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Can urban regimes travel in time and space?
Urban regime theory, urban governance theory,
and comparative urban politics

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Abstract. Urban regime theory has shaped the urban politics research agenda in the US for the past two decades. The article argues that urban regime theory draws on public and corporate behavior and strategies which were typical to the industrial era in the United States. As a result, the theory is insensitive to changes in institutional hierarchies, economic globalization, and the emergence of new types of actors and issues in urban politics. Urban governance theory conceptualizes agency more generically which allows the theory to travel better than urban regime theory in time and space.

Urban politics research in the United States over the past two decades has overwhelmingly been shaped by urban regime theory. The host of scholarly literature devoted to analyses of urban regimes is proof of Clarence Stone's foundational contribution to the field of urban politics. In addition to providing a framework for an understanding of the political and economic conditions of political power and policy choice in an industrial economy, urban regime theory also helped to reassert the status of urban politics in political science more broadly (see Orr and Johnson, 2008a, 2008b).

The European perspective on urban regime theory as a model for urban politics research has, for the most part, been rather tentative if not critical. To some, not least many British urbanists (but see Stoker, 1995), the main problem with urban regime theory appears to be simply that it is not a European theory or, indeed, that it is has been seen as an

abstraction of US urban political economy. For instance, Alan Harding (1995:46-7) suggests that there is a "powerful tradition of skepticism among UK political scientists about imported US theories and methods... US approaches are generally dismissed as insensitive to fundamental differences between the two countries".

Others see political and institutional differences between the US and Europe as a problem in employing urban regime theory in European urban politics. In this vein, Jonathan Davies argues that urban regimes are not likely to emerge in the British political, economic and institutional context; hence regime theory is not a useful analytical model in Britain (Davies, 2003).

Yet others have questioned the purpose of comparing urban politics on different sides of the Atlantic. Since the practice of urban politics in the United States and the European countries over past couple of decades has differed significantly in most key aspects, the issue is not so much to what degree theories can travel between the two continents but rather what would be the purpose of the journey. For European urbanists, the most urgent issues are not related to the formation and maintenance of regimes and partnerships between corporate and political leaders. Instead, those issues are more oriented towards institutional embeddedness in multi-level contexts of policy making and the subsequent rescaling of statehood, globalization, social exclusion, and the role of NGOs and civil society in the delivery of public service; in other words, the role of the city's public institutions and actors in urban governance (Brenner, 2004; John, 2008; Le Galés, 2002; Pierre, 2011). While the political economy of European governance is certainly relevant, it does not enjoy the same predominance as has been the case in American urban politics. European urbanists pursue largely other research issues than their American colleagues and, as a result, many would suggest that the argument that the pros and cons of bringing in urban regime theory is moot.

Confusing and sometimes parochial as this debate may appear, it nonetheless raises a series of questions about the capacity of urban regime theory to travel across time and space and the difficulties associated with balancing case sensitivity against universality of theories in urban politics more broadly. Against that backdrop, this article will compare urban regime theory and urban governance theory with respect to their capacity to serve as analytical frameworks for diachronic and synchronic comparative research.

More specifically, the article addresses three broad sets of questions. First, we investigate the institutional and economic underpinnings of urban regime theory and the continuity of those underpinnings. In order to assess the comparative potential of urban regime theory we need to investigate to what extent urban regime theory is typical to a particular configuration of the post-war industrial economy and whether it can serve as a useful analytical framework for other types of economies, too. In other words, how well should we expect urban regime theory to travel, diachronically and synchronically?

The second question is focused on urban governance theory as a framework for case studies and comparative analysis, particularly in comparison with urban regime theory. What are the key similarities and differences between these two theories and to what degree do those differences affect the capacity of the theories to guide comparative research on urban politics?

Third, we ask whether there are any significant aspects of US urban politics, broadly defined, where urban governance theory would provide a richer conceptualization of compared to urban regime theory. This discussion considers both the significance of other actors than those that comprise the urban regime. We argue that four aspects of urban politics tend to reduce the capacity of urban regime theory as a comparative framework. These aspects include the increasing diversity of actors in urban politics; cross-national differences in local autonomy;

differences in the institutional configuration of the economy and the incentives it offers firms to engage the city; and the impact of globalization on urban politics, primarily the rescaling of political authority and the vertical integration of corporate structures.

Urban governance theory is still evolving, as is indeed governance theory in a more generic sense (Bevir, 2010; Levi-Faur, 2012; Pierre, 2000). Urban governance research displays a number of varieties in terms of how scholars perceive the centrality of political institutions or the significance of networks and collaborative forms of governance (John, 2001; Pierre, 2011). The urban governance literature studies the causes and consequences of different forms of interactions between societal actors and the local state. It provides examples of both state-centric models of institutional control and of extensive network governance with the local state mainly playing the role of a metagovernor (Torfing et al., 2012).

Secondly, the juxtaposition of urban regime theory and urban governance theory is slightly misleading. The urban regime *is* a particular form of urban governance; since urban governance refers to the process through which a city is governed without making any prejudgments about the locus of power or the relative significance of political and societal actors in that process, the urban regime which Clarence Stone describes in his 1989 account of Atlanta is a textbook case of urban governance. Indeed, Stone recently suggested that there are "alternative lenses" which potentially can enhance our understanding of urban politics and one of those lenses is the governance approach (Stone, 2008:300). Urban regime theory and urban governance theory represent different, but clearly related, conceptual and theoretical "lenses".

The article argues that urban governance theory is more encompassing and open to variations in agency and institutional and economic embeddedness than urban regime theory. As mentioned earlier, urban regime theory has been criticized for being deeply conceptually and empirically embedded in, and reflective of, the US urban political economy;

in fact, Stone does not address the issue of how the theory fares outside the United States. The fundamental research question defined by urban regime theory about the sources of power and the logic of wielding resources and capabilities from both public and private sources are integral to urban governance theory as well. However, while urban regime theory is preoccupied with the synergy between political and corporate capabilities, urban governance theory simply asks who controls the resources that are critical to governing and to what extent they can sustain collective action.

Furthermore, the article argues that while urban regime theory offers a powerful framework for the analysis of urban politics which is typical to industrial society, particularly the US industrial society (Judd and Laslo, 2012), it is probably less likely to offer an equally encompassing theory for urban politics in a post-industrial economy. The strength, or one of the strengths, of urban regime theory is its conceptualization of the logic of overcoming an insufficient institutional capacity to govern by forging alliances with resourceful but politically weak societal actors. Much of that logic hinges on peak representation and bilateral exchanges. With an urban economy characterized by a very large number of smaller businesses and with corporate players increasingly operating as part of national or even transnational industrial conglomerates, the prospects of building an urban regime might not altogether disappear but it certainly becomes much more challenging.

The article is organized as follows. We first briefly discuss overarching developments in urban politics in the US and Europe over the past couple of decades, i.e. during the time period when urban regime theory and urban governance theory evolved. We then introduce the basic features of urban regime theory and urban governance theory and compare the two theories in more detail. The third section compares more closely the capacity of the two theories as frameworks for comparative urban politics research by assessing to what extent they conceptualize and explain current

developments in urban politics and urban political economy. A concluding section closes the article.

Urban politics in the United States and Europe

The trajectory of urban politics as a research field over the past couple of decades in the US is characterized by periods of marginalization bordering on oblivion and other periods of a high degree of centrality in political science. In the 1960s and 1970s, urban politics was "hot" (Orr and Johnson, 2008b). Most of the salient issues in political science at this time were urban politics issues, as was for instance the case with the debate between pluralists and elite theorists (Dahl, 1961; Hunter, 1953; Polsby, 1963). However, American local authorities suffer from limited autonomy and institutional fragmentation (Keating, 1991). When federal policies and programs towards the cities declined and finally all but disappeared in the 1980s and 1990s, urban politics both as a research field and a practice experienced a similar decline (Barnes, 2005; Kaplan and James, 1990; Jones, 1989; Mollenkopf, Orr and Johnson, 2008; Warren, 1990). Clarence Stone's seminal book *Regime Politics* (Stone, 1989) offered US urbanists a long awaited new theoretical focus and urban regime theory has been a leitmotif in American urban politics for much of the 1990s and 2000s.

Meanwhile, the European experience describes a rather different trajectory. Political mobilization is higher in Europe than in the United States. Local authorities are comparatively speaking more resourceful in financial and organizational terms and the political discourse is shaped by ideology to a much higher degree than in the United States. As a result, urban politics did not experience the same decline as in the United States. In the 1980s when American urban politics was clearly in decline, European cities in most countries (with the UK as an important exception) could enjoy a growing tax base and increasing autonomy (John, 2001; Le Galès,

2002; Pierre, 2011). These differences in the significance of the practice of urban politics help explain why urban politics as a research field in Europe has been spared from the decline witnessed in American urban politics.

Amidst these differences, however, there are also many similarities in the development of urban politics on both sides of the Atlantic. An important common feature is the aforementioned decline of a national urban policy. In the UK, urban policy has aimed at transforming local government from a system of service production to one of strategic, purposive, and enabling action (for the US, see Barnes, 2005; Kaplan and James, 1990; Mollenkopf, 1983; Orr and Johnson, 2008; Warren, 1990; for the UK, see Turok, 2005; Hill, 1994, 2000; Leach and Percy-Smith, 2001). Similar patterns of national policy either exiting the stage thus indirectly opening up for inter-local competition, or actively promoting such competition have been recorded in several other countries as well.

In terms of urban regimes and urban governance, the greater need for self-reliance and local mobilization which has been the outcome of these changes in national policy towards the cities has accentuated the need for collaborative strategies at the local level. Again, however, we note interesting differences between the US and the European experiences. In the American urban political economy, competition among cities for private investment is a powerful incentive for the political leadership to embark on a collaborative strategy with the corporate sector in order to secure existing investments and to wield all sources of resources to boost the local economy. Although European cities tend to be more financially resourceful than American cities they too emphasize collaborative strategies. European cities have other means, but also face other obstacles, in this collaborative strategy. The European Union provides a transnational source of revenues not available to American cities. Networks like Eurocities, Eurotowns, and the Council of European Municipalities and Regions (CEMR) organize local authorities on the European continent. The

CEMR in particular is a powerful lobby for cities and regions vis-à-vis the EU (Pierre, 2013).

The point here is that urban regimes and urban governance arrangements are embedded in national, sometimes transnational, institutional frameworks which define their scope of action and provide opportunity structures for urban political action (Bache and Flinders, 2004; Piattoni, 2010). These frameworks are fluid and dynamic; national urban policy can be redesigned over a few years and the EU changes its programs of urban support on an even shorter notice. Urban politics, and indeed any theory of urban politics, cannot ignore the institutional embeddedness of cities. As we will argue later in the article, the two theories differ significantly in this respect.

Comparing urban regime theory and urban governance theory

Before we begin our assessment of urban regime theory and urban governance theory we need to clarify their ontological status; are they indeed theories, or are they frameworks or approaches? The difference between theories, frameworks and approaches is obviously a topic far bigger than present space allows. For the present analysis, these constructs could be placed on an ordinal scale of analytical complexity and sophistication, with the approach being the least advanced construct and the theory as the most advanced of the three with the framework placed between the two. Thus, an approach identifies a research topic or field and presents some general notion about how it could be studied. A framework defines key concepts and identifies dependent and independent variables. A theory, finally, departs from an abstract analysis of the research field, defines the relationships among key concepts, and stipulates causal relations and the direction of that causality among those concepts. This means that a theory also contains a framework and an approach while a framework also offers an approach.

Secondly, we need to define the criteria that we employ in comparing and evaluating the two theories. From Popper onwards, falsifiability is often suggested as a key evaluative criterion of theories. Social science theories such as institutional theory or rational choice theory themselves do not tend to be falsifiable; only hypotheses derived from theory can be rejected.

Instead, other criteria appear to be central in an evaluation of social science theories. One such criterion is conceptual clarity; are concepts clearly defined and do definitions discriminate between relevant and irrelevant phenomena? Furthermore, coherence is essential to theory; are all salient aspects of the phenomenon under study incorporated in theory in a logical and rational fashion? Finally, since essentially all social science phenomena are dynamic and subject to change, we would demand that a theory has the capacity to account for, or at least accommodate, change. Thus, clarity, coherence and capacity to account for change will be the three main evaluative criteria used in our assessment of urban regime theory and urban governance theory.

Urban regime theory. Since the reader of this article could be assumed to be reasonably familiar with the basic tenets of urban regime theory we devote this presentation to those aspects of the theory which highlight the preconditions for concerted action across institutional border in the local society.

The basic point of departure in Clarence Stone's urban regime theory is the observation that the task of governing the city is too overwhelming for the local authority to handle alone. The institutional capacities of the local state are insufficient to address the most salient problems facing the city such as economic development, public service delivery, welfare, and infrastructural modernization. Processes of economic structural change which can have a major impact on the city are beyond the realm of control of local authorities. Furthermore, while the city controls

procedural and legal resources, political and institutional fragmentation frequently obstructs coordinated action. In addition, governing requires a variety of other resources, many of which tend to be controlled by the targets of policy. Essential to the present discussion, Stone also argues that it is precisely in order to increase the "capacity to act" that the urban political leadership forges alliances with resourceful societal actors, primarily the corporate sector (Stone, 1989:229).

The governing problem which Stone thus identifies is both one of institutional leverage and one of governing capacity; two separate but related issues. Insufficient institutional capacity is probably a problem known to local authorities in most countries. Urban politics, as already mentioned, is embedded in institutional and economic hierarchies which the city has little choice but to submit to since they control resources that are critical to governance; yet it is obligated to engage in social production to mitigate the impact of structural changes in the economy and to deliver on mandates which may or may not be funded. It is this gap between the capabilities and the political role of the city which drives the urban political leadership to engage important societal partners, primarily the business community.

Stone initially takes a seemingly generic approach to the issue of regime composition: "The study of urban regimes is...a study of who cooperates and how their cooperation is achieved across institutional sectors of community life" (Stone, 1989:9). Later, he makes a strong argument for the role of corporate interests; private capital controls "systemic power" which is integral to urban governance. Given the structure of Atlanta's economy and the mutual interest for politics and business to engage each other, urban regimes or "governing coalitions" more broadly tend to be built on top political and corporate leadership. Organizational theorists will recognize this as a contingency problem; a scenario where two actors control resources critical to the other actor is strongly conducive to collaborative action.

If institutional capacity is a feature of the local state, governing capacity is a feature of the patterns of interaction between the local state and key societal partners. Local authorities govern a social and economic landscape featuring actors which in many ways are more resourceful in financial and organizational terms than the local authority itself. Obtrusive and coercive policies can easily induce private capital to relocate to other and less hostile local government jurisdictions. Major corporate players operate according to a logic where place is a factor of rapidly decreasing significance compared to production lines, products or technologies. Thus even if a local authority had the sufficient institutional capacity to play a pro-active role in governing, the success of that role would still be contingent on the consent of its actions among key players in the local society.

Urban regimes are a means of solving the former problem by first solving the latter problem. Bringing in external resources and capabilities into the process of governing alleviates the city of some of its institutional insufficiency at the same time as it engages societal partners, thus bolstering a commitment to place and a shared vision for the city's future. The price tag, inevitably, is that the integrity of political leadership and political institutions is compromised and that the democratic process caters to privileged actors. There is also the obvious risk that policy goals will come to reflect the composition of the governing coalition. Some time ago now, Richard Hula (1993:38) argued that local government is restructuring in ways "that mobilize types and levels of private resources not normally available to purely public institutions"; in ways "that shift program goals toward traditional economic elites"; and in ways "that may reduce popular control". These processes of restructuring can be related to the development of urban regimes. In order to gain access to the "systemic power" of the corporate sector, the political leadership must be willing to cater to corporate interests.

Urban regime theory has a set of distinct economic and institutional underpinnings, some of which are discussed in detail whereas others are implied or seen as "givens". The structure of the corporate sector is such that it allows for peak-level representation with capacity to speak on behalf of the bulk of the local business community. This can be achieved either through a centralized corporate structure with a small number of big corporate players or through centralized business organizations. In both cases, the city's political leadership engages the business community through institutionalized bilateral channels.

Another feature related to economic variables that sustain urban regime theory is state and local corporate taxation. Cities have strong interests in the local business community for the creation of jobs and a positive economic development. In addition, most US states and some cities are dependent on local businesses for tax revenues. Exemption from state or local or state taxes are potential bargaining chips in attracting private investment. In unitary states, on the other hand, corporate taxation tends to be national, not regional or local, an arrangement which fosters a different type of urban political economy (Kantor and Savitch, 1993). Subnational corporate taxation is a double-edged sword which secures revenues and financial resources at the same time as it makes cities and states attractive targets for corporate pressures. Cities and regions in national contexts where taxation is more centralized, on the other hand, tend to enjoy a higher degree of horizontal autonomy because their tax revenues are not (directly) tied to corporate investment strategies or performance.

The distribution of taxation among institutional levels varies significantly across different jurisdictions (Peters, 1991). In the UK taxation was centralized by the Thatcher government in the 1980s; central government collects all forms of taxes and distributes parts of those revenues across subnational governments. Similarly in Australia, all taxation was moved to the federal government level in what was described as

an extraordinary measure to help fund the (WWII) war effort but was never returned to the state or local levels. In the Scandinavian countries we see almost the opposite pattern; the bulk of (income) taxation is conducted by local and regional government and central government subsidizes the delivery of national programs. We will return to these issues later as taxation and institutional autonomy are important aspects of comparative urban political economy.

Urban regimes evolve because it is in the interest of both the corporate and political leadership to forge a "governing coalition" where resources are exchanged and collective objectives are pursued. Cities control the political process and legal-institutional authority which are essential to corporate interests in terms of planning, land use and infrastructure (see Logan and Molotch, 1987). At the same time, local institutions depend on the corporate sector for job creation, growth, and financial and organizational resources to implement political projects. This model of public-private interdependency is probably well-known to most cities of the world. What differs across time and space is the capacity of the peak-level corporate leadership to deliver "credible commitments" to the city and the integrity of local political leaders in relationship to higher echelons of government to accommodate corporate preferences.

Urban governance theory. Governance refers to processes of societal coordination and steering towards collective objectives. In the context of urban politics, governance has been defined as "a concern with governing, achieving collective action in the realm of public affairs, in conditions where it is not possible to rest on recourse to the authority of the state" (Stoker, 2000:93). Thus, like urban regime theory, urban governance theory, too, departs from a notion of insufficient institutional capabilities to allow the city to perform key roles in governing. Another similarity between the two approaches is their focus on political entrepreneurship; power is contextualized and manifests itself in results, not formal

authority (Stoker, 2000). In urban regime theory, this relates to the distinction between the social production model and the social control model or between "power over" and "power to" (Stone, 1989).

Unlike urban regime theory, however, urban governance theory stipulates that the main role of local political institutions is to coordinate agency across the local territory towards collective goals. Urban governance suggests that authority—the formal right to make decisions—and agency—the execution of those decisions—can and should be separated so that the role of political institutions is to ensure that decisions are implemented, usually in concert with societal partners. Exchanges across the public-private distinction characterize all stages of the policy process albeit with a different relative emphasis on political and societal agency in different stages of the process. Elected officials are expected to largely control goal setting and decision making in order to ensure accountability while societal partners tend to help provide resources for collective projects and for implementation.

The degree of political and institutional centrality in governance is a contested issue. The debate covers the entire continuum of political or societal dominance, from almost exclusive political control to different models of decentred governance through networks and ad hoc partnerships (Bell and Hindmoor, 2009; Pierre and Peters, 2005; Rhodes, 1997). In urban governance there is emphasis on the constraints on political and institutional control and the importance of societal involvement to achieve collective goals. Cities are seen as entangled in complex contingencies both in a (vertical) relationship to regions, central government and transnational institutions such as the EU as well as a (horizontal) relationship with private business and organized interests. Managing these contingencies requires cities to forge coalitions with actors in their external environment controlling critical resources for governance.

That means that urban governance theory does not stipulate any particular loci or sources of political power. There is recognition of formal authority vested in elective office and institutions at the same time as there is an understanding that formal authority alone does not suffice to govern the local state. Furthermore, urban governance theory makes no stipulation about which type of societal actors and interests that form partnership with city hall although it is expected that local authorities will team up with different social partners in different issue areas or sector of public service delivery (Ansell and Gash, 2007).

The city's contingencies vis-à-vis regional and central government institutions and local societal actors do not only define the strategies of the local political leadership; they also help define the objectives and forms of urban governance (Pierre, 2011). The forms of urban governance that evolved during the 1990s were largely concurrent with the shift from an industry-based local economy towards a post-industrial economy (Hall and Stubbard, 1996). It also coincided with the decline of national urban policy and the growing emphasis on urban competition and competitiveness and economic growth. There is a fair degree of causality between these parallel events. As the state, by default or design, signalled to local authorities that henceforth they will have to rely on their own capacity to generate revenues, local authorities saw strong incentives in bringing in NGOs, the business sector and other potential social partners into the process of governing and service delivery.

In governance theory, coalitions across institutional boundaries tend to be less institutionalized compared to the governing coalition depicted in urban regime theory. Urban regimes have a stable composition whereas urban governance arrangements tend to be more ad hoc and contextually defined forms of collaborative arrangements. More importantly, urban regimes ensure top political involvement while urban governance can be conducted with much less commitment and involvement of the political leadership or by the city administration more broadly.

Summing up this brief discussion, urban governance theory is more encompassing than urban regime theory since the governance perspective draws on a broader definition of potential participants in governance. Urban regime theory has developed into a primarily political economy approach to urban politics. There has been good reason for that; the political economy of urban governance was the most significant aspect of urban governance and power, particularly in the early years of regime analysis. However, as we investigate the potential of urban regime theory to serve as an analytical framework for comparative analysis across time and space, it appears as if the predominance of the political economy approach tends to confine the scope of relevant actors and interests in ways which precludes attention to emergent factors of equal or greater significance such as institutional hierarchies, globalization, and the restructuring of the local economy towards a post-industrial, service-sector based economy. Later in this article we will take this analysis one step further by introducing different models of capitalist economy as an important variable in comparative research on urban governance.

Assessment and evaluation

Urban regime theory and urban governance theory address the complex issue of urban collective action in the absence of formal authority, or with such authority as one of the collaborating partners rather than the locus of power and leadership over the collaboration. Both theories are focused on the causes and consequences of collaboration across institutional borders and share several key assumptions about the nature of power in urban politics. One such assumption relates to the constraints but also opportunities which societal actors and organized interests present to governors. Also, both theories depart from the limited capacity of political institutions to provide governance by themselves. Governance theory provides more nuance in outlining different governance models,

ranging from state-centric governance—or “social control”, in Stone’s terminology—to contextualized, highly interactive forms of governance, or what Stone refers to as “social production”.

A third similarity is the potential democratic deficit in both urban regimes and urban governance and the role of elections in generating political support. Acquiring governing capacity by offering strategic societal partners privileged access to the political process exacerbates political inequalities. There is now a growing literature suggesting that political legitimacy is decreasingly tied to elections and representation but more to the performance and outcomes of the political system (see, for instance, Gilley, 2009; Rothstein, 2009). Elections still matter in urban regimes and informal governance arrangements but electoral victory in and of itself does not create a capacity to govern (Stone, 1989:229). Instead, such capacity is generated through governing coalitions and informal governance arrangements operating at arm’s length from the representative process.

A fourth similarity exists between the two theories in terms of what could be called the contextualization of power (see Smith, 2009). Governance and regime scholars agree that analyses of the formal-legal powers of local authorities provide only a partial understanding of the city’s capacity to act. Such capacity is rather generated through exchanges of strategic and critical resources between political institutions and societal interests. Thus, the sources of power and the exercise of that power will vary from process to process, across time and across space.

There are also several important differences between the two theories. Urban regime theory is much more localized than urban governance theory. Urban regime theory does not consider or conceptualize several of the societal transformations of the 1990s and early 2000s like the continuing globalization; the emergence of a post-industrial city with economic growth tied to the service sector; the internationalization, vertical integration and concentration of ownership in the corporate

sector; the growing awareness of climate change and environmental issues which may deter the city's political leadership from promoting industrial investment; the rapidly increasing migration and cross-border mobility of people, goods and services; or the growing number of inter-urban (and cross-border) joint ventures to address issues in the areas of environmental protection or the promotion of trade, just to mention a few of these trends. These developments propel what is now often referred to as a rescaling of statehood which is seen as the perhaps strongest driver of political and social change in urban politics. Globalization accords new institutional roles to cities and central government, exposing—but also inviting—cities to international arenas and markets. Cities that previously suffered under domestic institutional hierarchies are now more exposed to the market and forced to plan their own objectives and strategies (Brenner, 1999, 2004; Pierre, 2013; van der Heiden, 2010).

Urban governance as a research field is still evolving. It has yet to conceptualize and explain different types of agency and institutions. Perhaps most importantly, it has to present a rationale for societal actors' involvement in collective projects and the pursuit of the collective action. As Gerry Stoker (1997:18) points out, the value of urban governance theory, and indeed governance theory more broadly (Bell and Hindmoor, 2009; Bevir, 2010; Kjaer, 2004; Pierre, 2000; Pierre and Peters, 2005; Rhodes, 1997), is first and foremost that it provides an organizing framework identifying what is "worthy of study". In that respect, urban regime theory and urban governance theory are quite similar; both offer frameworks identifying actors and processes that define a research question and the institutions and actors that are "worthy of study".

Applying our evaluative criteria to the two theories we find an interesting pattern. The conceptual clarity and coherence of urban regime theory in defining the institutional and economic underpinnings of the urban regime makes it largely incapable of conceptualizing and accounting for change. As mentioned, the urban political scene and urban political

economy are changing in ways which pose a powerful challenge to urban regime theory. Stone (1989) conducts a careful analysis of regime change in Atlanta but his framework would not be of much help in understanding the decline of a regime or the replacement of a political economy regime by a regime comprising other societal constituencies. Urban governance theory with its much broader definition of agency performs better in this respect but it does so at the expense of conceptual clarity. As mentioned, this perspective has yet to conceptualize agency and the rationale of joining collaborative governance arrangements.

Indeed, it is doubtful whether either of the two theories passes the test of having the sophistication of theory as defined earlier. If a theory is built on an abstract analysis of the research field; defines the relationships among key concepts; and stipulates causal relations and the direction of that causality among those concepts it seems clear that the theories are in fact frameworks rather than theories. Therefore, henceforth we will refer to them as framework rather than as theories.

The urban regime and urban governance models as frameworks for comparative research

The preceding discussion suggests that while the urban regime framework is a more sophisticated model than urban governance framework it is probably more reflective of urban politics in the US post-war industrial economy than is acknowledged. Urban regime analysis elegantly conceptualizes the logic of public-private interaction as well as the consequences and outcomes of such collaboration but it does so under fairly strict albeit implicit assumptions. For instance, the framework does not consider the consequences of political or corporate embeddedness in multilevel hierarchies. This section will articulate those underlying assumptions and confront them with economic and institutional developments. From there, we

will investigate to what degree the urban governance model would perform better as a framework for comparative analysis.

Civil society, the market, and service delivery. A first set of issues which are often believed to be central to private businesses' commitment to place include not only the bilateral exchanges between the urban political leadership and corporate leaders but the broader relationships between local institutions, private business, NGOs, neighbourhood organizations, and other members of civil society. The boundaries between political institutions, the business community, and voluntary associations tend to be more blurred and permeable in the urban setting than in national politics. Bringing in civil society and the market into public service delivery and other forms of "hybridization" has grown in popularity over the past couple of decades (Ansell and Gash, 2007; Clarke, 2001). Thus, public management reform has to some degree redefined the role of institutions, business and voluntary associations, particularly at the local level (Hula, 1993; Pollitt and Bouckaert, 2011). At the same time, business, particularly manufacturing industry, is increasingly vertically integrated into national, sometimes even multinational, hierarchies which tend to detach firms from their location. The shift from an industrial towards a post-industrial economy mitigates to some extent the effects of national or global integration of businesses (Eisner, 2000). Thus, for the local business community as a whole we see that there are forces which both increase and decrease the local embeddedness of business.

Local business organizations should be seen as part of the local civil society. Cities tend to view such organizations with considerable strategic interest since they greatly reduce the points of contact between the local authority and the business community. Indeed, as Pierre (1992) shows, cities in Sweden have encouraged the creation of such organizations precisely in order to avoid managing a large number of bilateral contacts with private firms.

These developments in the relationships between the local state and societal actors suggest that an understanding of urban governance has to adopt a wider approach to urban politics and urban political economy than the strictly bilateral exchanges between city hall and the downtown elite which is at the core of the urban regime framework. We are likely to witness a continuing bifurcation in the local business sector between on the one hand the larger corporate players which are hierarchically integrated nationally and globally, and the growing number of smaller businesses in the service sector with a predominantly local market, on the other. The one (or few) company towns that provided much of the empirical reference for much of urban regime research during the 1980s and 1990s are gradually disappearing, giving place to more diversified service sector-based economies. Against that backdrop, it would appear as if we need a framework which is open in terms of how it stipulates agency and interactions. Such a framework would also be more geared to conceptualize and account for the growing inclusion of civil society in collective action at the local level.

Local autonomy and local government capabilities. A key aspect in comparative urban politics research is the degree of local autonomy and the capabilities of local institutions. The urban politics literature typically argues that formal institutional capabilities account for rather little of what a city's political leaders can do. Economic forces and hierarchical arrangements are believed to be far more important in defining local political capabilities than formal political and administrative roles. There is much merit in that argument but there are a couple of observations that need to be brought into the discussion in order to provide a more nuanced account of these issues.

First, while it is true that formal institutional roles do not tell the whole story about the capabilities of those institutions, they do define the fundamental rules of the game in urban politics. Constitutional

design defines not what is possible to do but rather what is allowed and prescribed. Breaking or circumventing constitutional rules is perhaps more common than is often thought but when it happens there are potential sanctions that could be enforced. Consider for example the constitutional ruling (Article II, Section 2) in the United States that only the president can sign treaties with foreign powers. This ruling has not prevented cities and states from signing other and softer forms of accords or agreements with overseas powers (Fry, 1998; Fry et al., 1989; Fry, 2013), thus pursuing their strategy while escaping sanctions.

Secondly, and perhaps more importantly, formal institutional roles and resources are bargaining chips in urban governance. The urban regime framework is based on a model of exchange of critical resources between the political and corporate spheres which enables and empowers political agency. The urban governance framework is more parsimonious on the issue on what constitutes such resources. Different actors control different types of resources (authority, knowledge, financial resources, networks, and so on) which, at some cost to the city, can be brought into the pursuit of collective goals. The key resources which political and administrative institutions control include legal authority, control of due process, and political support. The strength of the political sphere in urban governance is derived from the fact that very few projects of any magnitude in a city can be implemented without those resources.

A third important observation in the context of formal institutional roles is related to political autonomy. We mentioned earlier that local corporate taxation is a mixed blessing to the local authority because while it generates revenues to the city it also increases pressures from potential investors in the bargaining on investment location. Political autonomy presents a similar dilemma to the city. In jurisdictions where formal local autonomy is constrained, cities face a constitutional challenge as soon as they consider a larger urban project, unless of course it has not been imposed on the city by institutions higher up in the

hierarchy. Cities enjoying extensive autonomy, on the other hand, become attractive targets for parochial pressures at the local level, thus creating a political economy challenge to their capacity to act. This is the familiar distinction between horizontal and vertical autonomy which evolved mainly in European urban politics during the 1980s (King and Pierre, 1990).

Figure 1 about here

The distinction between the two types of autonomy is theoretically clear but difficult to employ in empirical analysis. While vertical autonomy can be measured from studies of constitutional arrangements, horizontal autonomy—the relationship between the local authority and other actors on the local level—requires in-depth analyses of the local industrial structure and the behavior of organized interests in city politics. The important point here is that formal, vertical autonomy both facilitates and constrains political action. The urban regime framework portrays a city constrained by limited both vertical and horizontal autonomy. Cities in other jurisdictions frequently face similar challenges in terms of their horizontal autonomy but different degrees of vertical autonomy determine their scope of action in the local arena. A framework for comparative urban politics and governance must be able to accommodate different degrees of formal autonomy since this is a key aspect of local institutional capabilities.

Liberal and coordinated economies.¹ A further aspect of urban political economy which needs to be considered in comparative analysis is the basic

¹This section is a very brief and limited account of Hall and Soskice's model of liberal and coordinated economies. The present analysis considers

modus operandi of the capitalist economy and the logic of corporate action. Those features of the economy explain to a large extent how individual firms relate to their local political environment. The most extensive approach to outline different models of capitalist economies has been advanced by Peter Hall and David Soskice and their associates (Hall and Soskice, 2001a; see also Albert, 1993). Using the firm as the unit of analysis in their two different "varieties" of capitalist economies, the liberal market economy (LME) and the coordinated market economy (CME), describe two different models of economic coordination within and among companies. The key difference between the two models is the role of public institutions in economic coordination. In a CME, "(institutional) structure conditions (corporate) strategy" without determining it. Hall and Soskice also argue that "differences in corporate strategy can be conditioned by the institutional support available to firms at the regional or sectoral levels" (Hall and Soskice, 2001b:15).

Transposing this overarching analysis to the firm level, the two models of economy predict different relationships between private businesses and the local state. In a LME, firms are selective and strategic in their exchanges with political institutions, utilizing resources from public sources while minimizing their commitment to place. In a CME, on the other hand, firms acknowledge the interdependencies between market, hierarchies and civil society. The pursuit of broader societal coordination among these spheres of society is driven less by consequentiality or expected utility but more by social rules, institutions and culture (Hall and Soskice, 2001b).

These different models of capitalism and what they mean for the behaviour of individual firms speak directly to issues of public-private interaction at the local level and thus represent an important dimension in

only those aspects of the theory which speak directly to the relationship between firms and the local or regional institutional environment.

comparative research on urban regimes and urban governance. In the United States, a typical LME, firms' strategies in relationship to political institutions are based in expected utilities. Firms in most continental European countries, by contrast, engage the city's political leadership partly because that is the behaviour prescribed by social norms and partly because they expect political leaders to support private business as a strategy to boost economic growth. Actors controlling resources essential to the overall development of the community are expected to be involved in collective and coordinated action towards that ends. Thus, questions such as "why do US businesses cooperate with political authorities?" and "why do businesses in Europe collaborate with political authorities?" are likely to be given different answers owing to differences in the fundamental logic of the respective economic systems.

The urban regime framework is reflective of the liberal market economy model. Stone's analysis provides no examples of corporate involvement in urban politics which does not cater to its own immediate interests. If anything, the literature points to the opposite pattern. "The existing literature on urban politics", argued Bryan Jones and Lynn Bachelor some time ago now, "continues to push the myth that businessmen want to run the city or that they have some interest in common with politicians in land inflation...There is...no simple collectivity of interest between city officials and industrialists" (Jones and Bachelor, 1993:231). This is corporate behaviour in the liberal market economy model at a glance; firms seek selective benefits in their exchanges with the city but do not commit themselves to local collective action.

Ironically, the social embeddedness which characterizes firms in coordinated market economies would induce corporate actors to engage in place-based collective problem solving to a greater extent than would firms in a liberal market economy. The urban governance framework acknowledges that in some national contexts the corporate sector is the key societal actor that the city's political leadership engages but that in other

countries it may instead approach NGOs or community organizations or neighbouring cities. Again, the point we wish to make is that the urban regime framework, while providing an elegant account of public-private collaboration in a US industrial city, does not perform very well as an analytical framework in cross-national analyses of urban politics.

Globalization, rescaling, and corporate hierarchies. The urban regime framework evolved at about the same time as globalization gained momentum, yet it is distinctly localized. Since the framework aims at explaining the logic of public-private exchange of resources, one could perhaps argue that it makes sense not to consider spatial and hierarchical variables beyond the urban political economy. The problem with that argument is that although the actors that are involved in the exchange are local, the resources—particularly corporate resources—that are exchanged tend to be increasingly detached from place. We can no longer understand an urban political economy by exclusively observing phenomena as both political and corporate actors are integrated in spatial and institutional hierarchies. Globalization has accelerated the corporate detachment from place.

There is today a host of literature addressing the issue of the impact of globalization on urban politics and urban political economy (for overviews, see Hambleton and Gross, 2007; Pierre, 2011). The tenor of this literature is that globalization affects urban politics in three major aspects. One type of impact is the “re-scaling of statehood” (Brenner, 2004), i.e. the redefinition of institutional roles at the local, regional, and national levels and the relaxation of hierarchical relationships among those levels. Secondly, globalization weakens the commitment of private capital, particularly “mature” manufacturing industry, to place; some firms become integrated in national and transnational conglomerates while others, mainly small service sector businesses, focus on the local market. Third and finally, globalization drives subnational internationalization. Local internationalization strategies tend to evolve from concerted public-

private exchanges aiming at positioning the city in international economic or institutional contexts. Such internationalization tends to be the managed predominantly by the city executive with only limited oversight and control by the local elected assembly (Fry et al., 1989; Fry, 2013; Hobbes, 1994; van der Heiden, 2010).

Needless to say, while cities differ tremendously in terms of the impact of globalization, few if any cities and their governance are immune to these developments (Hambleton and Gross, 2007). Both inward and outward internationalization challenge the dominance of the urban regime. Inward internationalization brings new ethnic groups and new businesses to the city, gradually changing the urban political agenda. Outward internationalization, frequently conducted in close cooperation between the city's political leaders and local corporate actors, serves to develop networks and partnerships with cities overseas; to identify markets for local businesses; and to insert the city in different forms of international collaborative efforts related to specific issues such as migration, environmental change or human rights (van der Heiden, 2010). The urban governance framework predicts that as cities embark on international strategies the composition of players change, giving more centrality to pro-growth coalitions and marginalizing groups advocating distributive and welfare programs. This framework would also conceive of the rescaling of statehood as a process akin to the emergence of multi-level governance (Bache and Flinders, 2004; Piattoni, 2012).

As a framework primarily concerned with the forms of interaction and coordination rather than the exchanges between two specific types of actors, urban governance is better geared to account for the changes brought about by globalization than is the urban regime framework. At the same time it would be less specific and detailed in its analysis of interaction across jurisdictional borders at the local level. The difference between the two frameworks could be described as the urban regime expert asking "how does an urban regime cope with

internationalization and globalization?" whereas an urban governance scholar would pose the question, "to what extent does globalization alter the composition of actors in urban governance and what are the consequences of those changes?".

The difference in perspective becomes even more significant as we seek to place the analysis of urban internationalization in comparative perspective. Here, it becomes even clearer that the urban regime framework is of rather little help as its key questions target endogenous, not exogenous, drivers of change. The problem is not so much related to the political economy approach—some of the best comparative studies in urban politics over the past decade or so take a similar approach (Savitch and Kantor, 2002; Sellers, 2001)—but rather to the urban regime framework's lack of attention to the crucial fact that today both corporate players and political institutions are embedded in multilevel hierarchies which define to a large extent their scope of action.

Conclusions and discussion

Clarence Stone's intention with the urban regime argument was not to present a framework for urban politics in all jurisdictions in all types of economy. Therefore he did not seek to uncover what features of the framework which would confine its relevance to a specific case or type of economy. This article highlights a few of the political and economic challenges to the urban regime framework which question its usefulness as a tool for diachronic and synchronic comparative research on urban politics. The basic argument coming out of the analysis is that the urban regime framework is specific to urban politics in the US industrial era (Judd and Laslo, 2012). Urban regimes require bilateral, peak-level organizational interaction between city hall and downtown corporate interests and thrive in a political economy characterized by few but big corporate structures. They would find it difficult to generate similar leverage in a more

heterogeneous and dynamic industrial setting or in a hierarchical context where institutional jurisdiction is renegotiated and local actors pursue collective objective far beyond the locale. Indeed, some observers are overall critical to the capacity of regimes to adapt to external developments (Jones and Bachelor, 1986; Judd and Laslo, 2012).

As we place the US case of local government in a cross-national comparative perspective it becomes clear that the urban regime framework has a limited utility as a vehicle for understanding urban politics (see Stoker and Mossberger, 1994). Comparative research requires a framework that is open to multilateral interactions between the local state and its external environment. It would also have to conceptualize not just the local, horizontal exchanges between corporate and political actors but also the embeddedness of these actors in national, sometimes even international institutional hierarchies. And, in the era of globalization the framework must be open to a wide variety of actors and interests on the urban political scene, not just businessmen and city officials.

The urban regime framework locks in on the bilateral relationship between the urban political leadership and the business community. In that perspective, the urban governance framework offers a broader and more generic framework of urban politics. Thus, coming back to an earlier comment about Stone's search for "alternative lenses" in the study of urban politics we conclude by saying that the urban governance framework, although far from being a full-fledged theory, does offer such an alternative approach.

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Figure 1 Examples of countries with different types of horizontal and vertical local autonomy.

		Vertical autonomy	
		Low	High
Horizontal autonomy	Low	Australia United States	Germany
	High	Norway	Sweden

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