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The genesis and evolution of urban policy: a confrontation of regulationist and governmentality approaches

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Abstract

This paper develops an analytical framework that can serve to analyse the genesis and evolution of institutions that instantiate urban policy. To this end, two theoretical approaches are integrated: the state theoretical regulation approach and the governmentality approach. Although these approaches depart from different ontological and epistemological starting points, the research tools that they have developed are largely complementary. Therefore, in concrete research, a framework that combines elements from both approaches could yield important empirical insights. Urban policy in the Netherlands is analysed to illustrate some of the theoretical and methodological propositions that have been developed.

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In the past decades, Jessop and some of his colleagues and students have developed the so-called state theoretical regulation approach (henceforth referred to as STRA) and have used this approach to explain the dynamics of urban and regional policies in Britain (cf. Jessop, 1990; Jones & MacLeod, 1999; MacLeod,

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1997). More recently, a number of authors who want to make sense of these types of policy have been inspired by the work that has evolved in response to Foucault's lecture on 'Governmentality' (Foucault, 1991; MacKinnon, 2000; Raco, 2003; Raco & Imrie, 2000). Both approaches have so far been developed in relative isolation from each other. 'Relative' because representatives of both approaches have incidentally referred to each other's work.

For example, the authors who have adopted the governmentality perspective have indicated on several occasions that not all state theories fall victim to the economism or formalism they identify with political-economic state theory (MacKinnon, 2000, p. 5; Raco & Imrie, 2000, p. 2089, note 1). However, these remarks have been made in footnotes or in introductory paragraphs and so far these authors have not directly confronted the STRA or, indeed, any other type of political-economic state theory. In a similar vein, one representative of the STRA has conceded in passing that the regulationist approach falls short in analysing the "microphysics of governmentality" (MacLeod, 2001, p. 822, note 22), whilst another author has stressed that STRA scholars "should also attend to more ethnographic aspects of state strategy and capacity" (Jeffrey, 2000, p. 1033). These observations are in line with a more general conclusion that "...political economy...has an impoverished notion of how subjects and subjectivities are formed and how different modes of calculation emerge and become institutionalised", which calls for the development of an approach that "...articulates the micro-foundations of political economy with its macro-structuring principles in an overall material-discursive analysis..." (Jessop & Sum, 2001, p. 97). These statements indicate that a central problem in the literature on governance – the relation between developments on different spatial scales – has not been properly dealt with. Jones (1998) raised the issue in a provocative paper in this journal and several papers have touched upon it since. However, the papers by MacKinnon (2000) and MacLeod and Goodwin (1999) are firmly rooted in the two respective approaches. A third paper by Jeffrey (2000) has with some success tried to broaden the scope of the STRA without, however, directly commenting on the origins of (urban) policies.

The casual references of representatives of both approaches in recent papers indicate that there potentially is a lot to gain from a further confrontation and integration. This paper covers a small part of this agenda. It tries to build an analytical framework for studying the genesis and development of urban policies. More specifically, this paper deals with the *multi-scalar origins* of (urban) policy, as it will try to provide a schematic account of the interactions between actors and processes operating on diverse spatial scales and the ways in which these interactions ultimately crystallize into specific types of policy. It is argued that both approaches have a rather limited conceptual tool kit when it comes to analysing the multi-scalar origins of (urban) policy. This omission occurs in a different guise in each case and both approaches have tried to resolve it within their own paradigm. If these fruitful yet partial attempts to deal with the problem of scale are combined, it becomes possible to make some steps forward.

The paper is organised as follows. The first section highlights some of the steps that have been taken in recent decades to conceptualise the state from a

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