

SPACE, SCALE, GOVERNANCE, AND REPRESENTATION: CONTEMPORARY GEOGRAPHICAL PERSPECTIVES ON URBAN POLITICS AND POLICY

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Urban studies has long been an interdisciplinary field, drawing from, among other disciplines, anthropology, geography, history, planning, political science, and sociology. Geographers in urban studies are distinguished first and foremost by a tradition of sustained explicit attention to spatial patterns and processes. Early research in the 1950s and 1960s proceeded largely in the human ecology and neoclassical economic traditions, examining the effect of spatial segregation on human organization, and the relationship between land use and land value (Berry & Kasarda, 1977; Harris & Ullman, 1945; Muth, 1961). That work was challenged in the 1970s and 1980s by Marxist geographers and sociologists concerned with understanding the underlying social processes that produced urban space (Castells, 1977; Cox, 1984; Dear & Scott, 1981; Harvey, 1973; Smith, 1984). The Marxist approach has itself been challenged by a range of perspectives that seek to avoid the economism of the early Marxist work. The result in geography has been an enriching proliferation of perspectives and themes in the study of the city and urban politics. While more traditional political-economic examinations of growth politics, urban regimes, and global restructuring have continued, they have been joined by feminist research (England, 1991; Hanson & Pratt, 1991), examinations of race/racism (Jackson, 1989; Peake & Kobayashi, 2002), and studies of sexuality (Bell, 1995; Valentine, 1993). The reaction to economism has introduced diverse post-structural and postmodern approaches to the city, and so questions of identity, difference, and representation have received increasing attention over the past 10 to 15 years.

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JOURNAL OF URBAN AFFAIRS, Volume 25, Number 2, pages 113-121.

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ISSN: 0735-2166.

In this special issue of the *Journal of Urban Affairs*, we present contemporary geographical research on urban politics and policies. In addition to a continuing emphasis on spatial patterns and processes, the articles in this issue display a distinct emphasis on three main themes: scale, governance, and representation. Each is representative of current trends in geographical research on cities. The articles presented here were originally among a series of papers on urban politics held at the Annual Meeting of the Association of American Geographers in New York in 2001. The articles that we have gathered for this special issue demonstrate urban geographers' attention to space, scale, governance, and representation in the context of their investigations into how global restructuring is affecting urban policy, politics, and communities. Before we outline the specific content of the individual articles, we briefly discuss the significance of a geographic perspective for urban research, focusing on the themes of space, scale, governance, and representation.

SPACE

The fundamental spatial nature of the capitalist economy was delineated by David Harvey (1973, 1985). He drew on Marx, who argued that capital investments are always geographically uneven. Inputs in one place or region reach a state of maturity, fostering disinvestments in those sites and new infusions of capital in alternate locations. However, space is not an even, undifferentiated plain on which investment unfolds. It is rather a complicated set of interlocking physical and social relations, patterns, and processes (Harvey, 1985; Lefebvre, 1991; Massey, 1984, 1994; Smith, 1984; Soja, 1989). Space is an unavoidably social product created from a mix of legal, political, economic, and social practices and structures (Lefebvre, 1991). While it has a material reality as environment, it is also experienced and conceptualized through the organization of social life (Massey, 1992).

Urban conflicts between residential land uses and commercially oriented development, for example, can be seen as spatial conflicts characterized by different ideas about what urban space is and what it should become (Purcell, 1997, 2001). Further, analyses that recognize different meanings of space—from its physical organization in land use planning, human attachments to specific locations, and idealized images—highlight areas of contradiction, tension, or difference in the urban sphere. In McCann's (1999) examination of racial conflict in Lexington, Kentucky, for example, he demonstrates how editorial cartoons foster racialized knowledge about the city, such as when African Americans are confronted and questioned in downtown areas because they are seen as out-of-place (Cresswell, 1996).

A spatial perspective on urban issues is evident in Logan and Molotch's (1987) characterization of the difference between use and exchange value of land. Viewing urban conflict through a lens of space, rather than one focusing on purely economic calculi, opens the analytic framework to a broader range of understandings and explanations for different approaches to urban land. In the case of memorials such as the World Trade Center site in New York, for instance, characterizing the value of the space as one based on use, and in contrast to reuse of the land for market exchange, does not fully capture the significance of the site itself within the urban and national psyche. A spatial analysis—particularly one recognizing the social production of space, as in Lefebvre (1991)—recognizes the inherent and multiple social meanings of space and the spatiality of all human activity.

SCALE

One key element in understanding space and investigating spatial dynamics in urban politics is specifying the scale of analysis. In urban politics, it may seem that the

appropriate unit of analysis is local government. However, social, political, and economic spheres that are manifest in locally bounded spaces also interact and have expression at much broader scales. In recognizing this, geographers have engaged in an ongoing attempt to theorize about the politics of scale. Scale in geography has long been important methodologically in terms of how research is framed. Inquiry framed at local scales yields different results than inquiry at larger scales, and geographers have debated the strengths and weaknesses of the various methodological approaches. In addition to such methodological questions, recent work in urban political geography has taken scale as itself an object of inquiry; it has examined how social processes are characterized by particular scalar arrangements.

It is in this latter sense that the articles in the special issue examine scale. The bulk of this new attention in geography has been aimed at understanding the recent profound shifts in global political and economic order. The upshot of this work has been an argument that globalization has involved a very specific rescaling. Formerly the national scale was the dominant scale at which political and economic power was coordinated. Increasingly, there is a greater role for supra-national scales and sub-national scales (such as the urban scale). In the case of the state and governance functions, for example, this shift involves a transfer of authority and responsibility from a national-scale state both to supra-national governance forms (such as the EU or the WTO) and to sub-national forms (as with the much discussed devolution of state functions over the last several years) (Staeheli, Kodras, & Flint, 1997). This scalar shift has been termed a process of *glocalization*—a simultaneous globalization and localization of the global political economy (Swyngedouw, 1992).

The sub-national aspect of this rescaling is most relevant to urban politics and policy. It involves local states and governance institutions accepting more responsibility and authority as nation-states devolve control from the national scale to the local and regional scales. National states are increasingly transferring responsibility to urban governments for tasks such as economic development, social services, and the provision of infrastructure (Painter, 1995; Peterson, 1995; Stewart & Stoker, 1995). The augmented responsibilities of local governing institutions have been accompanied by a shift in their policy orientation. Having been set adrift to a degree from the protection of the national state and its economy, local and urban governments have become more responsible for ensuring that the local area can compete effectively in the wider global economy. Therefore, the literature argues, the main policy shift in cities has been toward competitiveness: because capital is much more able to shift investment from place to place, newly independent local governance institutions are increasingly concerned to ensure that their region remains economically competitive so that it can attract and retain investment (Cerny, 1997; Harvey, 1989b; Jessop, Peck, & Tickell, 1999; Swyngedouw, 1996). The literature argues that economic competitiveness and attracting and retaining capital investment have taken on much greater importance for local policy-makers. Urban policy has become much more neoliberal in its orientation and the structure of the policy making apparatus has become increasingly complex.

GOVERNANCE

The complexity and dynamism of the contemporary policy arena is captured in the interest of geographers and others in the rise of new forms of urban governance (Box, 1999; Goodwin & Painter, 1996; Harvey, 1989b; MacLeod & Goodwin, 1999; Stone, 1989; Ward, 1996). Generally, the term *governance* is used to indicate “a shift from centralized and bureaucratic forms of decision-making [generally referred to as ‘government’] to a

plurality of coexisting networks and partnerships that interact as overlapping webs of relationships at diverse spatial scales, from the neighborhood to the globe” (Hubbard, Kitchin, Bartley, & Fuller, 2002, pp. 175–176). Scholars have been careful to note that this characterization of a transition from government to governance does not indicate a complete disjuncture. Rather, their intent is to identify recent changes in the organization of the state and society while acknowledging the continuing influence of established policy models in certain contexts. Identifying the rise of governance affords insight into larger changes in the organization of contemporary society. Neoliberal ideals of competition and market-led social policy are argued to be manifest in cities in ways that constitute both changes in the “external environment” within which government functions and the “changing internal structure of the state, as the responsibility for some of its functions [are] rescaled, licensed out to non-elected agencies or simply rationalized” (Ward, 2000, p. 173; see also Brenner & Theodore, 2002). Thus, questions of how decisions about contemporary cities’ social and economic futures are made, where they are made, which institutions or actors are empowered to make them, and in whose interests, are central to a great deal of contemporary writing in urban, political, and economic geography.

These questions drive research on the ways in which the importance of the spaces and institutions of the national state have changed in relation to the politics of economic development and social welfare provision (Brenner, 1998; Jessop, Peck, & Tickell, 1999). This has, in turn, informed the study of how certain cities and city-regions are emerging as powerful nodes in sub-national and supra-national political economies (Scott, 2001; Storper, 1997; Taylor, 2000). At the same time, there is an ongoing engagement with the various ways in which public-private coalitions and novel forms of decision-making are reshaping the political and physical landscapes of cities (Cox & Mair, 1988; Harvey, 1989b; Jonas & Wilson, 1999; McCann, 2001; Saint-Martin, 1998; Woodmansee, 1994).

Much of this work touches on two more connecting themes in the urban governance literature: 1) the analysis of how social processes operate both within and without formal political institutions and 2) the study of how these processes work in an uneven distribution across space and in the specific context of interlinked geographical scales, rather than on the head of the proverbial pin. For instance, “[w]hen I speak of urban politics,” writes Harvey (1989a).

I do not mean the mayor or the city council, though they are one, important form of expression of urban politics. Nor do I necessarily refer to an exclusively defined urban region, because metropolitan regions overlap and interpenetrate when it comes to the important processes at work there. The urban space with which I propose to work is fixed only to the degree that the key processes I shall identify are confined within fixed spaces. To the degree that the processes are restlessly in motion, so the urban space is itself perpetually in flux (p. 127).

As research has built upon these themes, many have argued that a key aspect of the politics of urban governance is the power to discursively represent the spatial, social, and ideological bounds of the city as an object to govern; to temporarily fix the limits of governable urban space for certain political purposes (Jessop, 1997; Jonas & Wilson, 1999).

REPRESENTATION

The attention by geographers to representation, rhetoric, and discourse parallels that of scholars in other disciplines who have questioned a transparent relationship between

material reality and the languages that we use to represent it (Foucault, 1970; Marcus & Fisher, 1999; Barnes & Duncan, 1992). Scholars have drawn upon the work of linguistic structuralists in recognizing the social production of the world, and the limitations of language to describe the material world separate from its social meaning (Derrida, 1976; Foucault, 1970, 1972; Saussure, 1974). This questioning of meaning gives rise to attention to discourses, or “frameworks that embrace particular combinations of narratives, concepts, ideologies and signifying practices, each relevant for a particular realm of social action” (Barnes & Duncan, 1992, p. 8). Discourses include linguistic representation as well as social practices.

This scholarly attention to representation and discourse takes two main forms: 1) a questioning of the ability of research to discover truths about the world, and 2) an examination of representation and discourse as an analytical framework for understanding social processes. The questioning of truths represents a disciplinary examination of epistemology, investigating means to knowledge and suggesting alternative frameworks for research. In geography, these analyses focused on the difficulty of accurately representing the world outside of its social meaning, in particular cultural contexts (Barnes & Duncan, 1992; Cosgrove & Daniels, 1988; McDowell, 1994). McDowell (1994), for example, argued that knowledge is multiple and positional, so there cannot be a single, unitary meaning of a given place, neighborhood, or city.

The second form of attention to representation and discourse focuses on social difference and power relations in empirical research. This type of discourse analysis has become common in urban research. It includes, for example, research examining media portrayals of urban places and the ways that they contribute to popular perceptions of inner cities as unsafe with deviant residents (Burgess, 1985; Martin, 2000; McCann, 1999). Other scholars have examined the policy process, demonstrating how particular rhetorical strategies, such as emphasizing growth in local economic development, prioritizes certain policy choices over others (McCann, 2002; Throgmorton, 1993). This examination of underlying values in political conflict highlights how the interests of some groups can be rhetorically cast as the interest of a whole community, obscuring alternative interpretations of policy choices. Cox and Mair’s (1988) examination of local dependence represents such a strategy, wherein the health of a given locality is defined in terms of its ability to attract new firms away from other places, with less attention paid, for example, to such firms’ labor practices. Finally, some scholars have investigated the ways that certain places are represented in public discourse as ideals, challenging any sort of land use change to those sites. Purcell’s (2001) research on homeowners’ associations in Los Angeles demonstrates how values about neighborhoods can be used in public policy to question growth that increases, for example, multi-family residential or commercial uses in suburban areas. In addition, Escobar (2001) suggests that the idea of the local has been used as a defensive strategy against global economic growth, such as along the Pacific coast of Columbia.

Representation and discourse are increasingly important analytical lenses for urban politics, as these concepts provide a framework for examining the role of values, stories, and ideals in shaping the social world, and reflecting change and conflict. Scholars of urban studies have drawn upon these concepts to examine multiple perspectives and meanings of places, as well as the values and ideals of material and ideal landscapes. Some of the articles in this special issue undertake a geographical analysis of representation and discourse, examining the portrayals of space and scale that reinforce particular urban policies, and manifest conflicts among parties within the urban sphere.

THE ARTICLES

All of the articles in this special issue mobilize different aspects of these four main themes. Wilson and Wouters' article puts space and discourses about space at the forefront of its analysis. They suggest that representations of space played an essential role in the discourse through which growth regimes in the Midwestern United States legitimated their agendas. Coalitions in Cleveland, Indianapolis, and St. Louis used descriptions of unhealthy, chaotic, abandoned, and decaying urban spaces to argue for the need for growth. Elwood and Leitner also examine how people imagine and portray space. Their focus is not primarily on spatial discourses, however, but on the interactions of different kinds of spatial knowledge in local politics. They tie this knowledge to governance change in Minneapolis and St. Paul, Minnesota, analyzing how Geographic Information Systems (GIS) are used by community groups in an effort to expand their participation in the planning decisions of their respective local states. They conclude that new neoliberal forms of governance are both reducing and opening opportunities for greater citizen participation in public policy.

McCann's article also investigates citizen participation in local planning and policy. He describes how Latino community activists in Austin, Texas resisted new forms of neoliberal governance by contesting the scale at which community planning was defined. Newly created planning boards favored relatively smaller areas for participation, while community activists argued for larger units that would allow a broader citywide alliance among poor neighborhoods and could better address regional inequality. His article examines how new forms of governance transform not only Austin's planning policies but also citizens' responses to those changes. The challenges to the new system illustrate how residents' conceptualizations of both space and scale differ from those of city planners.

Boudreau also deploys the concepts of scale and governance in her examination of how multiple territorial identities shape the character of Montreal's political conflicts. Efforts by the provincial and federal governments to restructure the boundaries of regional governance have allowed Anglo Montrealers to claim greater territorial autonomy. Structural shifts in governance, therefore, have altered the power relations among social groups in the city. Boudreau illustrates how devolved and flexible political structures have enabled local activists to agitate for greater political fragmentation and local control, based on cultural and linguistic differences within urban areas.

McGuirk's article treats both scale and governance explicitly. She uses an approach inspired by both regime theory (URT) and regulation theory to examine how Sydney is governed in response to the continual rescaling of the global order. She suggests that the URT's tendency to focus on local-scale processes limits its ability to capture the range of scales at which cities like Sydney are currently being governed. Similar dynamics of scale and governance characterize the article by Deas and Giordano. They address the process of rescaling in Europe, arguing that the rise of regional governance institutions in England and Italy is both an element of and reaction to the more general rescaling of European governance. As with McGuirk's Sydney, they contend that regional governance institutions in Europe must be understood as embedded in a complex set of shifting scales of governance.

CONCLUSION

Taken together, the articles in this special issue point to the importance and diversity of geographical approaches to urban politics. They highlight the multiple and competing visions of space as a material, constitutive element of daily life, economy, and politics. All

of the articles, to some degree, illustrate the ways that ideals about urban growth and identity are embedded in political decisions and conflicts about the development and management of urban space. Further, they also describe the ways that scale operates in political decision-making and conflict, from debates about the extent of a neighborhood, to conflict over territorial organization, identity, and autonomy among nested government hierarchies. Together, the research represented here demonstrates the application of central geographic themes—most notably, space and scale—to issues of pressing concern within urban politics and policy.

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