Neoliberal Urbanization and the Politics of Contestation

Margit Mayer

Editors Many of the late 1960s protest movements emphasized spontaneity and freedom in their critique of society. Spontaneity and freedom are also features of neoliberalism's self-perception. To what extent did the protest movements of the 1960s share the agenda of neoliberalism? Did the critique of Fordist, Keynesian society by the leftists of the 1960s pave the way for the roll-back neoliberalism of the 1980s?

Margit Mayer There have been several affinities between neoliberal ideas and the claims of 1960s movements besides the emphasis on freedom and spontaneity. They also share an explicit anti-statism: instead of the state, individuals, communities, or 'voluntarism' should be playing stronger roles for vibrant societies. Both view 'too much state intervention' as hindering not only personal development and self-realization, but also societal self-regulation (which the neoliberals prefer to see happening via the market and economic rationality, whereas progressive movements would like to see it happening through alternative networks). Hence, there are strong overlaps in the appreciation for autonomy, self-determination and self-management.

On the side of the 1960s movements, these attitudes emerged out of the experience with and therefore critique of an often overbearing, paternalist, and bureaucratic (welfare) state. The Left rejected that its social programmes usually came in the form of authoritarian and intrusive paternalism, which sought to coercively integrate its 'clients' into mainstream society. Against these constraints, activists called for more autonomy, personal freedom, independence, self-realization, as well as individual responsibility and initiative. But their critique was not only directed against the bureaucratic and authoritarian rationality of the state, but also against the economic rationality of the market, and they called not only for individual but also collective agency and mobilization, with an emphasis on solidarity.

Neoconservatives and neoliberals on the other hand have sought to dismantle the welfare state both as a means to shrink public expenditures and expand market rationality and entrepreneurial logics into further realms of society, including into social service provision. While self-activation and self-discipline here are conceived as social technologies with which to increase surplus value production, the emphasis on individual freedom, autonomy, independence from overbearing and anonymous bureaucracies, and instead the promise of more choice and enhanced effectiveness proved very persuasive in this context for gaining support beyond the affluent and upwardly mobile middle classes.

Among many of the alternative projects of the 1960s and 70s and especially among their successors, who increasingly found themselves within harsher climates of leaner municipalities and

tighter welfare states (as I will discuss below), these attitudes of anti-statism would lead to self-exploitation and precarious work conditions. This experience in turn led many activists to rationalize their efforts as 'social entrepreneurship' and give a positive connotation to their status as 'precariat' – when in fact such forms of micro-enterprise, no matter how 'innovative' or 'rebellious',[1] tend to reduce 'freedom' to the freedom of participating in a race to the bottom. Still, this insistence on individual freedom from the state (while downplaying other systems of control and domination, such as the market) enjoys popularity within certain left-alternative milieus, especially among the Greens who propose solving social and environmental problems with business means.[2] This liberal current within the alternative milieu, which presents its creative while precarious existence as rebellious and innovative, dovetails nicely with the neoliberal activation of all human creativity into pervasive competition and contributes, if inadvertently, to the deterioration of labour conditions and social security more broadly.

But the relationship between and mutual influence of neoliberalism and new social movements is far more complex. In the course of the neoliberalization of urban governance, a series of political demands as well as organizational forms of the new social movements have become incorporated into the neoliberal project. With new public management and the shift from public to private and semi-public institutions via outcontracting, not only established third-sector but also oppositional organizations were integrated into this regime; and with the shift from centralized to local and more differentiated modes of decision-making, also more consensus-oriented and participatory modes found their way into local governance.

On the other hand, as the movements became increasingly institutionalized and professionalized, they partially adapted to neoliberal modes of governance and reproduction, whether in community revitalization (where tenants' and citizens' initiatives as well as [ex-]squatter groups became part of 'careful urban renewal' regimes or community management landscapes) or in anti-poverty work and social service provision (where self-organized survival strategies became instrumentalized as coping mechanisms in local workfare states).

Thus we can see the impacts of the 1960s and following movements as ambivalent: while themselves a symptom of the crisis of Fordism, they were also agents of social transformation towards post-Fordism and neoliberalism in that they contributed to the cultural pluralization of Western societies, introduced new issues on to the political agenda (ecology, gender), and brought about participatory openings in local politics. What in many cities started out as radical squatters' movements, frequently ended up 'saving' neighbourhoods near the CBD and making them attractive for corporate investors and high-income residents, thus contributing

to gentrification. On the one hand, these movements succeeded in generating public pressure and contested Fordist hegemony on the local scale by building autonomous infrastructures of tenants' councils, by squatting buildings, and by creating alliances between their own radical organizations and supportive intellectuals and other local initiatives, and by intervening into and collaborating with institutional politics, thereby realizing their core goals of enhanced citizen participation as well as establishing forms of self-organization. On the other hand, some of these successes facilitated the integration and cooptation of some movement actors (based on the overlap of goals between neoliberal restructuring and radical self-realization), which led to the fragmentation of local movement scenes, and, on the part of those who routinized their cooperation with local governments, to an abandonment of some of their original goals, especially those pertaining to the role of private property.

E The idea of civic or public service, framed in the United States by figures such as president Obama, Hilary Clinton or Oprah Winfrey, is often presented as a contrast to the self-centred individualism and greed of neoliberal society. However, you have argued that the community organizations, many of which were born in the 1970s, by taking upon themselves governmental responsibilities, have enabled governmental retreat from civic responsibilities. Were these organizations, therefore, facilitators of neoliberalism, despite their best intentions?

MM Not only the Clintons and Obama, but already Bush Sr. as well as G. W. Bush have been calling for volunteerism and civic engagement as an antidote to the devastating social effects of neoliberalism. Starting with Bush Sr.'s *1000 Points of Light* campaign, leaders of both political parties have sought to mobilize the voluntary sector, with presidential summits and national initiatives for community service,[3] to compensate for the growing gaps in the social safety net. While these campaigns have mostly occurred on the level of symbolic politics, they have been playing an important role in depoliticizing the engagement of civil society organizations that has always been vibrant, especially in the US context.

Civic engagement did not need much official encouragement during the 1960s and 70s, when struggles around housing, rent strikes, campaigns against urban renewal (which was dramatically

1 German adherents of this position celebrate themselves as 'digital bohème'.

2 See Ralf Fücks, lecture in 'Labor für Entrepreneurship: Grüne Marktwirtschaft – Öko-Entrepreneurship', 2007 ('Laboratory for Entrepreneurship: Green Market Economy – Eco-Entrepreneurship'), available at: <http://labor.entrepreneurship.de/blog/?s=Heinrich+Boell+Stiftung> (accessed 22 March 2010).

3 President Clinton's 'Third Way' communitarianism leaned left, while G. W. Bush's compassionate conservatism leaned right. Both presidents instituted national initiatives for volunteerism (AmeriCorps, Freedom Corps), while funding programmes for community development and social services were cut back and/or tightly subordinated to the goals of national urban policy (in Clinton's National Urban Policy Report defined as '(to) promote solutions that are locally crafted and implemented by entrepreneurial public entities, private actors, and the growing network of community-based corporations and organizations'). This emphasis on entrepreneurialism and on inclusion of local actors and community-based groups and public-private partnerships continues to characterize neoliberal urban and anti-poverty policy, it merely shifted towards faith-based initiatives under G. W. Bush.

reorganizing cities and, in the process, displacing particularly poor residents), and struggles for youth and community centres were widespread both in North America and Western Europe. This form of civic action was often rather politicized by the wider 'threat context' which the student, anti-war, and leftist mobilizations of the 1960s had set up, and by the political openings which governments (generally in the mould of a social-democratic compromise) allowed at that time. The protests, even those around public transport, schools, child care and other public services, were contesting the cultural norms of the institutions of collective consumption, their price, their quality, and the limited options to participate in their design. The struggles around these urban services and infrastructures often brought together rebellious middle class students with marginalized and deprived groups, and were embedded in wider claims for civil rights, protest against US imperialism, and generally in a movement to build a more progressive, more democratic society.

Many of the movement organizations which were established during this first wave of broad and politicized movements entered into a more ambiguous relationship with local governments during the next phase. The background for this development was the austerity politics of the 1980s which everywhere began to grind away at Keynesian-welfarist and social-collectivist institutions. These institutions had earlier provided a material base for much of the progressive movement activity – even if this was not widely admitted by the activist beneficiaries. Now roll-back neoliberalization brought so-called 'old' social issues back on to the agenda of urban movements, next to the struggles for self-determined spaces and higher quality public infrastructures. Increasing unemployment and poverty, a 'new' housing need, riots in housing estates, and new waves of squattings changed the make-up of the urban movement milieus, while local governments – confronted with intensifying fiscal constraints as their expenditures were growing – became interested in innovative ways to solve their problems.

These pressures led to a reconfiguration in the relations between movements and local states: they transformed from opposition to cooperation. Local governments discovered the potential of community-based organizations for helping them solve their fiscal as well as legitimation problems, and the movements shifted their strategies 'from protest to programme' in order to put their alternative practice on to more stable footing. The reorientation of both was urged on by a new generation of comprehensive programmes for neighbourhood and urban revitalization. As a result, many formerly confrontational groups that used to organize rent strikes and public hearings or disrupt the authorities' business as usual with militant actions, in the course of the 1980s turned towards development and delivering (more or less alternative) services. These activities 'within and against the state' encouraged the social movement organizations to professionalize and institu-

tionalize their activities, which, however, had the effect of distancing them from newly mobilizing groups operating outside of these forms of increasingly routinized cooperation. Those organizations who were successful in putting their reproduction on a stable footing by developing stable relations with the local state or even managed to contract with higher-level (provincial, national, EU) or private funding agencies, one might say, did contribute to allowing governmental retreat and facilitate the neoliberalization of local politics.

But while such organizations became co-opted into an emerging community management landscape and new regime of service provision, other groups, whose needs were not addressed by these arrangements, would in turn radicalize. The movement terrain overall became not only more fragmented and polarized, but also more complex due to the entry of a panoply of middle class-based movements embracing a variety of concerns, and locating themselves across the political spectrum, from NIMBY to environmental, from defensive, even reactionary, to progressive, from *Freie Fahrt für freie Bürger!* (No speed control for free citizens) to less possessively individualist forms of self-realization. Squatting activities also continued, but here, too, a bifurcation took hold: while many of the first-wave squatters were now busy nesting in their sweat equity-liberated spaces and became upwardly mobile, the new (rehab-)squatters across European cities were increasingly more needs-oriented. In sum, cities experienced during this second phase more varied and more fragmented forms of urban protest, the movement milieu split into distinct components, and there was less convergence in joint action.

E What are the urban protest movements which characterize our times, and to what extent are they an outgrowth of 1960s movements?

MM The contemporary urban protest movements are shaped by the regime of roll-out neoliberalism which has replaced the previous phase of retrenchment characteristic of the 1980s. This new regime, while still radically prioritizing market mechanisms, introduced more consensus-oriented and participatory politics and integrated some of the earlier social movements' demands, thereby responding to some of the contradictions of roll-back neoliberalism. In the urban context, the basic neoliberal imperative of mobilizing city space as an arena for growth and market discipline remained the dominant municipal project, but from the 1990s on it was accompanied by more flanking mechanisms such as local economic development policies and community-based programmes to alleviate what is no longer called 'poverty', but rather 'social exclusion'.[4] But not just social, also political and ecological criteria have become included (while also redefined) in the efforts to promote economic competitiveness; social infrastructures, political culture, and ecological foundations of the city have become transformed into economic assets wherever possible. New

4 Neil Brenner, Nik Theodore, 'Cities and the Geographies of "Actually Existing Neoliberalism"', in: Neil Brenner, Nik Theodore (eds) **Spaces of Neoliberalism** (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002), pp. 26-27.

vocabularies of reform (the activating state, community regeneration, social capital) as well as new institutions and modes of delivery have been fashioned (such as integrated area development, public-private partnerships in urban regeneration and social welfare, all with a strong emphasis on civic engagement). These discourses and policies in many ways integrated earlier movement critiques of bureaucratic Keynesianism, and have been successful in seizing formerly progressive goals and mottos such as 'self-reliance' and 'autonomy' – while redefining them in a politically regressive, individualized and competitive direction. Through this hijacking of the language of earlier movements, their critical energy was harnessed towards the development of a revitalized urban growth machine.

The consequences of these new urban development policies and of the *de facto* erosion of social rights they implied have further fragmented the movement terrain: on the one hand they triggered the emergence of new defensive movements that would seek to protect themselves and whatever privileges they enjoyed from the effects of intensified intra-urban competition; on the other hand they politicized struggles over whose city it is supposed to be. Again and again waves of anti-gentrification struggles have swept across New York, Paris, Amsterdam, Berlin, Hamburg, also Istanbul and Zagreb, and slogans such as 'Die, yuppie scum!' became literally global. *Reclaim the Streets* and similar local mobilizations of the anti-globalization movement popularized the slogan 'Another world is possible', as well as 'Another city is possible!'

As urbanization has gone increasingly global through the integration of financial markets (that have used their flexibility to debt-finance urban development around the world),[5] and as economic growth rates began to stagnate (or, where growth has still occurred, it is increasingly jobless, as has been the case in the Euro-North American core), the sharper social divides have become expressed in intensifying socio-spatial polarization, while welfare is increasingly replaced with workfare. The new urban, social, and labour market policies have not only the effect of 'activating' large parts of the urban underclass into (downgraded) labour markets, but they also impacted many (former) social movement organizations, which increasingly reproduce themselves by implementing local social and employment programmes or community development – and are seen by many as doing a better job at 'combating social exclusion' than any competing (private or state) agency could. However, their mobilizing capacity has eroded, and most have buried formerly held dreams of 'the self-determined city' or even of liberated neighbourhoods, as they limit themselves to what seems feasible under the given circumstances. And local governments which contract with these community-based service delivery and development organizations have come under enormous pressure, as more and more responsibilities and risks have been passed down to municipal administrations, while their budgets are squeezed as never before.

These developments have restricted and narrowed the space for contemporary social contestation in many ways. But mobilization has continued to form at least along three fault lines, all of which turn on one or another form of the neoliberalization of urban governance:[6]

One fault line revolves around the way neoliberal urban governance works through the dominant pattern of growth politics. This has triggered protests by movements that challenge the forms, goals, and effects of corporate urban development;[7] they fight the commercialization of public space, the intensification of surveillance and policing of urban space, the entrepreneurial ways in which cities market themselves in the global competition, as well as the concomitant neglect of neighbourhoods that fall by the wayside of these forms of growth politics. Another fault line sparks mobilizations against the neoliberalization of social and labour market policies, against the dismantling of the welfare state, and for social and environmental justice, which increasingly come together in community/labour coalitions and (immigrant) workers' rights organizations. In Germany it is the local Anti-Hartz mobilizations, in Italy the Social Centres, in the US the workers' centres, which bring worksite and community organizing together in new coalitions of social rights organizations and unions, and unite the demands of the precariously employed as well as the unemployed. A third fault line is addressed by transnational anti-globalization movements[8] that have discovered 'the local', their city, as a place where globalization 'touches down' and materializes, where global issues become localized. These movements demand not only the democratization of international institutions such as the IMF, WTO, World Bank, EU, G8 etc., but are also mobilizing in defence of public services and institutions in the cities, discovering that issues such as privatization and infringement of social rights are actually connecting them with movements across the globe. They attack global neoliberalism in the form of global corporations, investors and developers (symbolically, as in happenings and street parties at Mayday protests, which *Reclaim the Streets* organized in central business districts across Europe), but also entrepreneurial local governments that help implement the neoliberal corporate agenda and use their political leverage to shape their cities in the interest of global corporate investors and affluent residents. Organizations such as the Social Fora or Attac have taken the message of 'global justice' to the local level, where they campaign against welfare cuts and for rights for migrants as well as workfare workers and build alliances with local unions, social service organizations and churches. And a broad spectrum of local, more or less militant, anarchist, autonomous, leftist groups with various ties to

5 See David Harvey, 'The Right to the City', **New Left Review** 53, September/October 2008, p. 30.
6 See for a more elaborate version of the following argument Margit Mayer, 'Contesting the Neoliberalization of Urban Governance', in Helga Leitner, Jamie Peck, Eric Sheppard (eds) **Contesting Neoliberalism: The Urban Frontier** (New York: Guilford Press, 2007), pp. 90-115.
7 Such as investments in glitzy new city centres filled with glass-and-steel architecture, offices and condominiums, mega-projects for sports and entertainment etc.
8 The World Social Forum (WSF) emerged in 2001 out of protests against the latest form of globalization, most famously the massive protests in Seattle against the World Trade Organization. Held simultaneously with the World Economic Forum annually in Davos, Switzerland, the WSF provides an 'open space' where activists from around the planet can discuss alternatives to neoliberal, free market globalization. The Forums have been held in different parts of the world such as India, Venezuela, Mali, Pakistan, and Kenya, but primarily in the home of its founding movements, Brazil.

regional and supra-national networks have regularly been converging at counter summits not just for blockading actions and demonstrations, but also to exchange insights and experiences with their national and international comrades, and to plan and coordinate upcoming joint civil disobedience and other actions.[9]

Thus, while the neoliberalization of the city has in many ways created a more hostile environment for progressive urban movements, it has also allowed for a more global articulation of urban protest, and it has spawned a renewed convergence of some of these strands under the umbrella of the Right to the City slogan. The different movements active these days around the three fault lines just sketched have brought deprived and excluded groups on the one hand and anti-neoliberal or anti-globalization groups on the other together in ways that were not quite possible in 1968, when both 'deprivation' and 'discontent' were key moving forces, but could not yet be merged. Today, the Right to the City concept, developed by Henri Lefebvre in the context of the 1960s movements, merges and concentrates a set of highly charged issues, as more and more groups of urban residents see long-accustomed rights erode. Accumulation by dispossession has accelerated on heretofore unseen levels, which entails enormous losses of rights – civil, social, political, as well as economic rights. Cities have transformed into gated communities and privatized public spaces, where wealthy and poor districts are increasingly separated if by invisible barriers, and access of the poor to the amenities and infrastructures that cities once held for all have become more and more restricted. In this context, the slogan 'Right to the City' resonates with activists, as it makes sense as a claim and a banner under which to mobilize one side in the conflict over who should have the benefit of the city and what kind of city it should be. Whether the nation-wide Right to the City Alliance in the US,[10] or more local Right to the City alliances as, for example, in Hamburg,[11] these movements are building on the Lefebvrian conception, whereas urbanization stands for a transformation of society and everyday life through capital. Against this transformation Lefebvre sought to *create* rights through social and political action: the street, and claims to it, are establishing these rights. In this sense, the right to the city is less a juridical right, but rather an oppositional demand, which challenges the claims of the rich and powerful. It is a right to redistribution, as Peter Marcuse once called it, not for all people, but for those deprived of it and in need of it. And it is a right that exists only as people appropriate it (and the city). In this revolutionary form of appropriation, which Lefebvre discovered in the Paris of 1968, today's struggles can be seen as an outgrowth – and further development – of the 1960s movements.

E Considering the cooptation of so many of the grass-roots movements of the 1960s, what effective means of urban protest have you encountered in recent years? How does such activism and protest gain political leverage?

MM Success of protest movements is not only measured by political leverage. Certain projects may boost emancipatory efforts while failing in terms of power politics. On the other hand, there are movements that long ago failed in terms of emancipatory and transformative criteria, but have continued with powerful political leverage for some time. Thus evaluating the 'effectiveness' of urban protest is a complex endeavour.

For example, the right to the city has not only become a powerful slogan informing current struggles over shaping the city, but it has also gained significant traction with international NGOs and advocacy organizations, if with somewhat different connotations than described above. Such traction might be viewed as an exemplary case of urban protest having gained political leverage. When policies get defined, by official international gatherings and organizations, and codified in national constitutions that are to guarantee sustainable, just and democratic cities, this might be viewed as political leverage par excellence. Together with UNESCO and UN-Habitat, human rights groups as well as groups involved with the WSF process have drafted a World Charter on the Right to the City and established a Working Group on 'Urban Policies and the Right to the City', with regular annual meetings taking place either at UNESCO headquarters or various municipalities. In Latin American cities, such charters (or parts of them) were widely circulated, and in Brazil a City Statute was even inserted in 2001 into the Brazilian Constitution to recognize the collective right to the city.[12]

9 Since the onset of the financial/economic crisis, these movements attract growing numbers of youth, whose hopes for a decent future are eroding as education systems and public infrastructures are crumbling, spawning their protest under the banner (not only in Athens) of 'money for the banks, bullets for the kids'.

10 The RTTCA includes 36 core member organizations spanning seven states and over a dozen metropolitan areas. Organized as regional collaborative networks, the RTTCA operates in the areas of Boston/Providence, Washington D.C./Northern Virginia, Los Angeles, Miami, New Orleans, New York, Oakland/San Francisco. Network members collaborate on the basis of themes as well as regions, such as civic engagement, tenants' rights, subsidized housing, and 'a just reclamation of the Gulf Coast' (see Jacqueline Leavitt, 'Right to the City Builds Alliance, Confronts Mayors', **Progressive Planning,** Summer 2009, available at Archived Progressive Planning Magazines: < http://www.plannersnetwork.org/publications/2009_summer/leavitt.html> (accessed 22 March 2010); and Jacqueline Leavitt, Tony Roshan Samara, Marnie Brady, 'Right to the City: Social Movement and Theory', **Poverty & Race**, 19/5, September/October 2009, available at: <http://www.prrac.org/full_text.php?text_id=1238&item_id=11801&newsletter_id=107&header=Community+Organizing&kc=1> (accessed 22 March 2010)).

11 Initially such groups sprang up primarily in Western Europe, bringing together anti-gentrification leftists, squatters, and artists with middle class preservationists (see for Hamburg: Philipp Oehmke, 'Who Has the Right to Shape the City? Squatters Take on the Creative Class', **Spiegel Online**, January 7 2010, available at: <http://www.spiegel.de/international/germany/0,1518,670600,00.html> (accessed 22 March 2010); <http://esregnetkaviar.wordpress.com/>, <http://wilhelmsburg.blog.de/>; for Leipzig <http://www.sozelei.net>), but recently a 'Right to the City' group has formed also in Zagreb, which has protested an investor plan to develop a central square (Flower Square) into an upscale, exclusive, traffic-rich plaza with underground parking, to jumpstart gentrification of the surrounding area. When the group handed over 54,000 signatures protesting the development to the mayor, his response was: in four years you can elect someone else, in the meantime, leave us to do our job! (See Ognjen Caldarovic, Jana Sarinic, 'Inevitability of Gentrification', paper presented at the ISA Meeting in Barcelona, September 2008).

12 See Edésio Fernandes, 'Constructing the "Right to the City" in Brazil', **Social and Legal Studies** 16/2 2007, pp. 201-19.

However, while these statutes and charters seek to influence public policy and legislation in a way that combines urban development with social equity and justice, they are removed from actual struggles and the interests of those whom they presumably seek to protect. In their effort to put 'our most vulnerable urban residents' rather than investors and developers at the centre of public policy, they enumerate specific rights which a progressive urban politics should particularly protect. Thus they refer to such rights as to housing, social security, work, an adequate standard of living, leisure, information, organization and free association, food and water, freedom from dispossession, participation and self-expression, health, education, culture, privacy and security, a safe and healthy environment, and more. These rights are supposed to hold for all 'urban inhabitants', both as individuals and collectively, but some groups are highlighted as deserving particular protection (poor, sick, handicapped, and migrants get mentioned).

The problem with such a legalistic definition of the right to the city and with enumerating different disenfranchised groups is that every list invariably excludes those that do not get listed. And the problem with the generic category of 'urban inhabitants' is that it reflects a view of civil society as basically homogenous and, as a whole, worthy of protection from (destructive) neoliberal forces – as if it itself did not encompass economic and political actors who participate in and profit from the production of poverty and discrimination; it thus obfuscates the fact that this entity is deeply divided by class and power. Furthermore, this institutionalized set of rights boils down to claims for inclusion in the current system as it exists, it does not aim at transforming the existing system – and in that process ourselves. The demands for rights as enumerated merely target particular aspects of neoliberal policy, e.g. in combating poverty, but not the underlying economic policies which systematically produce poverty and exclusion. Since 'collective transformative action always begins on the terrain and within the constraints set by the oppressor' (de Sousa Santos), success of the collective action is measured by the capacity to transform, in the course of the struggle, the terrain and the constraints of the conflict. Thus, remaking the city is always simultaneously a struggle about power, which cannot be left to (local) governments, not even social-democratic ones. Left to their devices and to the networks of NGOs, the political content and meaning of the contested right to the city will get diluted. It will become depoliticized as so many movement issues have, reframed into a discourse of civil society which has invaded movement milieus in the era of neoliberalism.

In this discourse, strengthening civil society networks is regarded as positive because it enhances efficiency; collaboration of urban residents and municipalities is seen as good because it furthers endogenous potentials and local growth; in this view, we can reconcile local autonomy with international competitiveness,

and sustainability with economic growth, we can have neoliberalism with a human touch. This, of course, constitutes one of the most powerful mystifications of the contemporary era; exposing that and proposing the radical right to the city instead, would seem to be the best way to fight neoliberal instrumentalization of movement demands. Hence, urban protest has been most effective where it does both, build autonomous structures and, simultaneously, pursue a strategy of political intervention in institutional politics. Neglecting the former leads to political cooptation via professionalization or economic commodification, neglecting the latter leads to political marginalization. Along this vein, many struggles have been successful in recent years, whether it be the campaign against MediaSpree in Berlin[13] or saving the Gängeviertel in Hamburg;[14] the RttC Alliance has won several victories in US localities, including winning affordable housing provision, maintaining access to public space, stopping demolition of public housing, and raising the pay of abused domestic workers.[15] But spaces won or saved by progressive movements are always threatened to become (re)absorbed into the dominant praxis. Neoliberalism has been particularly successful in hijacking and integrating oppositional and rebellious claims and repertoires into its regime. We can observe this among former squatters and the newly engaged cultural activists, who frequently become more interested in projecting a city where *their* – self-determined, autonomous – liberated space is guaranteed, and less concerned with the exclusion and repression of less fortunate ones. Such activists increasingly succeed today in securing their own survival by buying into the new 'creative city' policies that exploit the vibrant local cultural scenes for branding and as a locational asset in the intensifying interurban competition. Thus, movements need to be aware of the ever present possibility that their claims and their liberated places can become co-opted into the ongoing reinvention and re-adaptation of neoliberal hegemony.

E In an interview in *Critical Planning* you have raised the question of whether protest is now concentrated in the global South and outside the global Western cities. Could you expand on this point?

MM I do think we need to realize that Western cities, or cities of the global North, are no longer the site of politically mobilized working classes nor do they harbour any longer the vibrant proletarian public sphere as was the case during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. They are also no longer the site of struggles around collective consumption, as was the case in the 1960s when contestations over public infrastructures and public space were still perceived by the ruling class as unrest threatening broader catalytic effects. While for Marx as well as for Lefebvre revolutions were emanating from the city, the movements visible in today's first world metropoles

13 Albert Scharenberg, Ingo Bader, 'Berlin's Waterfront Site Struggle', **CITY** 13/2-3, June-September 2009, pp. 325-35.
14 Philipp Oehmke, 'Who Has the Right to Shape the City? Squatters Take on the Creative Class'; Klaus Irler, Maximilian Probst, 'Gängeviertel ist vorerst gerettet', **tageszeitung**, December 17, 2009, p.7.
15 Harmony Goldberg, 'Building Power in the City: Reflections on the Emergence of the Right to the City Alliance and the National Domestic Worker's Alliance', **In the Middle of the Whirlwind**, 2008, available at: <http://inthemiddleofthewhirlwind.wordpress.com/building-power-in-the-city/> (accessed 22 March 2010).

seem to have lost this potential of radiating transformative change into society at large. Instead of harbouring a potentially revolutionary class, first world cities now appear as global suburbs, privileged spaces for more and less gentrified 'creative classes', and breeding grounds for a mix of alternative, critical and 'bohemian' milieus. The class composition of first world cities has fundamentally transformed in the course of global urbanization and the outsourcing of manufacturing to the global South, leaving us with a new antagonism (and hence new types of conflict) between top-end users of the city versus growing advanced marginality. That is not to say that the struggles over this antagonism are not relevant (especially since [low] waged work has expanded to include more women and more immigrants, making first world cities important sites of anti-colonial struggles as well as struggles against racism and sexism), but they are hemmed in by a variety of structural factors that impede transformative change, especially the increasing societal fragmentation and the erosion of public space. Privatization, security measures, the proliferation of zones of segregation, and the retrenchment of municipal services and infrastructures have all contributed to the disappearance of spaces for collectivization, and to the disintegration of the role public space might play in the formation and politicization of (class) subjects and for building alliances.

The contemporary struggles under the banner of the right to the city and some of their victories referred to above do provide evidence that these odds are not insurmountable. But many of these struggles are merely defensive, seeking to save a piece of urbanity or protect their alternative lifestyles; for others, the risk of co-optation and partial integration into an urban model in the image of corporate and financial interests is immense, especially if we account for the fact that the benefits of the growth of the last 30 years have overwhelmingly gone to those living in the West/North under immeasurably higher living standards than the greater part of the world, even higher than for most but the very rich in the dynamic economies which have been keeping the world economy going.[16] Under these conditions, we need to ask: are first world cities still educing the social forces with an interest in transforming them into more equitable and attractive living environments for all? In whose interest would it be to form alliances that would challenge the structures of global inequality? Do the comparatively privileged urban activists in the global North have the motivation for *global* justice?

Obviously, networks and linkages with movements and actors constituting the global proletariat in those other places will be helpful. And actually, connections between struggles in first world metropoles and those in cities of the global South, where the fight against privatization, speculation, eviction and displacement is far more existential, have become quite tangible and real, as many Social Forum meetings have shown. It is often the same real estate developers and the same global corporations that are responsible for the displacement, eviction, or

privatization of public goods as in the global South. The last ten years of dialogue, information sharing and collective mobilization via the Social Forum process and the get-togethers of the anti-globalization movement at counter summits have been used by activists from around the globe to explore the shared experiences and commonalities in their various struggles against privatization and dispossession, which is a good start. For first world urban struggles to have a broad and transformative impact, networking and cooperation with the dispossessed and excluded from around the globe will have to be intensified, and cities will have to be envisioned and built that reflect their hearts' desire as well as ours.

E Around autumn 2008 there was much talk about restructuring following the crisis, of a significant shift in the political economy, and many signs of a return to Keynesian policies. Would a return to the safety of Keynesian policies mean also a return to the lifeless urban development of the 1950s and 1960s, to assembly-line architecture and spiritless bureaucratic new towns and urban peripheries?

MM If local politicians intent on bringing in global investors, affluent middle classes and the type of 'creative class' that Richard Florida hypes as the path to success for every city, encouraged by Green Party support for innovative social entrepreneurs,[17] are the only ones who get to shape the city, then we need not 'worry' about a return to Keynesian policies. Instead of safety, there will be precarious living and working conditions; instead of spiritless and inhospitable homogenous new towns, there will be social polarization: glitz, creativity, and trendy urban environments in the privileged quarters; precariousness, insecurity, blight and devastation of varying degrees in the marginalized ones.

Instead of Keynesian redistribution, the financial and economic meltdown of 2008 has been met with responses that intensified and expanded the dispossession of taxpayers and the public purse, which had already been going on over the last thirty years – i.e. with a new type of state interventionism in support of investment bankers. This has aided the concentration processes and the strengthening of finance capital as well as the growth of the state debt, thereby contributing to the further polarization of society and the deepening of impoverishment of both the people and places disadvantaged by this redistribution and excluded from the upscale parts of the city. While some authors now speak of a 'post-neoliberal' phase,[18] it seems to me that in spite of the

16 See Eric Hobsbawm, 'Is the Intellectual Opinion of Capitalism Changing?', **Today** programme, BBC Radio 4, October 20 2008, available at: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/today/hi/today/newsid_7677000/7677683.stm>

17 See note 2, above.

18 See Neil Smith, 'Neoliberalism is Dead, Dominant, Defeatable—Then What?', **Human Geography**, 1/ 2, 2008, pp. 1-3; Ulrich Brand, Nikola Sekler (eds) 'Postneoliberalism – a Beginning Debate,' **Development Dialogue** 51, January 2009, pp. 5-13. Even the Left Party's Rosa Luxemburg Foundation in some of its analysis claims that the crisis 'has forced [the ruling hegemonic block] to modify its neoliberal strategies'. Rosa Luxemburg Foundation, 'Die Krise des Finanzmarkt-Kapitalismus – Herausforderung für die Linke', **kontrovers** 01/2009, available at: <http://www.rosalux.de/cms/index.php?id=18514> (accessed 22 March 2010); cf. also Rosa Luxemburg Foundation, 'The World Crisis – and Beyond' conference, Brussels, Oct 28-Nov 1, 2009.

obvious crisis of neoliberalism, neoliberal rule continues to be pervasive. The current regime seeks more than ever to organize all social relations 'in a way that makes markets and competition work', where 'market-like forms of governance' prevail in all sectors of society.[19] Even though neoliberalism no longer has the solutions, no longer guarantees sustained economic growth, nor enjoys legitimation any longer, it is still dominant, enjoys the support of the political elites, and provides both the context and targets for urban social movements' activities.

So rather than worry about the return of homogenizing Keynesian policies, we *should* be worrying about how urban marginality is addressed nowadays by a welfare/workfare state that is simultaneously more punitive, more activating, and more locally specific than its Keynesian predecessor. While enormous resources are being poured into upgrading city centres into magnets for tourism, consumption, and work-play environments for the affluent, poor people as well as 'weak neighbourhoods' are now urged, with new-style empowerment programmes, to mobilize what few resources and potentials they may have, and to develop 'social capital' in order to become competitive. To meet this practically impossible task, civil society and grassroots engagement are now mobilized, not only symbolically, but through funding so-called comprehensive programmes which aim at 'activating' marginalized urban groups into state-enforced low-wage labour markets and 'problematic' neighbourhoods into harnessing their own networks to stop their downward drift.[20] At the same time, disciplinary sanctions are increased and the arsenal of the penal state serves to insure the subordination of the poor to these low-wage markets and the rules of the informal economy.[21] These trends towards intensely polarized societies are truly worrisome and require the urgent attention of urban planners as well as progressive movements.

19 Alex Demirovic, 'Postneoliberalism and Post-Fordism – Is There a New Period in the Capitalist Mode of Production?', **Development Dialogue** 51, January 2009, p. 46.
20 See Margit Mayer, 'The Onward Sweep of Social Capital: Causes and Consequences for Understanding Cities, Communities and Urban Movements', **International Journal of Urban and Regional Research**, 27/1, 2003, pp. 110-32; Margit Mayer, 'Armutspolitik in amerikanischen Städten', **Prokla** 38/4, December 2008, pp. 569-93.
21 See Loic Wacquant, **Punishing the Poor: The Neoliberal Government of Social Insecurity** (Durham: Duke UP, 2009).

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