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*City-Regionalisms:
Some Critical Reflections on
Transatlantic Urban Policy Convergence*

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Abstract

In the last 20 years there have been a number of changes in the political and economic context of urban policy in both the US and the UK. There has been a revival of national debates on urban policy if not of policy itself, alongside the creation of new institutional frameworks at the urban and regional scales. A thread common to both contexts is the re-focusing of understandings of the 'urban' (in urban policy) around a concept of city-region governance or city-regionalism. From an economic development perspective, this shift has also tended to be accompanied by talk of globalisation and notions of competitive regionalism. However, national differences remain important in the discursive form and institutional framework for the urban policy and regional development. New conceptual frameworks are required for understanding not only international urban policy convergence but also the persistence of national and sub-national institutional differences. Comparative analyses of new urban policy frameworks and regional development need to address geographies of city-region institution building at a variety of spatial scales.

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INTRODUCTION

The last twenty years has been marked by an exchange between the US and the UK of a range of social and economic policies. Often this bilateral exchange has involved little more than a superficial transfer of policy ideas and frameworks. At other instances, however, the exchange has also included an attempt to reproduce selective parts of the logic that underlay the policy design. In particular, in the area of UK urban policy one can think of incentives for the recent growth in US-style partnership models of urban development, business involvement in local politics and governance arrangements, and urban place promotion (see, e.g., Ward, 1997; Jessop, 1998). Even more recently, a very superficial transfer from the US to the UK has taken place around welfare reform, even if the UK Labour Government continues to shy away from the hard workfare line adopted by federal and state levels of government in the US (see, e.g., Peck, 1998). Both of these developments have been framed by the post-ideological acceptance of the logic of globalisation, a belief in competitive advantages secured under market forces, and the retreat from central government control into more 'flexible' and localised institutional arrangements (Jessop and Peck, 2001).

The flow from the US into the UK of 'soft' urban policy frameworks reached something of a climax under the various Conservative governments of the 1980s. North American models of urban redevelopment, based on property-led public-private regeneration partnerships, were applied in British cities, most notably and controversially in the London Docklands area as well as in other major urban centres like Manchester and Leeds (Imrie and Thomas, 1999). Often paying no more than lip-service to the underlying principles and surrounding contexts of US urban policy, successive UK Environment Ministers invoked the language of 'entrepreneurialism' and 'partnership' in order to mask their systematic restructuring of the state. UK urban regeneration policy removed key functions from local government as part of a dual strategy to centralise regulatory and fiscal control and displace local responsibility to quasi-public institutions such as Training Enterprise Councils and Urban Development Corporations (UDCs). One of the consequences of the superficial nature of this international policy transfer was that high-profile property-driven redevelopment projects and business-led regeneration partnerships proved politically unsustainable in the UK. Subsequently, urban regeneration policy has paid more attention to processes of community involvement around a wide range of regeneration projects (see, e.g., Haughton, 1999), and the development of community strategies by local authorities is likely to continue this trend.

The international transfer of urban theories with which to understand the local implementation of such urban policies in the UK has also proven problematic. During the

1980s and 1990s, analyses grounded in urban regime theory and the city-as-a-growth machine thesis were increasingly applied to urban policy and politics in the UK (see, *inter alia*, Bassett, 1986, 1999; DiGaetano and Klemanski, 1993, 1999; Harding, 1994; Stoker and Mossberger, 1994; Ward, 1996, 1997). In some circumstances these approaches were deployed appropriately in order to draw comparisons with institutions and politics in US cities exhibiting comparable redevelopment issues or similar economic problems as their UK counterparts. However, more often than not US-based urban theories required considerable tinkering so as to ‘fit’ the UK situation or, given enormous differences in the state-administrative structures of the two countries, were simply applied in an inappropriate fashion (Ward, 1996; Wood, 1999). Given these differences, we should be cautious about any attempt to transfer theoretical approaches grounded in a similar assumption that urban policy is converging. As Harvey Molotch (1999: 259) has recently suggested, “(t)he idea that U.S.-style urban entrepreneurialism sweeping the world is a consequence of new and inescapable conditions needs critical evaluation, not deferential acquiescence.”

Nonetheless, superficially the context of urban policy discourse in the US and UK has converged. In this working paper we try to identify three inter-related elements of this convergence: the rhetorical emphasis on, respectively, globalisation, urban governance, and the city-region. At the same time, we want to try to set out a working framework for thinking about key similarities and differences within and between the two national urban policy contexts. For example in both countries urban policy after World War II played a key role in macro-economic and social management. But more recently the emphasis on the ‘urban’ as a specific space or arena for national policy intervention has been downplayed, particularly in the US but also in a strategic way in the UK (Florida and Jonas, 1991; Gaffikin and Warf, 1993). Instead, the 1980s saw a move towards post-Keynesian forms of macro-economic regulation and the replacement of urban policy by more interventionist styles of economic governance on both sides of the Atlantic.

In light of recent research, these developments can be understood as part of wider attempts to establish new regulatory arrangements and state policies in order to create the institutional basis for a new phase of wealth creation in both countries (*cf.* Jessop, 1994). An important yet so far neglected dimension of this new era of institutional development has been the recent revival of an urban policy discourse if not of policy itself, alongside the development of new institutional frameworks at the urban and regional scales (Jones and MacLeod, 1999). Associated with this is the re-focusing of understandings of the ‘urban’ (in urban policy) around a concept of the city-region, alongside a tendency to frame these understandings in relation to globalisation and governance. Within this broad rubric, however, the new urban

policy discourse remains grounded in two quite different national political-institutional contexts, so that the form of urban governance and institutional development within particular city-regions continues to incorporate national and sub-national differences and specifics.

Our present task, therefore, is to highlight aspects of the national and sub-national specificity of new urban policy discourses and institutions. We pay particular attention to the ways in which the geography of policy development should be examined at several intersecting scales of spatiality. In the UK, policy discourse and strategy has focused on what might be called an 'urban-centric' political regionalism, one that seeks to reposition the urban crisis at the forefront of the national political agenda, but in a way that is heavily conditioned by the devolution agenda of the Labour government. In the US, by comparison, the new urban policy debate is framed by the federal government's ongoing attempts to devolve fiscal and administrative responsibilities to state and local government, thereby recognising the constitutional significance of these levels of government. In the US, the urban policy debate is further conditioned by the problem of the fragmentation of government and governance at the local level. The new urban policy discourse in the US incorporates longer-standing arguments in economic development circles about the need for the reform of metropolitan area government or what was once called 'corporate regionalism' (Feshback and Shipnuck, 1973).

A question that also intrigues us is to what extent at the city-region level in the UK and US, policy and institutional developments diverge from the dominant international urban policy narratives and practices. We do not adopt *a priori* the position that either country can learn from the other's experiences. Rather, we wish to argue that the differences in each country suggest a number of possible scenarios for the future of urban policy, for the likely success of future policy transfers, and how in turn these should be researched. In both the US and the UK, no single 'voice' (business, public, or otherwise), partnership, or institutional arrangement, should necessarily be seen to speak for any given city-region; city and regional economies are unique assemblages of social, economic and political institutions beset with a range of problems. Therefore, there should be some scope for local self-selection and reflexivity in the development of appropriate urban policies and institutional pathways (cf. Brenner, 1999; Jessop, 1998). Thus notwithstanding the alleged 'demise of the nation-state' and the concomitant 'internationalisation' of national (urban and economic) policies, urban policy and political theories need to continue to be constructed around what we see to be local and national geographies of city-regionalism.

SCALAR DISCUSSIONS: FROM 'URBAN POLICY' TO 'COMPETITIVE REGIONALISM'

Transatlantic debates about urban policy have seemingly undergone a remarkable metamorphosis in recent years. Three discursive elements of this change attract our interest in this paper: globalisation; urban governance; and the city-region. With respect to the first of these, it is now almost axiomatic to situate urban policy and politics in relation to a context of globalisation (Horan, 1991). Cox (1991; 1993) associates this development (especially in the US literature) as the rise of the 'new urban politics.' A key change here has been the way in which city development policy and politics is to be understood in relation to the pressures created by inter-regional capital mobility and the new global economy. This has been compared to the localistic emphasis of 'pre-globalisation' urban theories, including (again, in the US) community power analysis and the city-as-a-growth machine thesis (see Molotch, 1976; 1999), or (in the UK) urban managerialism and analyses of the (urban) politics of collective consumption (Cochrane, 1999).

Sometimes the references to globalisation in the new urban politics literature are merely rhetorical; globalisation is simply understood as providing a context for examining widespread changes in the nature and substance of urban governance and institutions. Arguably, compared to past work there is less emphasis now on framing urban policy and politics within a national as opposed to global context. In the US, for instance, John Mollenkopf's *The Contested City* [1983] and Stephen Elkin's analysis of 'federal' urban regimes in *City and Regime in the American Republic* [1987] both make little reference to the global context. Compare these, however, to the recent volume edited by Rob Imrie and Huw Thomas, *British Urban Policy* [1999]; this frames the emergence of Urban Development Corporations in the UK explicitly in terms of national government policy. This is perhaps the exception, however. Contemporary understandings of the city are increasingly inclined to the view that as far as policies, powers and resources pertaining specifically to the 'urban' are concerned references to a national policy context are becoming superfluous or at least secondary. This is not simply a rhetorical matter of replacing the word 'national' with the word 'global' in analyses of urban policy and politics. Rather it reflects the need to come up with creative ways of re-imagining the very role and functions of cities and city-regions in their wider regional, national, and international context (see, e.g., Cochrane and Jonas, 1998). Certainly, in Europe the 'urban' may now be seen as one amongst a number of newly emerging (inter-scalar) 'policy spaces.' These spaces are simultaneously occupied by various combinations of local, regional, national and global actors and strategies, on the one hand,

and multiples of trans-local, trans-regional and trans-national policies, on the other hand (cf. Brenner, 1998; 1999; Leitner and Sheppard, 1999).

Second, in lieu of formal urban policy-making and administration (i.e., urban *government*), there is growing emphasis on understanding and specifying new forms of urban *governance*. Governance here refers to the multiplicity of state and non-state arenas through which power in and between urban areas is exercised and decisions are made affecting the trajectory of development and redistribution within, across, and between cities and their regions. This development has seen a rise in interest in exposing the hand of business in urban policy making and studying the emergence of more entrepreneurial styles of urban policy and decision-making (see, e.g., Clarke and Gaile, 1998; Harvey, 1989a; 1989b; Hall and Hubbard, 1998; Jessop, 1998). It involves looking behind and beyond local (municipal, county or even state) government to those networks of private actors and business interests that are seen to shape patterns of investment and development within and between urban jurisdictions (Wood, 1996; 1999). At the same time, there is increasing attention given to processes and politics of 'urban' democratisation and increasing opportunities for public participation in urban policy and decision-making (Clarke and Gaile, 1998; Keil, 2000). It is as if the urban policy arena has become a 'de-centered space' where actors are to be understood not so much in terms of their relation to formal state-administrative structures within the city, but rather also in terms of their relation to other actors, spaces, and, indeed, geographical scales (Magnusson, 1996, as cited in Keil, 2000).

Third, and perhaps most significantly, there is a growing cross-national convergence on replacing a notion of the 'city' as a distinctive territorial arena of government with the idea of the 'city-region,' incorporating a more flexible, hierarchical and de-centered approach to the 'space' of urban governance. This trend has been accompanied by a normative emphasis on regional institution building (Deas and Ward, 2000; MacLeod and Goodwin, 1999). Often associated with terms like 'multi-level governance' and 'joined-up policies', the perceived need for a reshuffling of state institutions within city-regions is prescribed on the basis that a region -- however defined -- provides the optimum size and scale for a critical mass of organizations and economic actors to 'learn,' 'innovate' and 'compete' in the new economy (Cooke and Morgan, 1998).

To some extent, this normative re-scaling of the urban has been a state-directed process on both sides of the Atlantic (albeit urban theorists in the US often prefer to use the term 'government' rather than 'state'). For example, it can be associated with the rise of 'competitive regionalism' as a particular way forward for urban policy. This deliberate

attempt to re-scale urban policy seems to have drawn in various forms upon understandings of the ‘new economic geography’ as understood by influential writers like Michael Porter and Paul Krugman. It also incorporates the notion of the rise of ‘city-region’ states to replace the ‘national’ state as loci of economic and political power, as seen in the works of Keniche Ohmae.

The underlying assumption of ‘competitive regionalism’ is that the global economy is built around distinctive metropolitan or regional economies; these may be comprised of clusters of related and inter-dependent economic activities or are simply significant agglomerations of populations and local administrative units. Each metropolitan area or city-region must find its global market niche and develop clusters of activities in which it can specialise and compete. Each cluster or agglomeration, in turn, is characterised by a distinctive institutional milieu in which networked forms of economic organisation are presumed to connect the cluster or agglomeration to other networks and nodes in the global economy.

Recent discussions of competitive regionalism from a regional economic development perspective have, not surprisingly, emphasised the logic of small firms and networked forms of industrial organisation internal to these clusters. This emphasis has come at the expense of the continuing importance of large-scale business organisations in the economy and the role of international and national policies in sustaining economic growth (Harrison, 1994). A key question is the extent to which in different national contexts regional institutions have been deliberately encouraged by influential business groups and central state agencies, and hence whether there are different ‘national models’ of competitive regionalism. A related issue is the extent to which, by virtue of the resilience of urban institutions, government and governance arrangements outside a narrowly ‘economic’ sphere, ‘models’ of competitive regionalism vary both between and within national contexts. For example, in the US the debate about the need for the reform of metropolitan-area government has not advanced significantly beyond ideas first put forward in the 1960s by the Committee for Economic Development or even, for that matter, progressive reformers in the early decades of the twentieth century.

Nevertheless, competitive regionalism has real implications for urban governance and policy in the UK and USA. Policy-makers in both countries seem eager to reposition cities and urban policy to the centre-stage of national economic and social policy. At one level, then, the ‘urban’ in urban policy has been progressively *deterritorialised*. It is no longer simply about bricks and mortar, about housing in inner cities, sink estates or problem neighbourhoods. Nor

is it about particular cities, areas or social groups within these (whether, in the UK, in Brixton in London and the Moss Side in Manchester or, in the US, in Watts in Los Angeles and the Bronx in New York). Moreover, it is not necessarily and solely about the formal apparatus of urban government, including the appropriate size, structure and function of the city administration. Rather it is also about global competition, networks and social cohesion as generic attributes of 'competitive' cities and 'model' urban governance. Urban policy is increasingly becoming *placeless*; less bound-up (or bogged-down) in the precise configurations of local social relations and built environments and more oriented towards fitting with wider patterns of political and economic restructuring.

Concurrently, however, the urban is being *reterritorialised*; it is increasingly about city-*regions* and competitive *places*. It is thus also being re-scaled (cf. Brenner, 1998, Swyngedouw, 2000). Along with the ratcheting-up of global urban competition, cities are in the process of being scaled-upwards. Cities are no longer defined within fixed territorial boundaries (cities versus suburbs, central cities versus edge cities, etc.). Increasingly cities are viewed in the context of space annihilating, though nevertheless, geographically rooted networks and associations. Of course, these networks and associations have geographies: they are intrinsically territorial. But they are territorialised at a qualitatively different scale: they form city-regions that constitute 'nodes' or 'clusters' within the global economy. In this respect, as policy discourse has become globalised, urban policy and competitive regionalism are becoming intertwined ideas. This simultaneous process of rescaling and convergence is bound up with the increasing mobility of capital and transformations in geographical scales. Stemming from these sets of processes what has traditionally constituted 'the urban', 'the region' and 'the nation' as distinctive and separate geographical scales -- defined by specific assemblages of social and economic processes -- no longer holds (Smith, 1984). In this fluid and unstable context, the very meanings and metaphorical usage of scalar descriptors such as 'regional', 'national' or 'global' have slippery meanings and are open to strategic and political usage. Therefore, they demand critical interrogation (Jonas, 1994a). And so it seems with the urban scale and institutional and policy developments at that scale, both in the USA and Europe (Brenner, 1999). The new urban policy discourse, then, is as much a struggle over the international, national and regional contexts and meanings of urban policy as it is about its various material forms. Thinking critically about competitive regionalism, therefore, requires a focus on several scales and analytical frames *simultaneously*, ranging from the *global* logic driving new urban policy frameworks, to the *national* economic and political context of these frameworks, and to the *regional* specification of the institutional forms emerging within particular city-regions.

‘URBAN-CENTRIC’ REGIONALISM IN THE UK

Whilst there appears to be a global logic underpinning the international transfer of new urban policy discourses constructed around competitive regionalism, the political and economic conditions driving forward this transfer remain nationally specific. Thus appearance of a policy convergence at one level -- the global scale -- masks what are in fact complex sets of institutional and policy narratives, developments and conditions operating at others level, particularly at and through the level of the nation state. We now consider the way competitive regionalism has entered the urban policy debate in the UK.

UK-style competitive regionalism can be characterised crudely in the initial instance as part of a transition from a ‘new localism’ to a ‘new regionalism’ orchestrated by central government (Deas and Ward, 2000; Lovering, 1995; MacLeod, 1999). Under existing urban policies, local areas in the UK compete for regeneration and economic development funds distributed by central government and the EU (Table 1). A recent change in the national ‘urban’ framework, triggered by the election of New Labour in May 1997, has amounted to less of a shift from the Conservative policies than might be expected. As Table 1 outlines, in some policy areas initiatives remain largely unaltered, though of course within a changed wider political context. New Labour has realigned policy direction through, first, the ‘nesting’ of solutions, via its zoned initiatives, which integrate different elements of social policy and, second, through its emphasis on regional institution-building and solution-making.

In the UK, urban policies increasingly place an emphasis on local capacity building and competitiveness, while in order to understand the genesis of RDAs it is necessary to return to the policies of the last Conservative governments.

Table 1: Regeneration ‘framework’ under Blairism

	Blairism	Local regeneration politics	Local regeneration policies
Cultural/ ideological base	Continued organising based on market welfarism but with isolated examples of greater intervention	Reassertion of local government-centralism in conjunction with democratic renewal agenda	e.g. Central-local partnership
Discursive	Reinforcement of partnership combined with an emphasis on what the locality is able to achieve	Introduction back into policy vocabulary of local deprivation and the benefits of integrating strategies across Council departments and other agencies	e.g. SRBCF Rounds 4 and 5, New Deal for Communities
Economic	Continued emphasis on supply-side intervention	Rethink on the scale of economic intervention, though concern still	e.g. Employment Zones, Education Zones and

	with the creation of integrated 'zones' as local policy experiments	with attraction of outside investment rather than stimulation of local demand	Health Action Zones,
Political	Multi-agency involvement given, combined with a drive to make local government decision-making more transparent	Change in central-local relations and networks, with the appointment of city mayors and RDA chairs	e.g. RDAs, City Mayors
Institutional	Emphasis on the internal structure of local government and formal links between local and regional agencies	Partial resistance of local government and other local agencies to change to be introduced through RDAs	e.g. Best Value

Source: Ward (2000)

The establishment of Government Offices of the Regions (GORs) in 1994 and the development of comprehensive coverage of Regional Planning Guidance for the English standard regions were the most significant innovations (Mawson, 1997). In some ways, this trend was enhanced in the run up to the UK national election in May 1997. A raft of political and policy studies concluded by arguing that in order to achieve *national* economic competitiveness the central state needed to orchestrate a shuffling of functions across levels of the state (see for example Regional Policy Commission, 1996). This hinged on adopting a program of regional-institutional building, through both the conceding of functions downward (from the center) and the ceding of functions upward (from the local).

The creation of a new tier of government as Regional Development Agencies (RDAs) has encouraged greater co-ordination of existing spatial and sector policies at the regional scale (Table 2). They were granted decision-making power in housing, inward investment, training, transport, and to a limited extent the environment. In terms of competition and capacity building, the rationale for RDAs is that they build on existing policies and extend partnerships to the regional scale. In terms of economics, RDAs are business-led by design and debates around their *modus operandi*, have in some ways, involved going over the political ground covered in the 1980s with the formation of Urban Development Corporations (UDCs) and Training and Enterprise Councils (TECs) (Deas and Ward, 1999).

In political terms, the rationale for the RDAs and the Regional Assemblies is that they help to satisfy 'local' demands for regional autonomy and the devolution of political power. In reality, the powers and resources of RDAs are extremely limited and their coordinating role is hampered by the competing agendas of the central ministries responsible for different policies. Moreover, it is not clear how the activities of RDAs are being coordinated at the

national scale and integrated into supra-national policy frameworks.

Table 2: English region-building: the Regional Development Agency (RDA) 'model'

Wider context	RDAs
National political context at inception	1999: Recently elected Labour government committed to the introduction of constitutional change in Scotland and Wales. Pre-1997 election commitment to regional development and regional democracy softened and scaled-down. RDAs largely peripheral to New Deal welfare-to-work reforms. Blairite national vision of inclusive coalition of political interests mirrored at the local level by the desire to continue and amplify earlier government's emphasis on cross-sector partnership.
Local political context at inception	1999: Local areas already have in place a series of overlapping partnerships, containing representatives from all sectors and charged with delivering a range of services. The 'partnership habit' firmly established. Growing emphasis on the need to wed policies to promote competitiveness with those to address social exclusion.
Policy logic	To co-ordinate existing regional and sub-regional initiatives and institutions. Regional economic strategy formulated to guide the work of a series of implementing bodies: Business Links for business development; Training and Enterprise Councils for skills development; Department of Trade and Industry for Regional Selective Assistance to industry; Government Offices of the regions for European Union Structural Funds; and existing inward investment promotional bodies in some regions where RDAs do not opt to assume direct provision of such services themselves.
Budget	Estimated £750 million for nine RDAs annually (Dyson et al, 1998: 11).
Geographical scale	Defined by regional administrative boundaries. Long-standing disquiet about the artificiality of standard regions neutered by the decision not to consult over RDA boundaries.
Governance arrangements	A chair and board appointed by the Secretary of State and deemed to be part of the private sector. Longer term possibility of formal accountability to indirectly elected Regional Chambers, and possibly to directly elected assemblies. Formal accountability to Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and Regions, but informal accountability to (and statutory requirement to consult) Regional Chambers. RDAs can be required to take account of Regional Chamber views in formulating their corporate plans and regional economic strategies.
Position in broader restructuring	RDAs reflect the replacement of an agenda centred on the local – 'new localism' – with one aimed at the region – 'new regionalism' – as local partnerships are faced with an extra tier of governance arrangements that may alter the local (or sub-regional) configuration of power or influence.

Source: Deas and Ward (2000)

Nevertheless, it is in and through the central (national) state that co-ordination will take place (Jones and MacLeod, 1999). Competitive regionalism from above is therefore likely to encourage new forms of territorial politics, both within and between regions, and in particular around large urban areas (see for example Jonas and Ward, 1999). This paper now turns to the example of the North West of England and the city of Manchester more specifically, to tease

out some of the contradictions bound-up with this model of regionalism.

North West of England – An example of ‘urban-centric’ regionalism

The North West -- Cheshire, Cumbria, Greater Manchester, Lancashire and Merseyside -- is the second largest region in the UK, and has a population greater than four EU Member States: Denmark, Finland, Ireland and Luxembourg. The North West contains two large urban cities, Liverpool and Manchester, which have dominated the local and regional economic and political landscape. In particular, although Greater Manchester is made up of 10 boroughs, the city of Manchester -- only one of the ten -- has tended to dominate institutional politics. There is a mis-match between the geographical size of the city and its politico-institutional presence in the region. But this domination does not reflect economic prosperity. Manchester contains within its boundaries some of the most deprived areas in the UK.

In the case of Manchester, the effort invested in creating city-based alliances has meant the city's political leadership has been uneasy about the establishment of a North West RDA. Their views found expression, for example, through the city's symbolic decision in 1997 to withdraw support from a European Commission liaison office in Brussels. This was shared with other North West local authorities. Manchester then re-christened its own office as 'North West of England House'! City policy-makers in Manchester have developed alternative institutional axes that promote city and metropolitan-based strategies, while simultaneously being a hesitant (and often unwilling) participant in the regional-level coalition that developed in the North West in the lead-up to the creation of a RDA on 1st April 1999. An example of the politically contested (and constructed) nature of urban and regional scales is evident in the issues that surrounded the vexed issue of inward investment in the region. This is a particularly illustrative case, given the economic competitive discourse that has surrounded (and served to support) the creation of RDAs.

Inward investment has become increasingly politicized in the UK generally and the North West region is no different. INWARD, the region's inward investment promotional body, has attempted to juggle the competing claims of constituent sub-areas that (along with DTI support) provide through their subscriptions the bulk of its funding. For Manchester, INWARD's apparent emphasis on green field sites beyond its boundaries prompted City Council disquiet over a number of years, with the city's political leadership rejecting senior officers' admonitions to subscribe. There was a deep-rooted tension between, on the one hand, what was regarded as good for the region as a whole (i.e. investment in the more peripheral and less-developed parts of the region) and, on the other hand, what Manchester viewed as supporting its future economic prosperity.

In a political *volte-face* the leaderships of Salford and Trafford withdrew from INWARD. They joined with Manchester (which, significantly had never been a member of INWARD) and transferred their support to a new agency that was to focus on the core of the Greater Manchester conurbation. The resultant Manchester Investment and Development Agency Service (MIDAS) was launched in 1997. Together with Manchester TEC and a fourth local authority member, Tameside, its principal remit was to provide a database of sites, premises, infrastructure, labor force characteristics and ‘cultural assets’ with which to lure potential inward investors to the area. What is significant about MIDAS is that it illustrates the limited commitment -- and, at times, overt opposition -- at the city level to the region-building efforts of bodies such as the North West Development Agency. Such has been the allure of the principles of the ‘new localism’ to Manchester’s policy-makers that the more recent emergence of regional-based institutions has generated palpable unease. The most dramatic expression of this phenomenon is the establishment of an inward investment promotional body in competition, initially, with a long-established regional body, INWARD, and later with a powerful regional body, the North West Development Agency, which had political support from the central state.

The formation of MIDAS is emblematic of the desire for territorial coalition building at a scale different to that of the standard geographical region, around which the RDAs have been constructed. Manchester’s political leadership would appear to hold the view that the metropolitan level is a more appropriate level at which to organise cross-institutional pacts and partnerships. Urban managers have argued that the future geography of regeneration should be defined in terms of cities. It should not mirror artificial administrative regions that are a legacy of war-time emergency planning, retained simply to ease the administrative chore of collating government statistics, but which fail to reflect the functional reach of city-region economies. The strategy behind the formation of MIDAS is instructive. It reveals the degree to which Manchester’s elite are profoundly uneasy with the region-building efforts that have laid the foundations for the North West’s RDA, political reactions which at the very least question the organic credentials of the ‘imposed regionalism’ in the UK. It reinforces the importance of retaining the support of the regional capital if new regional institutions, like RDAs, are to have (or are to be given) the necessary local legitimacy.

To summarise, in the UK the re-scaling of urban policy and institutions has focused around the development of the RDAs as well as related moves to integrate urban-based institutions and programs into regional governance frameworks (Table 1). These in turn involve a shift from ‘elite localism’ to ‘elite regionalism’ -- as exemplified by the example of the political

relationship between Manchester and the North West. While legitimated by wider devolving tendencies in the UK central state, imposed regionalism in the UK is not likely to produce urban institutions that are more accountable and accessible to a local citizenry. Bidding for urban programs such as the Single Regeneration Budget (SRB) Challenge Fund will simply be tied into wider funding regimes, such as those offered by the EU (i.e. ERDF), creating a competitive climate of political uncertainty and local fiscal instability. Risks associated with competitive bidding and policy design will simply be re-scaled, embedded within an alternative (regional) narrative. Here the only hope for individuals and communities may lie in urban programs and Community Economic Development initiatives that have a genuine community base and focus. Supranational urban policies may offer some hope for those local organisations that have the capacity to draw down funding *despite* institutional thickness at the regional level rather than because of it.

‘SUBURBAN-CENTRIC’ REGIONALISM IN THE US

The recent British experience with urban policy and governance superficially draws upon the US model (see, for example, Hambleton, 1995). But we argue that the national and local political and economic contexts for the US model are very different. In the US, the emergence of competitive regionalism alongside the revival of a national urban policy debate can perhaps be set in the context of the demise of a dominant post-Depression urban policy narrative. Federal urban renewal and anti-poverty initiatives such as Great Society served as the spatial correlative of a limited Keynesian welfare state, redistributing wealth to the central cities even as postwar economic growth favoured suburban and Sunbelt city development (Florida and Jonas, 1991). Urban policy is now in a ‘post-federal’ era characterised by increasing state discretion in terms of the allocation of federal funding, coupled with wholesale de-federalisation in former ‘urban’ programs such as urban renewal (redevelopment), welfare-to-work, and education. While real spending on urban programs has not declined as precipitously as has sometimes been claimed, overall local government in the US is far more dependent upon local revenue sources and institutional capacities. Clarke and Gaile (1998: 48), for example, described the Clinton/Gore urban policy as a ‘hybrid’ that followed the ‘path of least resistance’ carved out by the Reagan and Bush (Sr.) administrations. Specifically, it combined a mixture of newer entrepreneurial incentives with traditional targeted spending and area-based strategies (e.g. Empowerment Zones), and a growing reliance on state and local fiscal and administrative capacities.

But quite apart from actual policies, the urban policy narrative under Clinton/Gore did change. The aspect of this change that we wish to highlight here is the emergence in the 1990s of a policy narrative centred on competitive regionalism. Indeed, a centrepiece of the Clinton/Gore urban program (such as it was) was much greater emphasis on metropolitan and regional co-operation around economic development, from which the idea of competitive regionalism emerged. An important proponent of competitive regionalism within the Clinton Administration was former Secretary of Housing and Urban Development, Henry Cisneros, onetime Mayor of San Antonio, a Sunbelt City that had used its annexation powers to offset the suburbanisation of population and tax base. Drawing on his mayoral experience, Cisneros articulated his views on competitive regionalism in a series of position essays on urban policy published during his tenure at HUD. In one of these papers, he drew a distinction between ‘things’ and ‘people’ regionalism (Cisneros, 1995). By ‘things regionalism’ he meant overcoming the problem of the political fragmentation caused by the proliferation of municipal governments and special purpose districts. ‘People regionalism,’ by comparison, focuses on the relationship between macro-economic conditions and local political participation. Here, the argument was that regional governance should not simply contribute to economic growth but it should also involve socially marginalised groups in local economic decision making. Cisneros argued that the policy emphasis should be on ‘people regionalism’. Competitive regionalism, therefore, is not simply about increasing metropolitan co-operation on economic development projects; it is also all about creating new geographies of opportunity for urban residents in a rapidly globalising but politically decentralised space-economy.

There are, therefore, several important contextual differences between the way in which city-region governance is understood and applied in the US and UK. Firstly, the new urban policy in the US is premised on the notion that the political fragmentation of local government and administration in metropolitan areas remains an obstacle to be overcome, but that this should be achieved via greater city-suburban co-operation (Jonas, 1994b). As Salins (1993) pointed out, a sort of ‘Faustian bargain’ existed for most of the postwar period in which the federal government effectively gave subsidies to central cities in exchange for agreements not to interfere in the sovereign affairs of suburban area local governments. The emergence of competitive regionalism, however, effectively marks the abandonment of this Faustian bargain. Suburbs must now share in the economic and governance problems of central cities as well as of the larger metropolitan area in which they are located, and they must do so without federal support.

Secondly, competitive regionalism in the US incorporates ideas about the reform and reorganisation of metropolitan area structures of government that are longer-standing in nature. This, too, represents an important difference with the UK context. In the 1960s and 1970s, the influential Committee for Economic Development actively sought to promote the concept of fiscally and administratively strong forms of metropolitan government in US (CED, 1970). The concept was motivated by the need to resolve area-wide problems of public administration and economic development whilst preserving the autonomy of local political units. The persistence of fiscal disparities between central cities and suburbs, and problems of administrative duplication, were seen as especially problematic from the standpoint of reformers and metropolitan publics alike. In this respect, metropolitan reform – or corporate regionalism -- has long been a policy goal of politically influential metropolitan growth coalitions in the US, the historical presence of which is a contextual feature of the urban policy debate in the US that probably has no counterpart in the UK.

Nevertheless, *within* the US context, there are some key ideological and political differences in the contexts for corporate regionalism and competitive regionalism (see Table 3). Corporate regionalism speaks to a strong *national* economy while competitive regionalism articulates a ‘new relationship’ or ‘partnership’ between the federal government and cities and suburbs for coping with the *global* economy. In addition, in the 1970s business interests, academics and policy-makers were content to see metropolitan reform as a policy end in itself to be pursued within the US. Today, however, city and suburban actors are encouraged to view their economic and social fortunes as increasingly interdependent on each other, those in other city-regions, and the global economy. In this respect, competitive regionalism can be seen as an instrument of neo-liberal economic policy: economic growth comes first, and social (and spatial) redistribution follows. Thus by shifting the terms of the debate to the global arena, competitive regionalism seeks to transcend a longer-standing conflict between advocates of metropolitan reform versus interests in political fragmentation. As Keil (2000: 759) has argued, the politics of metropolitan political reorganization in the US can no longer be seen as representing struggles between opposing one-dimensional views of urban governance. Reformers (influential business groups and academics) are not on one side with local citizens (consumers and homeowners) on the other. Instead:

...what appear to be limited struggles over local jurisdiction and administration of service delivery, are struggles over the urban dimensions of a globalized world, at least in part. Amalgamation and concession become fighting metaphors of change in the war of position in which urban actors find themselves in the age of the global city (Keil, 2000: 759).

Table 3: Corporate and competitive regionalism in the US compared

	Corporate regionalism	Competitive regionalism
Cultural/ ideological base	Federal intervention seen as necessary to resolving the urban fiscal crisis, reducing inter-jurisdictional disparities, breaking down suburban exclusion, and promoting equity	The neo-conservative view that re-asserts the role of state and local governments in the federal system; the institutional vehicle for promoting neo-liberal economic and social policies and new “local policy experiments”
Discursive	Construction of the crisis of the central city and promotion of metropolitan government as a solution; despite emphasis on metropolitan government, there is a real political and ideological separation of city and suburbs	Discursive rendering of cities as competitive nodes in the global economy; emphasis on re-uniting city and suburb through regional partnerships; political regionalism as a stimulus to urban entrepreneurialism
Economic	Serving the interests of monopoly capital; emphasis on economies of scale and rationalization of planning, fiscal structures and land use through regional frameworks	Serving the interests of global capital; emphasis on economies of scope and up-playing the significance of the metropolitan region as a competitive unit in the global economy
Political	Metropolitan government seen as a vehicle for advancing social equality, reducing fiscal disparities, and creating national economic growth; use of metropolitan political arrangements and special districts to co-ordinate delivery of federal urban policies; metropolitan growth coalitions (re)activated	Regional co-operation is linked to de-federalization of service functions such as welfare; greater cooperation encouraged between central cities and suburbs; but co-operation tends to be function-specific (e.g., housing, redevelopment, transportation; conservation planning); emphasis on entrepreneurial styles of governance and political leadership
Institutional	Emphasis on metropolitan consolidation; creation of regional councils of government; HUD and EPA incentives for regional co-operation	Emphasis on voluntary agreements between local governments; incentives provided for regional co-operation; emphasis on use of local rather than federal resources

In practical terms, what this means is that, within the otherwise ‘global’ policy discourse of competitive regionalism, there is scope to develop different ‘local models’ of institutional reorganization, some of which can diverge from a more instrumentalist neo-liberal vision contained in competitive regionalism. Where, for example, local areas in the US have faced severe problems arising from economic restructuring and social exclusion -- problems that increasingly have migrated to the inner suburbs -- a patchwork quilt of the more ‘traditional’ targeted urban programs and policies remains. Thus, while advocating the economic argument for competitive regionalism, the Clinton/Gore policy also played the ‘social’ and ‘environmental’ cards, emphasizing the ongoing value of area policies for economic development, social exclusion, and environmental action, such as enterprise zones, community empowerment zones, and habitat conservation plans. Increasingly, however, these

have been aimed not simply at the most deprived inner urban areas but also at suburbs, because these are now seen as constituent parts of the city-region. Moreover, there is increasing dependence on local government powers, such as land use planning, redevelopment, revenue bonds, tax increment financing, and so forth. Since these powers are confined to specific local jurisdictions, the effects of governmental fragmentation at the local level have not necessarily diminished despite all the rhetoric about greater city-suburban cooperation. In short, competitive regionalism continues to develop unevenly within the US.

Southern California: Corporate versus competitive regionalism?

In recent years, Los Angeles (and its wider region, Southern California) has been amongst the fastest growing and most socially diverse city-regions in the US (Scott and Soja, 1996). At the same time, it has been subject to periodic bouts of de-industrialisation, urban restructuring, and civil unrest, which have focused public and academic attention on a perceived lack of governance capacities at the regional level. The region has a rich history of corporatist governmental reform, including innovative area-wide solutions to problems of infrastructure planning and revenue sharing (Miller, 1981). But the academic debate about the scope, scale and capacity of governance in Southern California has recently extended to include areas located well beyond the urban core of Los Angeles County (see, e.g., Bollens, 1997; Jonas, 1997; Teaford, 1997).

At the same time, recent years have seen moves on the part of middle-class homeowners in certain areas of Los Angeles to secede from the city (Keil, 2000). Underpinning, these secessionist tendencies are powerful motives for exclusion constructed around class and 'race.' What political constituency for corporate regionalism in Southern California does remain is often restricted to the specific economic or service functions like water supply (e.g. the Metropolitan Water District) and multi-jurisdictional planning (e.g., the Southern California Association of Governments). For the most part, the corporatist Los Angeles metropolitan growth lobby has been happy to support the further political fragmentation of the city-region. Developers continue to build in growth-friendly suburbs or unincorporated areas where they can avoid local growth restrictions, regional utilities contract with individual households and local municipalities for services, and manufacturers seek out those local jurisdictions with favorable infrastructure and access to cheap labor.

A revival of political regionalism can, however, be found in suburban areas of Southern California, such as in the San Bernardino-Riverside metropolitan area (or the Inland Empire as it is known locally), immediately to the east of Los Angeles and Orange counties. This suburban-centric regionalism is focused mainly around two economic development activities:

the promotion of inward investment and redevelopment. But alongside this new forms of corporate regionalism have also emerged, as exemplified by the trend towards regional conservation and land use planning. Yet even though the region exhibits tendencies towards both competitive and corporatist forms of political regionalism, overall the governance of Southern California remains fragmented (Bollens, 1997).

In the case of inward investment, there have been attempts within the region to respond to federal and state incentives to create regional partnerships. For example, the local jurisdictions of western Riverside and San Bernardino counties established one such regional partnership in 1992. The aim was to co-ordinate inward investment activity and to plan for economic recovery in the wake of the regional economic downturn of the early 1990s associated with defense restructuring, high unemployment, and a property market slump (Jonas, 1997). Backed by a cross-political party local congressional coalition, The Inland Empire Economic Partnership (IEEP) is comprised of a loose partnership of local cities, business and community groups, and economic development practitioners. The IEEP sees itself as involved in promoting the economic development of the Inland Empire, providing a one-stop shop for potential investors who want to locate and invest in the twenty-four or more local jurisdictions of this sub-region. However, as a 'model' of competitive regionalism the partnership has had limited success. Less than 10 per cent of inward investment activity in the region actually goes through the IEEP. Member jurisdictions for the most part remain in competition with each other for economic activities and rely on local resources to do this. Perhaps the strongest disincentive to this form of competitive regionalism has been the fiscal local dependence of local jurisdictions, a dependence intensified by the state's property tax limitation measure and the fragmentation of local governance. Local jurisdictions continue to rely upon local land use powers and institutional capacities to leverage inward investment.

Redevelopment is a second arena of urban policy and governance in Southern California where there is some evidence of increasing levels of inter-jurisdictional cooperation, albeit focused on suburban areas. After California's Proposition 13, which limited the property tax-raising capacity of municipalities, tax-increment funding of redevelopment became an increasingly important source of revenue for younger suburban municipalities in California, including cities in the Inland Empire. State law provides for local jurisdictions to set up their own redevelopment agencies, which can declare certain properties to be blighted, qualifying these for redevelopment. At the commencement of a redevelopment project, property values in a project area are frozen at a base value. Following redevelopment, the property tax increment arising from any increase in values is accrued entirely by the redevelopment agency. State law mandates that ten per cent of the tax increment must be spent locally on

‘affordable housing’. However, what qualifies as affordable housing depends on median house values, which vary significantly from one jurisdiction to another.

Across the Inland Empire, there is intense competition and conflict between municipalities for redevelopment. This has been demonstrated by the rise in instances of local jurisdictions suing neighboring municipalities over their redevelopment projects (Althubaity and Jonas, 1998). Such litigation has resulted in delays to redevelopment projects, escalating levels of public debt, and lack of spending on affordable housing. In order to avoid further conflict with each other, some Inland Empire municipalities have recently entered into co-operative arrangements around redevelopment. These include so-called ‘no-litigation’ agreements, developing inter-jurisdictional policies on affordable housing, as well as limited moves to integrate local redevelopment projects with regional economic development goals. For the most part, however, redevelopment remains a local activity, reproducing enormous inter-jurisdictional variations in revenue and median house values.

Finally, there is one -- perhaps unexpected -- area in which federal intervention has (unintentionally) brought about more regionally integrated institutional arrangements in Southern California, and that is land use planning and the conservation of habitat for endangered species. Suburban development in the region has threatened to destroy the habitat of rare and endangered fauna and flora listed for protection under the 1973 federal Endangered Species Act (ESA). Until recently, habitat conservation plans (HCPs) developed under the federal ESA by local jurisdictions were targeted at individual species only when they were federally listed. These plans focused on fragments of habitat falling within well-defined local property and jurisdictional boundaries. HCPs often failed to cover sufficient acreage. They failed to ensure the survival of species, encountered opposition from local growth coalitions and property owners on the grounds that such plans amount to a ‘taking’ of private property, and often were not properly integrated into other regional and local planning processes (Feldman and Jonas, 2000).

In response to a growing conflict between urban growth and conservation caused by the federal ESA, the State of California in 1991 introduced Natural Community Conservation Planning, a procedure for implementing ecosystem-based conservation plans on private and public lands throughout the region. Cities and counties in the region were initially reluctant to surrender control to a larger planning process and, as a result, the NCCP pilot program developed for Southern California quickly fragmented into its constituent sub-regions. However, sub-regions such as western Riverside County have begun to integrate HCPs into local land use and transportation plans. The longer-term aim is to bring all of these sub-

regional conservation plans into the ecosystem framework of the NCCP program. This trend towards corporate regionalism and planning and conservation has been broadly supported by a loose regional coalition of developers, utilities, environmental groups, and state and county officials. This integrated planning process holds some promise for the long-term development of a sustainable regional approach to economic development and environmental governance in a region otherwise noted for its profound absence of regional governance capacity. But at the same time, it reflects how new urban policy frameworks have had to incorporate the unique urban development and ecological conditions of Southern California. In short, this ‘model’ regional planning and governance may prove extremely difficult to replicate in other contexts.

In summary, contemporary debates about city-regionalism in the US incorporate long-standing views about the economic development benefits of metropolitan reform viz-a-viz the persistence of more fragmented structure of local governance and service provision, albeit recast in the context of economic globalization. New urban policy frameworks in the US recognize the continuing salience of state and local as opposed to federal powers and responsibilities. What regional institution building has occurred in city-regions like Southern California in recent years bears little comparison to institutional developments in city-regions in the UK, such as the North West.

Perhaps it is inappropriate to draw comparisons between two very different places. Yet our argument is not that we should looking for national and regional variations in urban policy; rather, it seems that across many different places (cities) the regional scale is now becoming a focus for new policy experiments, institutional developments, and political struggle. Yet despite the increasing integration of city-regions into global economic networks and international urban policy discourses, national differences persist. Moreover, regional institution building *within* specific national and urban contexts has been uneven. What is often at issue is the very definition of the city-region: Where are its boundaries? Who controls the process of regional institutional reorganization? At what spatial scale(s) are interest groups driving reorganization mobilized?

CONCLUSIONS

This paper rejects claims from both sides of the Atlantic that national urban policy either is in ‘terminal demise’ or is converging around a uniform understanding of globalization, urban governance, and the city-region. Although national government expenditures on ‘real’ urban programs may have declined since the expansionist years of the Great Society in the US and,

in the UK, those of the public housing boom of the 1950s and 1960s, national urban policy has not so much disappeared as undergone a metamorphosis. This change has a number of implications for theoretically informed analyses of regional economic development and urban policy. These of late have become rather over-preoccupied with the rhetoric of globalization, urban governance, and the city-region, but often at the expense of sensitivity to national and sub-national differences in urban policy and politics. In concluding this paper, we lay out four propositions that we believe might help to frame future UK-US urban policy comparisons.

First, *both in the US and the UK the urban policy debate has been up-scaled from an emphasis on the city to the domain of the city-region, a development that demands critical understanding rather than uncritical acceptance.* Whereas ‘cities’ (and spaces in these) once offered coherent spatial arenas for national policy interventions, the contemporary ‘city-region’ is understood in less formulaic terms to be a semi-coherent amalgam of actors, institutions and capacities that require incentives for greater co-ordination in order to compete globally. The up-scaling of the ‘urban’ requires, in turn, that urban political theories become more sensitive to new institutional developments and political alliances at the regional scale. This could simply involve up-scaling the theories themselves. For example, if urban regime theories have traditionally examined governance capacities within cities, perhaps these theories should be re-deployed to examine such capacities at the regional level. However, this misses the point that a shift in the scale of analysis does not necessarily correspond to the changing scope of strategic action. For example, urban regime theory’s preoccupation with urban institutions may obfuscate the fact that the re-scaling of governance in European urban areas has become a political strategy of the national state. Instead of simply a case of mobilising coalitions across the state-market divide within city-regions, competitive regionalism may provide an opportunity for elite groups to re-enter the urban policy arena, and fashion regional institutions after their own interests. Perhaps, the key analytical question for urban and regional development theory these days is not ‘who rules cities’ but rather ‘at what spatial scale is territorial governance crystallising’?

Second, *understanding the different logics underpinning national urban policy paradigms encourages us to question the extent to which urban policy convergence has occurred.* Much analysis in the ‘new urban politics’ is premised by arguments to the effect that globalisation is ‘hollowing out’ the state, eliminating national differences, and activating similar models of urban entrepreneurialism in different contexts. Yet in these attempts to theorise the apparent global rise and international transfer of urban entrepreneurialism and regional economic and political institution building, we would argue that there remains a need to take seriously the role of the nation state and national differences. Though the national level might appear to be

a receding 'natural economic zone' (Jessop and Peck, 2001; MacLeod, 1999), as a political zone it remains central to the orchestration and re-scaling of state functions in urban areas. The emergent model of competitive regionalism in the UK has been influenced as much by New Labour's devolution agenda as by an interest in activating US-style urban entrepreneurialism or, more recently in the style of a European 'social capital' model, creating more socially inclusive urban institutions. 'Suburban-centric' competitive regionalism in the US, by the same token, must be understood in relation to changing federal-state-local relations, the problem of political fragmentation, and a long-standing corporatist agenda to regionalise selective functions of the state. The national scale remains an important frame of reference for understanding and comparing the origins and efficacy of urban policies across diverse spatial contexts.

Third, *international urban policy transfers notwithstanding, competitive regionalism continues to develop unevenly within specific national contexts*. There are a variety of political 'regionalisms'. The logic underpinning one model might differ considerably from that of another. Even where there appears to be some similarity across logics, design difference, wider political contexts and the multi-scalar 'embedding' of different interests often leads policy to skew away from what simple policy transfer analysis might predict. It is worth noting that across the US there are variants on what might be seen as a single national 'model' of competitive regionalism. Sometimes these variants have been championed in the national policy debate, even if they are all framed in a similar policy context. To understand the different logics that underpin these models, then, one needs to look to their original development contexts, and to conditions within these metropolitan regions rather than simply to the national or global context. Whereas particular emphasis is often given to 'national success stories' based on 'local policy' experiments that are seen to have worked within certain city-regions, the generalisation of these models to other contexts may prove impossible.

Fourth and finally, *while it is important to develop new urban political theories for understanding international urban policy transfers, the solution does not necessarily lie in the international transfer of urban political theory*. We have learnt that the transfer of US urban political theories to understand partnership models of urban governance in the UK has proven problematic. Superficially, the application of urban regime theory in the UK makes sense given the attempts by the UK government to activate urban partnerships that privilege private business interests. By the same token, the emphasis on property redevelopment has encouraged attempts to apply the city-as-a-growth machine thesis to the UK, but again the results are far from conclusive (Harding, 1994; Wood, 1999). But it is precisely because

partnerships have been made to matter by national government (and also the European Union) rather than evolving from governance dilemmas posed within urban areas that makes the UK context different. In this context urban regime and growth machine theories remain usefully descriptive frameworks but far from analytically incisive (Jessop, Peck and Tickell, 1999). Rather, what we hope to see is greater sensitivity to differences in the national and sub-national contexts in which urban and regional development theory is constructed.

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