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Out from the (Green) shadow? Neoliberal hegemony through the market logic of shared urban environmental governance

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A B S T R A C T

Recent work in critical geography describes the neoliberalization of urban social service provision through a transition from state provision to civil sector delivery. The concept of a 'shadow state' is deployed by some social theorists to describe this process by which nonprofits with government contracts increasingly adopt a state-oriented agenda for the execution of social entitlement programs. Possible linkages between the neoliberalization of urban *environmental* service provision and a shadow state are lacking by comparison. I, therefore, use qualitative data concerning three organizations in Milwaukee, Wisconsin to demonstrate that civil sector groups are stepping up as local government diminishes its markets for municipal environmental labor. However, the diverse compositions of these shared governances potentially complicate the efficacy of a shadow state thesis for describing environmental provision in inner-city Milwaukee. Instead, I argue that a Gramscian interpretation of shared governance better accounts for the neoliberalization of environmental service provision as government agencies and civil sector groups relate to one another through hegemonic market logic. I argue that this provides a more nuanced picture of how governance concerning the urban environment is constructed by the government, market, and civil sectors to further shape human social reproduction.

Introduction

Neoliberalization is described as a foundational shift in the capitalist political economies of Western and nonwestern states alike (Harvey, 2005; Jessop, 2002; Peck, 2001). Geographers have written about the liberalization of previously regulated markets, retrenchment of social service provision coupled with increasing workfare programs, a disciplinary state apparatus in regard to trade unionism, and a renewed emphasis on place-based competitiveness (Brenner & Theodore, 2002; Peck & Tickell, 2002). These processes in their wake have profoundly reorganized the social landscapes of global urbanism (Luke, 2003). How neoliberalization impacts urban environments is less clear.

Recent efforts in geography are beginning to connect neoliberalization as process to the environment in general (see Heynen, McCarthy, Prudham, & Robbins, 2007, Heynen and Robbins, 2005; McCarthy & Prudham, 2004; Swyngedouw, 2005a). Following Marx (1887/1976), these geographers base their investigations into neoliberalization on the assumption that environments are in part an ecological product of social labor under capitalism (see also Benton, 1996; Foster, 2000; Harvey, 1996; Swyngedouw & Heynen, 2003). This connection is no minor intellectual achievement, because as Smith (2006) suggests, the commodification of environments is successful at making contemporary concepts of the environment nonsocial. These works mitigate this damaging trend by revealing that neoliberalization is constituted *within* the environment as a diverse set of socio-natural processes (including labor) that further exploit and commodify the environment in part through market deregulation and/or expansion (Castree, 2008). In this regard, the exposition of inherently uneven and disempowering spatialities constructed with neoliberalization of the environment is achieving ever-greater sophistication. But in theory and praxis it still suffers omissions. For example, are neoliberalizations potentially reorganizing resource-poor urban environments where it seems market forces should have difficulty finding purchase? And if so, how do we characterize these changes?

We do not have many answers to these questions because prior investigations have shed little light specifically on neoliberalizing geographies of *inner-city* environments – including parks and forests. In order to start making up this deficiency, we must look to other investigations concerning neoliberalizing transformations of social service provision in marginalized urban spaces for clues. This is an important step because the regulation of social reproduction

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through social service provision for inner-cities – formerly the contractual responsibility of the interventionist Keynesian state – is now increasingly devolved to the nonprofit sector. Wolch (1990) refers to this devolution as the emergence of the 'shadow state'. She uses the term to describe the process whereby the non/quasi-governmental sector assumes the burden from the state for regulating labor and social service agendas/policies. In turn, the state directs these voluntary agencies with paid staffs to provide services to urban residents while simultaneously activating recipients' roles in the polis in order to reduce the need for future welfare services (Fyfe, 2005; Fyfe & Milligan, 2003a, 2003b). Scholars have recently noted these changes for service provision in part comprise a neoliberalized shift from government to governance (Swyngedouw, 2005b). But what does this shift have to do with the production of urban environments, or more specifically, parks and trees in the central city?

Basic welfare entitlements are not the same as provision for parks and trees. The former under Keynesianism – often being regulated at the level of the national state – was more comprehensive in scale and meant to provide for the immediate, material needs of marginalized people through incremental redistributions of the total social product. The latter, by comparison, was often negotiated at the municipal level and geared toward sustaining neighborhoods in which working classes could live and reproduce (Perkins, 2007). But we can still take direction from the shift away from welfare entitlement in regards to changing provision for inner-city parks and forests. This is because trees and parks were also a part of a decades-long Keynesian social contract designed to redistribute a portion of the total social product to mediate the problems with uneven social reproduction under capitalism (Heynen, 2006; Heynen & Perkins, 2005). In other words, public parks and trees also provide critical social and material benefits for urban residents who might otherwise not be able to afford such amenities on their own (for more on the benefits these green infrastructures provide, see Chenoweth & Gobster, 1990; Nowak & Dwyer, 2000). Therefore, it is imperative to determine if changes seen in the social welfare contract are also occurring in environmental provision for critical urban amenities like the (re)production of parks and trees.

An increase in environmentally oriented civil sector organizations in Milwaukee and other cities across the United States during the last 20 years parallels shifts in modes of provision for other urban service sectors (for more see Cohen, 2004; Desfor & Keil, 2004). It seems this shift presents an opportunity for state agencies to deploy neoliberal environmental agendas by forging relationships with voluntarist organizations in the central city – thus forming a shadow state. In the next section, however, I argue a Gramscian analysis that connects government agencies and civil sector groups through market relations provides a more thorough analysis of the power of governance than the shadow state thesis alone. In order to address this possibility, I subsequently demonstrate that shifts in environmental provision in Milwaukee, Wisconsin are not so much about coercive state mandates as much as they represent negotiated shifts in social and environmental reproduction along the lines of 'common sense' market logics. Finally, I use three local examples of urban environmental governance to further exemplify the consensual and active role civil society plays in the construction of a polymorphous, neoliberal hegemony.

Neoliberal hegemony through shared governance?

Shifts in political-economic relations from Keynesian state intervention to (neo)liberal, market-oriented principles require the restructuring of relationships between government and civil society. Of note to regulation theorists is the supposed diminishment – or hollowing out – of regulatory powers of the central state to coordinate social, economic, and political activity in light of the forces of globalization. However, as Lemke (2001: 202) notes, the shift is more about rearticulating the power of enhanced civil society rather than diminishing state power outright:

> The crisis of Keynesianism and the reduction in forms of welfare-state intervention therefore lead less to the state losing powers of regulation and control (in the sense of a zero sum game) and can instead be construed as a reorganisation or restructuring of government techniques, shifting the regulatory competence of the state onto 'responsible' and 'rational' individuals.

Swyngedouw (2005b) notes this reorganization occurs because this shift away from government to governance in social service provision is a crisis-ridden transformation for segments of society. Thus government to governance technologies are necessarily generated in order to stabilize social relations during political-economic upheaval by giving civil society an apparent boost in political responsibility (Jessop, 2002: 455). A growing literature exists concerning this transition from government to governance in neoliberalizing spatio-temporal contexts, particularly in regard to local economic (re)development initiatives in the United States and UK (for representative samples see Coaffee & Healey, 2003; Elwood, 2004; Gerometta, Haussermann, & Longo, 2005).

Among these works, an urban governance literature has emerged based specifically on Wolch's shadow state thesis. It is worth noting here that Wolch (1990: xvi) describes the shadow state as:

> …comprised of multiple voluntary sector organizations, administered outside of traditional democratic politics and charged with major collective service responsibilities previously shouldered by the public sector, yet within purview of state control.

Investigations into urban governance from a shadow state perspective are particularly concerned about how coercive statist agendas potentially infiltrate civil sector institutions and lead to disempowering outcomes for marginalized people. Warrington (1995), for example, noted in the UK that the state used the voluntary sector there as a vehicle to transform social housing policy into a system of unaffordable private properties. Mitchell (2001) described a situation in British Columbia where the state directed a nonprofit to provide services to Chinese immigrants so it could simultaneously retrench its own welfare expenditures.

There is reason to be concerned, however, about the unidirectional flow of power emanating from the state as characterized in governance studies that employ the shadow state thesis. As Fyfe and Milligan (2003a: 410) suggest:

> [The shadow state thesis] needs to be re-examined in the light of the rapidly and radically changing economic and political landscapes that voluntary organizations now occupy. In terms of the economic landscape, the increasing involvement of voluntary organizations in joint ventures with the private sector and the growing importance of the market in the delivery of social welfare, clearly raise important theoretical issues about the relationship between voluntarism and the private sector which are beyond the scope of the shadow-state thesis to address.

Trudeau (2008), in his work on Hmong immigration to Saint Paul, Minnesota, recognizes this concern and calls for a relational view of the shadow state to better account for the role that groups of people and individuals achieve in co-producing dominant society's social and political agendas. Much to his credit, Trudeau's trenchant critique opens up an avenue for re-conceptualizing the