

# Crisis and the city

Neoliberalism, austerity planning and the production of space

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The current crisis, with its particularly severe configuration in Southern European countries, provides an opportunity to probe the interrelation of economic crunches and the production of space, and also to imagine potential paths of sociospatial emancipation from the dictates of global markets. This introductory chapter offers a preliminary interpretive framework exploring the fundamental role of urban and territorial restructuring in the formation, management and resolution of capitalist crises and, conversely, periods of crisis as key stages in the history of urbanization. I will begin by contextualizing the 2007-8 economic slump, the subsequent global recession and its uneven impact on states and cities in the *longue durée* of capitalist productions of space, studying the transformation of spatial configurations in previous episodes of economic stagnation. This broader perspective will then be used to analyze currently emerging formations of austerity urbanism, showing how the practices of crisis management incorporate a strategy for economic and institutional restructuring that eventually impacts on urban policy, and indeed in the production of urban space itself.

I will start this discussion with two basic premises. Firstly, capitalism is a crisis-prone system. Crunches and recessions appear as the aggregated result of a continuous and contradictory process of expansion of value; they are structural aspects of capitalist development, not an aberration in a naturally balanced economic organization (Harvey, 2010). According to this viewpoint, the history of capitalism is staged as an evolution through successive regulatory regimes articulated around the emergence and overcoming of recurring crises of overaccumulation (Aglietta, 2000). The current predicament is therefore not an exception but just another

manifestation of a broader developmental pattern that we can compare and contrast with previous conjunctures and political-economic responses. Secondly, the production of space and the regulation thereof are key moments in the dynamics of capitalist accumulation and its reproduction. Spatial configurations work at many levels of a given social formation, either as means or sites of production, as productive forces or social relations, as governmental apparatuses or collective representations, and so forth (Lefebvre, 1991). The circulation of capital under capitalism relies heavily on a relentless reorganization of these configurations at several scales, both to expand the network of production and as a means to absorb surplus value (Harvey, 1975).

What happens when both phenomena overlap in time? How is the logic of capitalist production of space transformed in a time of crisis? The capitalist mobilization of the production of space is especially acute during economic crunches (Gottdiener and Komminos, 1989). In such conditions the very creative destruction of territorial formations turns into a key vehicle for crisis management through the orchestration of successive layers of spatial and economic restructuring. As Lefebvre suggested, '[c]apitalism has found itself able to attenuate (if not resolve) its internal contradictions for a century ... We cannot calculate at what cost, but we do know the means: by occupying space, by producing a space' (Lefebvre, 1976:31). David Harvey (2006a) has elaborated upon this hypothesis in his analysis of short- and medium-term 'spatial fixes' to capitalist crises. Amongst other means, capitalism tends to overcome recessions through inner and outer rearrangements of space that allow the displacement and deferral of contradictions geographically and temporally so that immediate devaluation of capital is avoided. In a recent work Harvey (2014) extends this idea by suggesting that capitalism thrives and resolves its crises through a constant shift of its contradictions from one structural or productive moment to another, from one economic sector to another, from one scale to another, from one region to another, or between these different elements themselves. By circulating local and context-specific conflicts capital manages to reconfigure the limits to accumulation. However, this procedure simply internalizes capitalist contradictions in new temporally and spatially evasive maneuvers. In the long run there is no possible 'absolute fix' for the system and local crises develop into global depressions. As these preliminary propositions suggest, there is a particular dialectic whereby spatial (trans)formations

are fundamental to understanding the onset and subsequent evolution of any given crisis and, vice versa, crises management patterns are essential indexes to grasp how the regulation and production of space is constantly recast under capitalism.

Let us consider this dialectic movement in detail with a first glance at the development and spatial mutations of the current conjuncture. As a result of the dotcom bubble at the end of the 1990s and the early 2000s, and the parallel decline of stock-markets, surplus capital changed the target and investment in property and related assets soared worldwide. The pace of urbanization and construction was particularly intense in the US until 2007, when the crisis broke as a compounded result of housing overproduction and speculation in real estate and mortgage markets. From the US, the crisis spread unevenly around the world, impacting on diverse regions depending on their position in the international division of labor and the geopolitical scene. Through these trends the crisis has developed and deepened previous patterns of uneven geographical development, an aspect that is completely obvious in the European case, where the crisis has widened the gap between Southern and Northern Europe. There is, therefore, a *horizontal*, geopolitical distribution (or spatial mutation) of the crisis. It is also important to consider the transformations in the nature and scales of the crisis throughout the years. Starting as a crash at the level of built environment production and the related credit system, the crisis adopted a financial form soon. The collapse of stock-markets turned into a global recession and a sovereign debt crisis when certain governments decided to save their banks from bankruptcy. Finally, the nation-state crunch is becoming a crisis of particular regions and cities as national and supranational agencies push down budgetary pressure to regional and local governments in the form of new austerity policy-regimes. Hence there is also a *vertical*, scalar circulation of the crisis, from one country to the globe, to specific regions and cities —and, even, particular neighborhoods—in other countries.

The synthesis above may oversimplify the actual intricacies of recent economic decline, but it allows us to grasp the crucial role of the production of space as both a cause of the crisis and a strategy to manage and overcome it. Two spatial fixes stand at the temporal extremes of the recession, showing that the absorption of surplus capital at a given point provides just a temporary solution, one that is likely to generate deeper contradictions in a subsequent stage of development. The

potential administration of this conflict-ridden process through rational management — such as that provided by the most lucid manifestations of reformist town and regional planning — is always abandoned in the long run. The circulation of capital through built environments demands a systematic, ever-expanding reconfiguration of inherited spatial formations in order to avoid obsolescence and devaluation, and as a material basis for subsequent rounds of investment and accumulation. In that sense, real estate speculation and constant urbanization and re-urbanization are not a deviation, but are essential to the survival of capitalism (Harvey, 2006a:398). As Brenner and Theodore argue:

[C]apital continually renders obsolete the very geographical landscapes it creates and upon which its own reproduction and expansion hinges. Particularly during periods of systemic crisis, inherited frameworks of capitalist territorial organization may be destabilized as capital seeks to transcend sociospatial infrastructures and systems of class relations that no longer provide a secure basis for sustained accumulation. As the effects of devaluation ripple through the space-economy, processes of creative destruction ensue in which the capitalist landscape is thoroughly transformed: the configurations of territorial organization that underpinned the previous round of capitalist expansion are jettisoned and reworked in order to establish a new locational grid for the accumulation process. (Brenner and Theodore, 2002:354-5).

These spatial transformations require and at the same time trigger associated processes of institutional and regulatory change, new modes of urban and regional government, new modes of intervention, and so on. Each stage of capitalism generates specific regulatory arrangements that produce a series of historical regimes of urban and regional policy, including particular assemblages of the state and the private sector, particular articulations between different state levels and jurisdictions, and particular interrelations of planning practices and policy with other moments in the production of space.

## **1. SPACE AND CRISIS IN THE LONGUE DURÉE OF CAPITALISM**

In this section I will briefly explore several historical episodes in order to illustrate how different assemblages of capital and space generate diverse

crisis regimes in the *longue durée* of capitalism. Each historical stage of development privileges certain scales, territories and agencies in the deployment of new waves of spatial creative destruction in times of crisis. Accordingly, cities, urbanization and urban policy take on different roles in the process of spatial and economic restructuring and are in turn reshaped as they become instrumental in the strategies to manage and overcome stagnation. These cycles rework not only the urban fabric, but also the techniques we use to govern it. It is helpful, therefore, to look backwards in order to understand the material conditions for the transformation of urban policy and planning in the past, and to gain some insight about the potential evolution of the field in the future and the possible scenarios we will face.

This cursory review starts with the classic case of mid-nineteenth century Paris, an interesting example for many reasons. First of all is the fact that Haussmann's *grands travaux* in Paris and the broader programs of infrastructural development in the country at large during the Second Empire were devised strategically to absorb capital and labor surpluses after a crisis that had threatened to reactivate revolutionary change (Harvey, 2003). The slump originated abroad; indeed the contradictions of the production of space had a role in the formation of the crisis: by the mid-1840s, the railway mania in Britain had unleashed a spiral of investment and speculation in related assets (Evans, 1848; Berger and Spoerer, 2001). French capital partook in the short-lived feast. The impact on French investors and banks was hard when the bubble burst; the Bank of France, for instance, saw its deposits reduced from 320 million in June 1845 to 57 million in January 1847 (Traugott, 1983:457-8). France was not alone in the repercussions of the British crash. The crisis spread to the entire continental Europe, galvanizing a chain reaction of revolts and riots in France, Germany, Poland, Italy and the Austrian Empire in 1848 — the so-called Springtime of Peoples (Hobsbawm, 1975:21-40). Hence a crash generated as the combined outcome of overproduction of space and associated financial speculation triggered a sequence of economic and political crises that developed unevenly throughout the continent.

In France the change of government after the uprisings and the subsequent *coup d'état* paved the way for a new approach that relied heavily and consciously on urban- and national-scale spatial fixes to exit

the crisis.<sup>1</sup> The vast program of public works in Paris included not only the opening of new boulevards carved through the dense city center, but also the widening and extension of existing roads, the creation of new parks and hospitals, schools and colleges, markets, prisons and barracks. New water, drainage and gas systems were adopted as well (Girouard, 1985:288-9). Radiating from Paris, the new national railway system constituted another (ironic) element of Napoleon III's fix to the crisis. In the 1870s, immediately after his mandate, ten railway lines arrived in the capital; three decades before there was only one. France passed from less than 500 km. of railway line in the 1840s to more than 2.300 km in 1880 (Martí-Henneberg, 2013). In brief, a major process of urban and regional restructuring reshaped the economic and social landscape. Together with the reinforcement of its centrality in the country, Paris experienced a complete reconfiguration of the relation between the inner city and the peripheries, with the reorganization of residential areas along class lines and new locational patterns for industrial and retail activities.

These spatial transformations required parallel efforts of institutional and regulatory restructuring. New legal and technical frameworks were developed to implement the interventions. A new urban form of governance emerged, with distinctive relations between the national and the local state, as well as novel alliances between public administration and private enterprise. Indeed, the Second Empire's growth machine hinged as much upon Haussmann's vision and managerial capacity as it did upon his financial creativity and relation with venturesome investors. Only in Paris the public works expenditure between 1853 and 1869 amounted to a previously unseen figure of 2.5 billion francs, which Haussmann would gather from a number of sources including public bonds and loans from new financial agencies such as Crédit Foncier de France and the Société Générale du Crédit Mobilier, both created by the Pereire brothers, who were also directly involved in the creation of railways, gas supply, public transit systems and, of course, residential building (Harvey, 2003:113-120). In short, the rescaling of urbanization and infrastructural development triggered the formation of the modern credit system in France. Both the spatial and the financial fixes of the Second Empire collapsed together in

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**1** | Louis Napoleon Bonaparte had expressed beforehand his support for the active promotion of economic prosperity through investment in public works (Bonaparte, 1840:59).

the late 1860s, when their aggregated contradictions hit again. The crash of risk capital put an end to Haussmann's projects and Napoleon III's mandate. The resulting crisis would incite anew the specters of revolution in the 1871 Commune.

Jumping forward a few decades we meet another key crisis period, the 1930s Great Depression in the US. Despite the huge number of studies on the 1929 crash, few economists have taken note of the previous development of a real estate bubble and subsequent fall in the mid-1920s, starting in Florida and spreading to the whole country. In just a few years land development and housing rose irrationally in Florida, fuelled by a feverish wave of investment that galvanized an emerging middle-class. By 1925 the exchange in land property and associated shares had become a purely speculative dynamic, with scarce relation to actual construction activity: lots could be sold several times in a single day (Frazer and Guthrie Jr., 1995). The bust in the state was just the tip of the iceberg and the whole country experienced a steady decline in real estate development the following year. As White (2009) shows, this contraction marked the starting point of the stock issues boom, with massive doses of surplus capital being transferred to the equity market as an alternative investment. Again, we see the close relation between the conflicts at the level of spatial production, financialization and economic crises.

Roosevelt's New Deal tried to tackle the depression by mobilizing spatial policies in several ways. Firstly, during the intense years under the dominance of the first Brain Trust —including strong supporters of central planning such as Rexford G. Tugwell and Arthur E. Morgan—a program blending civil works in both the city and rural areas and a back-to-the-land vision promoted a substantial restructuring of the social geography of the country. Agencies such as Milburn L. Wilson's Subsistence Homesteads Division, Morgan's Tennessee Valley Authority or Tugwell's Resettlement Administration were attempts at countering the spontaneous deterioration of rural regions under capitalist uneven spatial development, taking the regeneration thereof as an opportunity to foster economic development and pacify urban unrest by moving surplus labor power to the countryside. After 1936, however, a more pragmatic anti-cyclical approach was adopted to stimulate construction activity that would reshape the social landscape of the nation. One the one hand the federal government guaranteed private domestic mortgages for the middle-classes in order to ease credit flow and prevent foreclosure; on the

other hand, the administration launched a concerted effort to build public housing for the working-class and the 'deserving' poor. While agencies such as the Public Works Administration and the United States Housing Authority and its state branches focused on building collective housing in inner-city neighborhoods for low-income population groups, the Home Owners' Loan Corporation and later the Federal Housing Administration established redlining practices using class, race, typological and locational criteria, insuring mostly middle-class, white, single-family houses in the suburbs (Jackson, 1985:190-218). Together with the investment in the expansion of the road and highway system, this strategy secured new niches of household consumption, fostering a process of suburbanization and spatial segregation that would pervade the post-war era (Hayden, 2003:128-153).

Thus a new national horizon of economic recovery was established based on a profound reconfiguration of preexisting social divisions of space. The polarization of housing patterns along class and racial lines remained as a contradictory legacy of an alleged progressive period. At all events, the New Deal restructuring was not limited to a reorganization of core-periphery-suburb relations. As was the case with nineteenth-century France, the redesign of the urban fabric required major regulatory and governmental reforms – with the federal and regional administrations assuming an unprecedented role in the management of local activity – and also a strong reorganization of the relations between the state and the financial sector. The 1930s crisis paved the way for an increased presence of the nation scale as the pre-eminent level for accumulation and the regulation of political-economic life (Brenner and Theodore, 2002:358). I have focused here on the US for its central role in the geopolitical context and its ascendancy in this path at that time, but of course similar arguments apply to most of the contemporary Western world and their concurrence in what some have termed the Fordist exception (Neilson and Rossiter, 2008).

The US and, particularly, New York City, led the outbreak of the next episode in this quick overview of the connection of crises to major spatial restructurings, and indeed one that might be read as the inception of our current predicament. Several authors have identified the management of New York City's fiscal crisis in the 1970s as the blueprint for subsequent nation-wide neoliberalization agendas in the US and abroad, inaugurating a trend of austerity measures in social welfare, incentives to business,

and intervention in local affairs by supra-municipal agencies, corporate interests and unelected institutions (Harvey, 2005:48; Tabb, 1982:9; Zevin, 1977).<sup>2</sup> In the late 1960s the decline of manufacture and suburban flight eroded the local revenues; the city was more and more dependent on federal funds. In view of the growing deficit, however, the Nixon administration changed its approach and began to diminish federal aid in 1972. 'The urban crisis', declared the president, should be refashioned as an 'urban opportunity' (Nixon, 1972). The Manhattanite financial elite understood the gist behind the message: urban restructuring could become not only a chance to exit the crisis but also a bridge to restore upper-class power and capital preeminence after a long period of state-rule oriented to maintain welfare programs.

For a couple of years the banks covered the gap left by federal retrenchment but in 1975, amidst a global recession, they finally decided to stop rolling the debt over (Tabb, 1982:21-2). New York City faced technical bankruptcy. In lieu of direct subsidies, the (Republican) state government and financial institutions put the city under the control of a bailout agency, the Municipal Assistance Corporation, followed by the Emergency Financial Control Board, incorporating representatives from the financial and corporate spheres. The new agenda should be as innovative as exemplary. According to Secretary of the Treasury William Simon, the program had to be 'so punitive, the overall experience so painful, that no city, no political subdivision would ever be tempted to go down the same road'.<sup>3</sup> And so it was. In little more than a year the city fired almost 50,000 employees and cut down welfare departments' budget by 25 percent; additional rollback would ensue after the initial shock treatment (Tabb, 1982:30). The new agenda also included a transition to entrepreneurial approaches to urban governance, whereby the local administration should not only strive to create a good business climate through all manner of incentives, but also to brand the city itself as a major cultural hub and, of course, as a succulent niche for real estate investment (Greenberg, 2008). Together with finance and ancillary activities, the restructuring of the urban fabric through successive rounds of gentrification reshaped

**2** | Of course, more violent, merciless versions of a new experimental neoliberalization were imposed on a national scale in contemporary Chile and other Latin American countries afterwards.

**3** | Quoted in Harvey (2005:46).

the local economy (Harvey, 2005:47). In these processes new alliances of public and private actors fostering corporate profit opened a path of institutional change that would spread later to other scales and regions.

The neoliberal agenda imposed by Reagan in the US, Thatcher in Britain, and in Europe and other countries afterwards, had of course a national and global horizon, but its impact was especially severe in cities. Many large metropolises bore the brunt of budgetary austerity and became the major victims of rollback policies. Indeed, as Brenner and Theodore (2002) suggest, in the following years they became a crucial arena for economic and regulatory restructuring, a pivotal point to displace and manage the crisis. Certain cities and city-regions transformed into nodes of a new planetary division of labor that would widen the gap between global centers and global peripheries. They worked as the engines of a new round of uneven spatial development and as key sites for regulatory experimentation, with state institutions being constantly recast at the local scale as protean galvanizers of transnational surplus capital. This blend of intense governmental restructuring, inflexible austerity and entrepreneurial urbanism is at the root of today's round deepened urban neoliberalization.

## **2. THE AGE OF AUSTERITY AND THE ALTERNATIVES FOR PLANNING**

[E]conomic recovery was never the point; the drive for austerity was about using the crisis, not solving it. (Krugman, 2012:n.p.)

The crisis today presents strong structural similarities with the cases above. Again, following conditions of capital overaccumulation, a massive switch of surplus wealth from the primary (production of standard commodities) to the secondary (production of space and the built environment) circuit of capital triggered property market speculation and securitization, which in turn led to the collapse of the financial system and a global recession. Far from inciting institutional change oriented towards a progressive reform of the system, the outcome in terms of policy is a redoubled effort to extend the neoliberal agenda further (Hall et al, 2013). In fact the 1970s recession and subsequent transformations

in urban governance are especially relevant in the context of the current conjuncture for several reasons. Given that Western governmental agencies and international economic institutions are pushing to 'exit' that model's crisis through a development of its main tenets, many authors suggest that we are undergoing a stage of deepened neoliberalization (e.g. see Callinicos, 2012; Peck et al, 2012). Of course, the austerity recipe and the strategic use thereof are not new. A common mantra since the early 1980s, 'austerity' is the perfect euphemism for fiscal retrenchment and the dismantling of the welfare state. Left aside of the severe rollback as a necessary evil, the veritable cause for the sovereign debt crisis — the trillions spent in the public bailout of private banks and other financial institutions — becomes an opportunity to further downsize the public sector. As Harvey (2006b:154-5) contends, crisis management is in fact one of the fundamental modes of neoliberal accumulation by dispossession — that is, of accumulation through direct extraction of profit out of public or common forms of collective wealth.

But the distribution of this agenda is spatially variegated, socially unequal, and it deepens earlier paths of policy rescaling and restructuring: the impact is most severely felt by certain population groups living in vulnerable areas in cities located in already weak regions and countries. As was the case during previous crises, the outcome of the recession intensifies preceding trends of uneven geographical development according with specific patterns of path-dependency in terms of economic restructuring, social change and policy innovation (Brenner et al, 2010). In the US, the epicenter of the crisis, there are around 300 municipalities nationwide in default on their debt (Peck, 2012:633). But the origins and the solutions for their problems are very different and vary depending on the recent history of these places. In Rustbelt cities subprime lending was especially intense in deprived African American neighborhoods, but minor in comparison to the Sunbelt real estate boom, more focused on middle-class buyers and speculative investment, which made 'the housing bubble ... bigger and more likely to bust' in the South (Aalbers, 2012:7). However, it is precisely those states already under structural weaknesses that face harder times now. For instance, in view of the fiscal emergency at the local level, the state of Michigan made a controversial move and bailed out cities through external management, which have taken hold of local policies at many different levels, including planning programs (Peck, 2012:635).

The situation is more dramatic in Europe. As Costis Hadjimichalis (2011:255) suggests, the foundations of the sovereign debt crisis are embedded in the patterns of uneven regional development at the heart of the structure of the European Union. In fact, the imposition of extreme austerity measures in the wake of the financial crisis has reactivated regional divergence, doing away with the EU's alleged goals of territorial cohesion and reinforcing the economic and political hegemony of particular regions and certain forms of capital in central European countries. Before the crisis 43 percent of the EU GDP was produced in only 14 percent of its territory; since the euro's introduction Southern Europe had become a main destiny for German exports, exceeding the total dispatches to US, China and Japan together in 2007 and developing a spiraling negative trade balance with Germany (Eurostat, 2009:148-9, 152). Both aspects, uneven production and commercial dependence, are likely to worsen after the imposition of bail out programs which render the South increasingly subordinated to political decisions coming from Northern and central countries.

The spatial unevenness of the reaction to the crisis also incorporates a scalar element. Cities —or, more precisely, particular cities and neighborhoods within them— are likely to become the major victims in the medium and long term for several reasons. Firstly, they experience greater impact from the construction slowdown following credit scarcity (and, in some cases, the collapse of real estate markets) since housing and infrastructural development have a stronger role in their economies, including the collection of public revenues through building taxes; a general state of depressed consumption also hits fundamental sectors of urban economies such as tourism and conspicuous commercial activity. Furthermore, compared to rural areas where family and kin networks are tighter, urban populations are more dependent on formal mechanisms of social reproduction such as those provided by public services, a sector under special pressure in a context of austerity. Of course, it is the disenfranchised population living in large urban areas that bears the brunt of welfare cuts (Matsaganis, 2011; Hall et al, 2013). Finally, in recent years certain countries have developed a trend to push down the management of austerity-derived conflicts to lower levels of government, what Jamie Peck terms 'scalar dumping': '[c]ities are ... where austerity bites ... The projection downward of these pressures establishes a socially regressive form of scalar politics — with cities positioned at the sharp end' (Peck,

2012:629,631,647). Together, these phenomena create the conditions for the emergence of an ‘austerity urbanism’ — again, Peck’s (2012) term — with variegated manifestations across the world but common features related not only with cities’ shared structural elements but also with their role as key sites to overcome the depression.

Just as this double movement of conflict condensation and regulatory restructuring in urban areas prolongs the path opened in the 1970s, we can expect emerging forms of urbanism and urban policy to deepen the features of previous rounds of policy innovation and institutional transformation. For the time being we are perhaps witnessing only the ‘destructive’ moment of this deepened neoliberalization of urban agendas along the line of the earlier dismantling of managerial, Fordist-Keynesian urbanism. Public assets and facilities are at the frontline of this new attack on already meager forms of welfare: public estate and companies are sold, granted or pulled to pieces as part of the downsize program; potentially profitable services and goods such as healthcare, education, security and even public space itself are privatized, submitted to private management, or charged with user fees; the public administration surrenders normative and economic prerogatives to corporate agencies and developers, and so forth.

Though still inchoate, the ‘creative’ moment of the process is likely to revisit previous aspects of entrepreneurial urbanism starting from the new platform provided by these measures. In a context of limited investment and lending, cities and city-regions will have to reinforce their strategies to attract capital amidst intensified inter-urban competition. This trend will widen the gap between the top and bottom tiers of urban areas, aggravating the predicament of those already under pressure from economic and social conflicts. Megaproject- and megaevent-oriented initiatives are to galvanize the public sector of those cities who can afford such enterprises, and structural developments will probably adopt the public-private partnership formula on a regular basis, with corporate investment leading the initiatives in search of profit and leaving the public sector to assume the risk and unprofitable expenditures. Private interest is likely to embrace previously progressive urbanisms as novel accumulation niches, including environmental management and city greening, as well as urban redevelopment and regeneration of both city centers and historic peripheries. In a context of construction decline soft urbanisms will privilege the reorganization of the city’s content —rather than the

built environment itself—as a realm of commodification, as is the case with the pervasive initiatives of smart cities and the urban mobilization of big data through new electronic devices and communication services. However, once real estate markets are reactivated we can expect new urban developments to spread that, especially in the case of Southern European countries, could be increasingly targeted at international corporate investment in high-end touristic areas and capital cities. At an everyday level traditional public services will probably undergo a process of segmentation along class lines depending on the users' capacity to afford fees and extra taxes for enhanced assistance and facilities; those lacking economic resources will face the bare support of basic assistance.

In any case, this dismal view on our urban futures presupposes a preliminary achievement that is still to be proven: the capacity of deep neoliberalization to fix the growing contradictions resulting from the crisis and to govern the intensification of uneven development without triggering further social upheaval, armed conflicts, environmental disaster and, of course, new economic collapses. Instead, Brenner et al (2010:339-341) consider the possibility that a dysfunctional 'zombie neoliberalism' is developed as a 'putative [solution] to persistent regulatory dilemmas across scales, territories and contexts'. Given the undesirability of any of these scenarios, it is extremely urgent that we think of potential alternatives to revive the social breath of planning and urban policy. Four levels and scales of engagement should articulate this endeavor:

- Activist urbanism: The crisis has sparked an archipelago of small-scale interventions and public space occupations as a direct response to state retrenchment in fundamental dimensions of sociospatial regulation. Together with traditional forms of urban social movements and ephemeral guerilla urbanisms these new experiences show 'the potential of the temporary and the mobile to refigure the city around spaces that were dormant, disregarded or dead' (Tonkiss, 2013:322), but also and especially the importance of laying claim to public space and producing new regimes of publicity by an active, collective self-management of the city (Harvey, 2012). Both everyday, piecemeal reappropriations of the streets and massive urban protests can be assembled through activist urbanisms to engender novel forms of urban commoning that palliate the crisis of formal social reproduction and create the opportunity for a more human urban life.

- Progressive urbanism: On a more formal basis, we need an alliance for a new progressive alternative to neoliberal planning and urban policy, including civic leaders, planning practitioners, the non-profit sector and scholars on the left. These actors should operate as an advocacy body mediating and aiding the penetration of social movement's demands in governmental agendas, promoting the renovation of urbanism's social function and undoing recent entrepreneurial approaches. At the same time they should develop a convincing discourse to underpin such new forms of urbanism, appealing to social justice and democratization to counter the devastating effect of 'common-sense' neoliberal ideologies.
- Urban-regional solidarity: The efforts on a local level should be paralleled with the creation of a network of inter-urban solidarity across regions and nations so that the harmful effects of spatial competition are lowered. Such networks ought to exchange experiences in regulatory experimentation, establish common political agendas and elaborate protocols to resist and support each other in case they undergo fiscal problems or face attacks from corporate capital or institutions. Within Europe this network should include not only cities across the South, but also those suffering from endemic structural conflicts and social vulnerability in depressed regions in the North and the East.
- Rescaled social struggle: The city is not enough. Current patterns of intensified uneven geographical development show the urgent need for a realignment of national and supranational levels of government pursuing to rebalance social and territorial inequalities. Certain aspects of the regulation of contemporary social formations cannot find an appropriate solution through urban and regional strategies alone, but need to be orchestrated from higher agencies. In Southern European countries the main lines of austerity agendas are imposed by bodies including representatives from national governments, EU institutions and international financial agencies, while the detailed distribution of budgetary retrenchment is pushed down to lower levels of administration — a clear evidence of the need to rescale social struggle to target power centers beyond the urban scale.

Taken together, these moves gesture towards a collective reappropriation of planning at several scales, including both those in which the state stands as the fundamental agency and those currently undergoing a transition

to a growing presence of forms of commoning and self-management. Of course, the state is still the fundamental actor in terms of economic and regulatory innovation; but it is also—as it always was—the main promoter of advances in the field of planning and the orchestration of spatial production. In my opinion, the point—at least from a possibilist perspective departing from the reality of our cities and not from a timeless, placeless ideal—is to take the state and put them to work for the collective interest. This does not mean that we have to focus on taking formal, institutional power and forget about the commons for a while, rather the reverse. We need to mobilize the energies of commoning to define what the common good should be, to reorient the state in the right direction. At the same time, the re-socialization of the state must be implemented in such a way that, by creating a new public, the state no longer erodes the commons but, on the contrary, it concentrates efforts to become a formal infrastructure from which new forms of commons can blossom. Both projects, the commoning of urban space and everyday life and the constituent reconfiguration of the state should strive to palliate the current crisis of socioenvironmental reproduction, pursuing a new notion of good living based on the achievement of real sustainability—realized through the transformation of our lifestyles, not through the proliferation of new marketable technologies—a project of care and mutual aid—capable of combining formal and informal networks of social reproduction—and a commitment to radical democracy.

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