

VARIETIES OF URBAN CAPITALISM: A MULTISCALAR ANALYSIS OF NEOLIBERAL RESTRUCTURING *IN AND THROUGH* NEW YORK CITY, JOHANNESBURG AND STOCKHOLM

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Abstract

The overarching dilemma of this dissertation is one that permeates most discussions on capitalist diversity: is it possible to account for both contextual specificity *and* the interrelation and interconnectedness of different capitalist contexts? And if so, how? Neoliberal restructuring has shown a particularly high degree of complexity, and its systemic and contingent institutional features have been difficult to discern. This is especially evident in cities, which have emerged as key anchors for neoliberalism both within their respective national contexts and in a broader global context. This research project therefore seeks to develop an understanding of these systemic and contingent impulses within neoliberalism, as well as to ascertain how cities figure in this regard.

With this problematique in mind, I develop an analysis at the intersection between French Régulation and the Morphogenetic Approach, building on ontological and theoretical complementarities highlighted in Knio (2020). In particular, I draw on the French Régulation (FR) approach and its conceptualization of capitalist diversity through the lens of different ‘regimes of accumulation’ and ‘modes of regulation.’ I focus on FR contributions that posit the existence of institutional hierarchies and complementarities across diverse institutional contexts (Boyer 2002a; Amable 2000), allowing us to study systemic institutional traits. In order to capture neoliberal restructuring as a dynamic process, I embed this analysis within a temporalization powered by the Morphogenetic Approach (MA) which traces the interplay between structure and agency through the three moments of conditioning, interaction and elaboration. By identifying the institutional features of Fordism that preceded the emergence of neoliberalism in different contexts, the varied motivations of context-specific agents, as well as the different crises that precipitated neoliberal restructuring, it also becomes possible to pinpoint contingencies.

In order to tackle the question of the relationship between neoliberalism and cities, I adopt a scalar understanding of cities, thereby moving away from the ‘methodological city-ism’ that characterizes most research on neoliberalism and cities (Brenner 2019). Rather, I adopt a scalar analysis that departs from institutional forms and only subsequently seeks to identify the role of cities within these broader institutional configurations. In this sense, I draw on theorizations advanced by Peck and Tickell (1995) and Tickell and Peck (1992; 1995) who propose a multiscalar understanding of institutional forms, allowing us to conceptualize how regimes of accumulation play out across different scales. In sum, I deploy an analytical framework that centers around two (overlapping and inherently intertwined) hierarchies – a scalar and an institutional hierarchy – to chart the positioning of cities within broader processes of neoliberal restructuring.

My empirical analysis focuses on three different cities – New York, Johannesburg and Stockholm – which have been selected because they exhibit considerable divergences amongst each other and are embedded within very different capitalist economies on the national scale (with correspondingly divergent forms of insertion into the global economy). Even though all three cases display different institutional features, I show that all of them have experienced institutional patterning through the rise of the financial monetary regime and its complementary relation with internationalization of competition, that is, through the institutionalization of finance into the urban structure. At the same

time, I argue that contingencies arise due to the particular way in which cities are positioned within these two overlapping hierarchies, which I investigate in-depth.