms of sub-national government - has created elected regional

parliaments (such as for Scotland and Wales) which also have limited budgetary powers and limited rights to levy taxes. Thus in the UK as elsewhere (for example, Catalonia in Spain), some regions have strong national identities which bolster demands for self-government.

What do these varied structures mean for the local level? Comparing the UK's centralised system, which has a strong tradition of direct national government intervention, with the US's decentralised system, characterised by limited higher level intervention in the local level, reveals a key point regarding local autonomy. In the UK, any local government powers have been specifically authorised at national level. Whilst subsequently there have been attempts to shift power (or at least responsibilities) downwards – with devolution and in terms of 'new localism' (below) - the locus of power remains firmly at the national level. Indeed, UK local government is renowned for its 'culture of dependency' (Davies and Blanco 2017, 1533) on centralised national government. In contrast, in the US (like the Canadian and Australian) federal system, local government is a creature of state (regional level) government, which therefore determines local level powers. However, as many US states grant their local governments varying degrees of general competencies through 'home rule' provisions (the principle of self-government by localities), the locus of authority and responsibility sits at the local level. Indeed, the US contrasts with most other nation-states given how open it was to the formation of new municipalities throughout the nineteenth and well into the twentieth centuries, due to the value accorded to 'the right of cities to self-rule' (Judd and Swanstrom 2008, 5). Permissive state municipal incorporation laws required very low population thresholds in order to acquire the right to tax, educate and police. That said, although local government has relatively greater powers in the US, its ability to exercise these is extremely constrained by its 'fiscal squeeze' (examined below).

In contrast, within the federal systems of Canada and Australia, the local government level is in a relatively weak position as a creature of regional government (provinces, states or territories) whilst lacking 'home rule' provisions. In Australia, local government does not play a substantial role in the country's governing arrangements, in part due to its comparatively narrow range of functions (Aulich 2005, 205). Collective services such as policing, fire protection, schools and public housing are provided by state government. In both highly urbanised countries, however, the national state can intervene when it chooses, particularly in terms of providing funds for major infrastructure projects deemed to be in the national interest (such as airports and major roads). Australia's extreme 'vertical fiscal imbalance' (whereby the national level collects most taxation revenue, well in excess of its expenditure responsibilities) means that states depend on grants for nearly half their revenue

(Tomlinson 2017, 149). This enables national government, when it chooses, to have a say in policy areas which in theory under the country's constitution are matters for the states.

New localism

Scholars link shifts in the political economy, in particular globalising neoliberalism, to state rescaling processes in which the national state transfers authority and responsibility downwards. Critics describe the 'so-called new localism' as not resulting from local self-determination and leadership but as 'the political expression of multi-scalar state strategies' (Brenner 2019, 23).

These debates overlap with work on 'austerity urbanism', referring to the logic and practices of governing under conditions of 'extreme economy' (Peck 2012, 626), exacerbated by the Global Financial Crisis (GFC) of 2008. In US cities, Jamie Peck argues, austerity has been the norm since the initial roll-back of the state in the 1970s and 1980s. The political ideology invoked asserts the neoliberal argument of bloated and inefficient local states that hamper the operation of market forces. Practices are characterised as downscaling (localist), with the devolving of risks and responsibilities to the local level, and as offloading (privatist), with the outsourcing and privatisation of government services and social supports (Peck 2012, 648). Thus austerity measures 'concentrate costs and burdens on those at the bottom of the social hierarchy, compounding economic marginalization with state abandonment' (Peck 2012, 651). The GFC, it is argued, exacerbated state withdrawal and encouraged more privatised urban governance in the US and elsewhere. It was used to justify neoliberal policy approaches to reduce public spending, retrench state welfare, privatise public assets and increase the power of private, corporate actors with the financialisation of urban infrastructure, services and property markets (Guironnet, Attuyer, and Halbert 2016, 1442).

Focusing on the use of 'new localism' in the UK provides an insightful perspective on central-local governmental power relations and local political autonomy and highlights the localism of austerity urbanism. In the highly centralised UK, localism features significantly in policy discourse about decentralisation - wherein normative appeals are made about the importance of the local level, closest to the people. Its modern roots lie in the neoliberal reforms of the 1980s Thatcher government to counter the centralisation of the post-war welfare state, in the belief that centralised bureaucracy compromised market functioning and government efficiency. This was accompanied by the rise of the mixed economy of welfare with a reduced role for state intervention and a greater emphasis on voluntary action, informal aid and market provision. As market-discipline was imposed on public service delivery through New Public Management, central-local government relations

became increasingly antagonistic, with central government and its agencies acting as strategic overseer. The first New Labour government (1997-2001) retained local government in a strict delivery relationship with the centre. But by its second term, the notion of 'new localism' was deployed, branded as 'new' as it drew on the perceived benefits of network governance enacted via local government reforms, including formation of Local Strategic Partnerships in each local government area of England. These partnerships brought together public, private, voluntary and community sector representatives with local government in the lead role.

With the election of the (Conservative-Liberal) Coalition government in 2010, continuities were evident in terms of emphasis on locally distinctive policy-making. But New Labour's performance management had sought to assure baseline standards for public services with additional resources allocated accordingly. Under the Coalition, local variation was presented as an outcome of local priorities. New national legislation (the Localism Act 2011) ostensibly increased the power vested at the local level by granting a 'general power of competence'. Intended to encourage municipal entrepreneurship, it also extended possibilities for other kinds of municipal activity since local governments no longer had to demonstrate the statutory basis for their actions (Cooper and Herman 2020, 44). But this downscaling of responsibility was not accompanied by resource, given central state funding cuts to local government under austerity and the inability to increase local taxation to fill the gap given central government restrictions. Critical interpretations described policies as a product of 'savage public spending cuts and the need to externalise responsibility for performance failure' as much as 'a principled commitment to more autonomous local governance' (Lowndes and Pratchett 2012, 22, 38). Such shifts affirm the salience of arguments that posit the localist, home rule US as a harbinger for municipalities elsewhere (Davies and Pill 2012, 2200). As enacted, 'new localism' is a political displacement mechanism which reinforces neoliberalism and narrows the range of political choices available to local governments.

Can urban government rise to the challenge?

The example of the UK highlights the constraints upon subordinate tiers of government. Devolving powers and strengthening city governments are regarded as necessary conditions for equipping cities with the capacity to address key problems (McQuarrie, da Cruz, and Rode, n.d.). But cities remain highly dependent on decisions made by national states. Indeed, the UN's third New Urban Agenda (2016) was negotiated and adopted by, and will be implemented or discarded by, member states. The agenda is intended to provide guidance for member states' urban policies and governance, including citizen participation and democratic processes. It builds from the United

Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly SDG 11, to 'make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable' (United Nations 2015, 24). The impetus for cities to seek greater political autonomy is clear, but this entails a devolution rarely seen given the challenges it poses to national state power and territorial equity.

Challenges from critical studies

Critical scholars engage with theory and practice in an interdisciplinary and empirical research agenda deriving from diverse global contexts (da Cruz, Rode, and McQuarrie 2019, 13). Critical studies have been informed by post-structural and post-colonial interventions that raise questions about the explanatory status accorded to Global North theorising and the relevance of political economic theory claims concerning entrepreneurialism and neoliberalism. A significant methodological response to these debates has been a renewed emphasis on theorising from 'elsewhere' encompassing 'ordinary cities' as everyday spaces in which most people in the majority urban world live (Robinson 2006, 3, 1).

Whilst Global North-derived theories of urban governance did pave the way for analysis which went beyond the formal institutions of government (Mossberger and Stoker 2001, 810), scholars have increasingly recognised the limitations of these theories. Regime theory emphasises incremental adjustment to incorporate dissent and is thus critiqued for overlooking the disruptive potentialities of urban political life (Davies and Blanco 2017, 1531). Urban governance theory is subject to similar critique given its emphasis on co-ordination and consensus. Current academic debates argue that critical scholars should spend less time developing their diagnoses of urban neoliberalism and more time considering the kinds of political action that might transform it. Thus increasingly critical scholarship focuses on not only the formal institutions of government but also on the more informal, grassroots and everyday forms of politics, moving beyond a hierarchical or 'top down' focus on urban elites to a 'bottom up' perspective drawing from the lives and struggles of ordinary urban residents and diverse social groups in the city.

Here we focus on scholarship regarding the scope for a democratic and participatory politics which develops place-based visions at city level. Scholarship on planetary urbanisation (Brenner and Schmid 2012) implies that the location of politics and power has shifted away from the local or city level given its subordinate status amidst global processes. In contrast, critical scholars have sought to develop less hierarchical modes of explanation which challenge the limitations of a totalising

conception of neoliberalism, highlighting the need to understand the specific and contested practices of how cities are governed (Leitner, Peck, and Sheppard 2007, 312). The local level is regarded as a crucial arena for 'the study of local practices, in ways that recognise the multiple logics at play in different conjunctures, and the spaces such ambiguities and 'messiness' open up for different forms of situated agency' (Blanco, Griggs, and Sullivan 2014, 3129).

Critical scholarship questions the validity of notions of a post-political era where contestation is nullified given the power of prevailing ideologies about market-driven growth. Dikeç and Swyngedouw (2017, 2) argue the need to see the city as a site of political encounter and experimentation, not only in terms of the more familiar institutions of urban government or social movements but in terms of other forms of political action, several of which stem from the Global South. These understandings draw from the empowering effects of local action and the scope for bottom-up agency despite its structural constraints. In this view, neoliberalism can be contested through traditional struggles but also by 'new urban activisms' (Walliser 2013, 329) which cultivate practical solidarities and forms of everyday reproduction.

New municipalism

Much current critical research focuses on new municipalism, which in broad terms aims to transform democracy from representation to participation and politics from parties and institutions to citizens and projects (Beveridge and Naumann 2021, 8-9). Through seeking to establish a 'new politics' it seeks to mitigate the marketisation of social and economic relations and the problems of wealth extraction associated with financialisation. As such, it challenges post-political understandings of the neoliberal 'common sense'.

The Global South has been formative in new municipalism. The rise of left municipal governments in Latin America in the 2000s led to radical local developments such as participatory budgeting which influenced Global North debates about public participation and participatory democracy which have informed new municipalist practice. It is a diverse and emergent project, but one which links to older traditions. It is 'new' to distinguish it from the 'municipal socialist' local states which emerged in cities such as Birmingham, Glasgow and London in the UK as well as elsewhere in Europe in the late nineteenth century. Municipal socialism resulted from the rise of organised labour movements and associated political parties. Once in power at the local level, radical working class parties engaged in social redistribution, collective ownership and international solidarity. In the deindustrialising UK of the 1980s, attempts were made by cities such as Liverpool and Sheffield to

replicate these approaches (Boddy and Fudge 1984), resulting in the Thatcher national government reasserting its power and ideology via measures like the marketisation of NPM and the creation of special purpose agencies to bypass local government. Antecedents are also apparent in Chicago and Boston during the 1980s in response to the burgeoning neoliberalisation of the Reagan presidency (Clavel 2010).

New municipalism is especially prominent in Spain. Since 2015 Barcelona, amongst other cities, has been governed by an anti-austerity coalition drawn from a variety of social movements and political organisations. These coalitions share a rejection of traditional party politics in favour of the creation of 'platforms' or 'movement parties' (della Porta 2020, 22) and favour radical deliberative processes of citizen participation. Following the GFC of 2008, citizen concerns about job insecurity, public sector retrenchment, housing exclusion and socio-spatial inequality heralded the resurgence of the progressive left, culminating in the victory of the citizen platform Barcelona en Comu ('in common', BComú) in the city government elections.

BComú has become a paradigmatic case of what can be achieved at city level. It has faced significant obstacles, lacking a majority in the City Council, forcing it into coalition following both the 2015 and 2019 elections. It has had to deal with resistance from within the city bureaucracy. And it has to operate within the bounds of the powers and responsibilities of city government, lacking power in key policy domains such as housing. But despite these constraints, it has agency in realising its goals. Research in the city (Blanco, Salazar, and Bianchi 2020, 30) has revealed a repertoire of strategies to promote radical political change at city level. These include making maximum, creative use of the powers of city government, and recognition of the importance of building alliances with social movements and community organisations to contest the power of upper levels of government. The 'old' municipalist theme of international solidarity carries through to its new incarnation. BComú has inspired the creation, encouraged the progression, and linked with similar platforms elsewhere. The first global summit of the 'fearless cities' international network attracted 700 representatives from six continents to Barcelona in 2017 (Russell 2019, 990). A US example is the movement Cooperation Jackson which since 2013 has created cooperatives as bases of autonomous economic power for black communities in Jackson, Mississippi. It is also developing people's assemblies and a participatory model of city budgeting, inspired by lessons from the Global South.

Whilst the new municipalism seeks to go beyond the institutions of the local state, seeking a base in social movements, it does need to be linked to the local state. Progressive forces will always

struggle to maintain momentum and achieve change given the nature of formal politics and the state (Beveridge and Naumann 2021, 9). However, new municipalism does offer a means of seeking to transform municipal government despite the difficulties of working both 'in and against' the state. In contrast, the UK example of the city of Preston underlines the importance of greater local state autonomy in being able to take the lead on more progressive forms of localism, here in terms of place-based procurement processes which have helped generate local worker-owned co-operatives. It provides an example of how the 'general power of competence' endowed to local government under the Localism Act has generated opportunities beyond those envisaged by central government (Cooper and Herman 2020, 44).

Directions for future research

The array of new municipalisms points to a research agenda which can furnish better understanding of new forms of political participation and activism; the creation of effective alliances and social movements; new forms of local politics and local economies; and importantly the role of city government and societal actors in facilitating, co-opting or blocking these. Research is needed to ascertain what conditions enable these alternatives in different places, such as the ability of city government to creatively use its powers, the importance of alliances with citizens, community groups and civil society organisations, and the role of city-to-city solidarities within and across international borders. Better understanding is also needed of how new municipalist approaches replace, combine with or are separate from so-called 'normal' local politics and 'place-less', market-led extractive economies.

The new municipalism is described as a 'binary-buster' (Beveridge and Featherstone 2021, 447) given how it seeks to work across boundaries - between social movements and political parties; direct and representative democracy; and the state and urban everyday life. These critical developments highlight the need to reformulate conceptions of the local state, aided by thinking about ways in which the boundaries between what is the 'local state' and 'local civil society' can be and are regularly crossed, as exemplified in the Barcelona case. Some conceptualise a plural (state and society) 'everyday local state' (Hilbrandt 2019; Pill and Guarneros-Meza 2019) in which everyday practices shape the state, revealing 'an active politics of the present' (Lowndes and McCaughie 2013, 546). In contrast to assumptions that everyday agency is directed against the state or developed in its absence, here everyday state-civil society relations are mutually constituted.

Applying this to conceptions of urban governance points to the need for further research about how urban governments are located within, and seek to co-ordinate, governance - what takes place 'beyond the fuzzy boundaries of the state apparatus' (Fisker, Johansen, and Thuesen 2022, 2). A key research priority is to explore the micropolitical practices that contribute to determine how governance arrangements at the local level play out, and hence to questions of how governance is embedded in the everyday, rather than focussing only on formal governance arrangements and policies.

In turn, further theorising is required regarding the role and potentialities of city government despite its seemingly limited powers and territory. Cooper and Herman (2020, 41) propound a 'municipal state activism', arguing that city government provides a productive site for thinking about forms of political activism that transcend the binary distinction where activism is typically placed in opposition to the state. They argue that city government can and does participate in campaigns and movements for change, drawing on different powers and capacities. Such municipal state activism holds opportunities for a more progressive localism in which, they argue, the local state can also seek change beyond its own formally territorialised borders, as it is embedded within networks outside (as well as within) the vertical state hierarchy.

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