



NEOLIBERAL_CITI

Re-framing urban neoliberalism and neo-liberal citizenship – Enactments of resistance and practices of protest

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PROJECT OUTLINE

Neoliberalism, one of the most prominent concepts in the interdisciplinary field of Human Geography, Urban Sociology and Political Science, has been examined as a class-based ideology that threatens the welfare state in advanced societies such as the US, Great Britain and continental Europe, but also widely transforms economic and social conditions worldwide (Harvey 2005; Ong 2007, Hackworth 2007). Within the last few decades, the proliferation of neoliberal politics throughout most democracies in the Western hemisphere has widely shaped the way contemporary politicians as well as mainstream media evaluate the role and function of the state, the market and the individual and the interplay between them (Bourdieu 1998; Hardt, Negri 2000). Additionally, the introduction of market arrangements into areas of social life that had been previously organised in other ways (e.g., education, health, local services) and the use of financial markets to regulate the conduct of states increasingly restrict the scope of political and social citizenship rights granted to individuals (Hindess 2002).

To explain the consequences of neoliberalism, it is of growing importance to consider its local expressions. Globalisation and liberalisation articulate new forms of governance and transform the basis for urban development as well as the political, social and economic power relations in the city (Swyngedouw et al. 2002). It was widely addressed that cities play a strategic role in the variegated geographies of neoliberalism (Brenner et al. 2010; Gough 2002; Keil 2002; Peck 2006), but much of this work concentrated on the economic and social outcomes of “urban neoliberalism” (Wilson 2004), while relatively little research critically assessed the challenges democracy faces in neoliberal societies (Purcell 2007). The research project NEOLIBERAL_CITI will tackle this gap; it will provide analytical insight into how squatters, a counter-hegemonic movement marginalised in mainstream politics, imagine and perceive specific urban places and their transformations, thus discussing the possible subaltern appropriations of urban space in ‘actually existing neoliberalism’ (Brenner, Theodore 2002). As such, the specific sites of ‘making and enacting citizenship’ (Soysal 2002) will be examined.

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AIMS OF THE PROJECT

The interest of NEOLIBERAL_CITI focuses on four questions, namely:

- How do subaltern social movements imagine and perceive the transformations in the ‘neoliberal city’ after the financial crisis?
- Which alternative imaginations and appropriations do they propose?
- How do they enact resistance to the mainstream debate in urban politics?
- Until which degree are they themselves a subject of the extensive neoliberalisation of the public sphere?

The project will provide analytical insights into the shifting geographies of the enactment of citizenship through counter-hegemonic movements that critically engage in an often conflictive dialogue with the mainstream society. Such discussion about imaginations, perceptions and subaltern appropriations of specific urban places is structured around five objectives that intertwine theoretical, methodological and empirical innovations:

1. Development of a theoretical frame that conceptualises political protest and resistance against the hegemonic neoliberal city development as an enactment of citizenship.
2. Implementation of innovative methodologies such as reflexive photography. This approach is closely related to debates about the role performativity and visualisations play in cityscapes.
3. Generation of analytical insights into contest against urban neoliberalism, through the examination of both mainstream media discourse and subaltern media, especially online platforms.
4. Evaluation of ‘acts’ of citizenship as an embodiment of resistance, including a critical analysis and evaluation of the claims for recognition, practices and strategies of subaltern movements.
5. Dissemination and practical involvement, in science, media, politics and the movement itself.

These objectives prove to be of interest for addressing the rising contest of the dominant forces of neoliberalism. It is expected that within a specific field of symbolical importance, NEOLIBERAL_CITI will provide new empirical insights to the changes occurring in the articulations between neoliberalism and counter-hegemonic resistance in European cities after the economic crisis.