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Neo liberalism and the city

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Introduction :

Mitchell Dean, the great foucauldian scholar, has voiced some worries about conceptualisation of neo liberalism « Neoliberalism, it might be argued, is a rather overblown notion, which has been used, usually by a certain kind of critic, to characterize everything from a particular brand of free-market political philosophy and a wide variety of innovations in public management to patterns and processes found in and across diverse political spaces and territories around the globe » (2014, p.150).

John Clarke made a similar point (2008, p.135 and 138) : « the core problems of neo-liberalism as a concept:it is omnipresent and it is promiscuous.There may be a third: that neo-liberalism is omnipotentThere is little in the present for which neo-liberalism cannot be held responsible.I encountered the following list of sites, institutions, processes, and practices that were identified as neo-liberal (and I do not think the list is exhaustive): states, spaces, logics, techniques, technologies, discourses, discursive framework, ideologies, ways of thinking, projects, agendas, programs, governmentality, measures, regimes, development, ethnodevelopment, development imaginaries, global forms of control, social policies, multiculturalism, audit cultures, managerialism, restructuring, reform, privatization, regulatory frameworks, governance, good governance, NGOs, third sector, subjects, subjectivities, individualization, professionalization, normalization, market logics, market forms of calculation, the destatalization of government and the degovernmentalization of the state.That's an impressive list.....what is and what is not neo liberal ?...»

Neo liberalism has been hailed as one of the main factor of transformation of cities all around the world. As too often in urban theory, neo liberalism has been seen as hegemonic and explaining all sorts of transformation in different places, one of the great deus ex machina (after globalization) leading to convergence, explaining anything taking place in cities from gentrification to the changing forms of organization of waste disposal, the role of NGO's, the rise of mega projects and sometimes forms of democratic participation. Many claims are just overblown but it is hard to disagree with the idea that neo liberalism, as a paradigm has been very successful to change representations of problems, to provide programmes to

conservative politicians and to deeply change policies to destroy keynesian arrangements and influence the organizations of the state and cities. Far too often however, the arguments are general, unprecise about neo liberalism, lacking any specific mechanisms, missing systematic empirical data and marked by confusion between a number of processes such as globalisation, financierisation, privatisation, or blunt capitalist transformation. But that's not always the case.

By contrast, this contribution engages a debate with the sophisticated intellectual framework developed by Brenner, Peck and Theodore (2002, 2010) in order not only to define neo liberalism in its different forms but to analyse particular contexts of implementation, various processes (even contradictory one) of roll out roll on neo liberalisation. But our intellectual strategies to deal with neo liberalism is different.

The purpose of the paper is rather limited. Rather than embracing the multiple ever changing forms of neo liberalism and the constructivist underpinning of this position, we suggest to nail down some of its central elements by contrast to liberalism. Neo liberalism is indeed a political project, a nasty one, a paradigm and a process. As a paradigm we argue, neo liberalism should be more clearly separated from liberalism. That was less of an issue for some sections of critical urban studies for good reasons : the critical stand against liberalism, policies, state interventions, politics dominated by the bourgeoisie did not require much nuance to criticise neo liberalism. Our strategy to critically deal with neo liberalism is by contrast to try to characterise it. After all, we argue that the term « neo liberal » may be largely a misnomer, as neo liberalism is very much anti liberal.

Our point of departure is therefore that there is a set of ideas a political project and processes that are under the name « neo liberalism », that have been in existence since the 1920's in their early form and that gained prominence, dominance from the 1970's onwards (we tend to use the gramscian concept of hegemony with parcimony and with reasonable evidence).

Our second point of departure and limit, is to define cities and urban regions in terms of accumulation and concentration (density) of individuals, groups, buildings, infrastructures, social relations (formal or informal), representations, organisations, institutions and political projects. Allright, there are different singular city but working definition and some level of abstraction is central to the social science tradition aiming at providing some explanation with reasonable empirical evidence. Dense

interactions create all sorts of conflicts, of problems, of organisation. Cities and urban regions are also political beasts more or less democratic, more or less governed and regulated by policies, by markets, informal arrangements, political elites, corporations, NGO's, community groups, institutions, social movements, state officials, churches or gangs and mafias. They are built, organized and managed by people, usually in organizations and institutions, who have ideas about how to make them change, how to control and exercise authority, how to develop services and foster prosperity and quality of life and/or to exclude various people. For instance, markets have many of their most notorious areas of failure in resolving the problems of the urban environment. Across the political spectrum of ideas and social theories, most would agree that many non-market forms of urban governance are necessary. These non-market forms of governance include rules for the use of land, and the public provision of infrastructure, police, social services transportation, education, neighborhood planning, recreational and leisure and cultural opportunities, and many other kinds of urban public goods. Policies are making clienteles and victims, who benefits and who is excluded are always central questions. While there is significant conflict and disagreement as to which kinds of policies and governance systems to use, and about the specific types of outcomes desired, there is a striking absence of views, across the political and social spectrum, that the city can be successfully governed uniquely through private action and market institutions.

Third point : many urban policies are also changing without neo liberalism. A lot of urban policies change because of pragmatic solutions invented by local actors, because of political conflicts and interests (including private developers) and others within urban growth coalitions, because new regulations, policies, laws are edicted at the national or international level, because of discrete institutional changes or because of the role of skilled social actors developing new ideas (Fligstein, 1996). Urban policies change for many reasons which may or may not be related to neo liberalism. The focus rightly put on neo liberalism has sometimes led to an over emphasis on what is new Urban policies are rarely new and as public policy scholars know quite well, policies rarely die, they are reorganized with new combinations and new labels all the time but are not often new. Sometimes, neo liberalism is used as a clear paradigm leading to massive policy change as Loic Wacquant has convincingly argued in his analysis of the rise of the neo liberal penal state in the US, less

convincingly elsewhere (2007). By contrast policies might be intentionally developed within the neo liberal framework and may be painted or presented within a social democratic discourse.

One strategy, followed for example by Jamie Peck 's brilliant book « Construction of the neo liberal reason » is to stress the genealogy and ongoing diverse and multiple forms hybridized in different contexts. By contrast, our plan is rather to sharpen our analytical understanding of neo liberalism in order to be more precise about the consequences for cities. As with every intellectual strategy, this one has limits, its runs the risk of reifying or simplifying the concept of « neo liberalism » but allows more precision to use it to analyse change and to interpret the transformations of cities.

The paper first suggests to contrast liberalism from neo liberalism. *Second we will assess the extent to which contemporary cities, policies and urban governance can be said to be neo-Liberal.*

Liberalism and the quiet state

Of course neo liberalism has profound roots in liberalism, that's very clear in the work of Hayek for instance. There is no need here to come back to the different conceptions of liberalism emerging in Italian cities of the early Renaissance, in England after the 1688 revolution, in the Scottish and French enlightments, the American and French Revolution, in the master synthesis and development of John Stuard Mill or in Bentham's seminal work on utilitarianism. In Britain, Germany, the US, France, Italy, particular liberal traditions have developed over time now hybridized with different traditions all over the globe. Of course they are many linears of the liberal tradition¹.

Liberal social thought was the modern social rival to all forms of conservative, royalist, traditionalist or divine conceptions of social organization in order to replace royal power with limited states and self-governed democracies. Liberalism is best understood as a political economy comprising some economic elements, some political elements (states and markets) and as Gamble emphasises, strong emphasis

¹ Among many see Barry, 1976, C. Laval 2007, B.Hindness, 1987, M.Dean, 2010, Q.Skinner, 1978

on different conception of households (2013). It was the ideology of the upcoming bourgeoisies within nation states in the making. The core of liberal thought in the classical writings of Mill is restraint on organized state power in favor of creating a large sphere of individual autonomy and liberty to do act, which is “liberal” in the sense that there is presumption in favor of the freedom of the individual unless there is a specific and justifiable reason in limiting this freedom. The state should be quiet, benevolent, concentrating on the police and enforcing property rights with moderate intervention in case of market failure, hence limited tax, and rules to limit its interventionist role. The emphasis on individual rights and freedoms raised the complementary issue of coordination of a complex society, the question of how social order could be achieved, and how some collective good could emerge in such an individualistic world including the risk of the developing state limiting democracy as mentioned by Tocqueville.

In the course of the Industrial Revolution, liberals began to think about how very complex economic systems – firms, production chains, far-flung markets – could be coordinated if top-down economic authority were limited. Articulating the pursuit of private interest to the general interest pursued by a benevolent state was central. Adam Smith, of course, famously replied with his “invisible hand” theory, which holds that centralized systems are generally inferior to decentralized ones (such as markets) in amassing and processing information, and its key complementary notion that self-interested action can in fact lead to highly organized outcomes, and outcomes that are highly desirable, in the right institutional circumstances. Liberalism starts with skepticism about the effectiveness of centralized authority to identify and process information and make effective decisions in highly complex interaction settings, and it is skeptical about centralized power in general, whether it be private agents or states. Indeed, the Smith of the “invisible hand” theory is widely misunderstood in contemporary writings on neoliberalism. Smith had generally negative views not only about state monopoly or planning, but about private monopoly and concentration of power, as was extensively described in his *Theory of Moral Sentiments* in 1759, where he railed against “the wretched spirit of monopoly.” Smith was hostile to “greedy merchants” because they violated the central principle of the “invisible hand” as a fair game, of specialists trading their skills in a division of labor, for mutual benefit of both parties to any trade. He was systematic in his criticism of special interests and privileges, and pointed out – centuries before

Mancur Olson – that organized state power is frequently the means for private actors to rig things in their benefit. He presaged the modern focus of liberal economists on making sure that markets remained competitive, not rigged for monopolists or for the rich and powerful. As we shall see, moreover, he was the first to point out that markets are not automatic, and that they can have zones of failure that need to be rectified by public policy.

Adam Smith is the founder of the modern debate between states and markets, incentives versus planning. But within the reflections about markets within modern liberalism, there are widely varying positions on precisely where the border between markets and states should lie. Some versions of liberalism carve out a wide sweep of action for the state by virtue of an expansive definition of market failures in economics. Other versions of modern liberalism, are more likely to find that markets are successful at allocating economic resources and creating incentives for economic progress. This is so-called *laissez-faire* liberalism. Liberals have a stronger preference for individual freedom and restrained states and are less worried than conservatives about social integration and are generally more enthusiastic about individualism, cosmopolitanism, and urban life.

Another debate internal to Liberalism has to do with political decision-making. Specifically it considers the relationship of Liberalism to democracy. Mill and Tocqueville, for example, considered democracy to be preferable to any form of autocracy, but did not believe that formal democracy automatically resolved Liberalism's problem of restraints on collective power and authority. Both, for example, worried about tyranny of the majority, and believed, therefore, that democracy had to be coupled to constitutional – hence untouchable – restraints on state power. Rousseau, from the French Enlightenment tradition, worried less about the possibility of illiberal democracy, insofar as the democracy could be said to express the "will of the people." This is an important, and frequently forgotten point, that democracy and liberalism have variable relationships, just as do markets and liberalism.

The variety of liberalisms touches on many of the pertinent dimensions of social theory and policy debates of the 20th century. Liberals disagree widely over exactly how much, and in what areas, markets are doomed to failure. Concretely, this has to do with arduous debates over the nature and scope of externalities, free rider effects and moral hazards in market interactions, whether market transaction

costs are so high as to stifle interactions, and whether market fragmentation is a good rival to centralized state or monopoly provision. These economic issues, in turn, relate to society-shaping processes through two major concerns of contemporary liberalism. The first has to do with distribution or equity. Even when private markets are considered to be efficient in maximizing aggregate economic output or growth, they have unequal income and wealth creation effects that change over time. Liberals are concerned to separate the inequality that comes from properly-functioning markets (due to the division of labor) from inequality generated by powerful interests who take more than their proper share ("rent earners"). The second debate is closely linked to this first one: some forms of inequality may be efficient in the aggregate, but some liberals hold that they may be corrosive of social cooperation, individual mobility, and human character.

And in turn, the responses to these two major debates link to a third, that is vital to liberal thought: the failures of markets in economics and social dynamics might call for amelioration, but liberals do not have an automatic preference for state action to rectify market failures, because they see the state as hampered by its limited information-processing capacities and its tendency to be captured by interest groups and monopolists. But they take each of these issues empirically, and are open to regulation, incentives and public/state provision on a case-by-case basis.

Thirdly, liberalism has also been shaped by the rise of the bourgeoisie, forms of rationalisation stressed by Weber. Laval (2007) has in particular emphasised the important of utilitarian ideas and the work of Jeremy Bentham ie the rise of men as calculating beast, looking at maximising their interest, the rise of the homo economicus. For the Foucauldians, liberalism is about a form of governmentality, or as Dean put it after Foucault « certain ways of governing, which we will broadly define as liberal modes of government, are distinguished by trying to work through the freedom or capacities of the governed ». Beyond the question of individual rights, freedom and rule of law, Foucauldians emphasise liberalism as a particular form of governmentality characterised by knowledge, means, calculating devices or an art of government « considered as an art and rationality of government, it views the operation of individual liberty as necessary to the ends of government ». (Dean, p.51)

Liberalism is therefore an attempt to reconcile the search for private interest with the making of the collective good, emphasising the autonomy of the individuals in part guaranteed by the states (including property rights of course) and the rule of law. Three points are central for our concern : firstly most liberals accept the idea of market failure, being monopoly, corruption, failure to deliver services or even, sometimes, too much inequality. That allowed for the rise of progressive liberalism over the 20th century including keynesianism. Beyond hard liners, the intervention of state can be justified to deal with market failures. But that point should not be stretched too far, for most liberals, the question of inequality is residual or not central². Secondly, liberalism is not always associated to democracy but the emphasis on the rights and autonomy of individuals suggest some distrust of the authoritarian tendency of the state or oligarchies, distrust of illiberal policies. Thirdly, liberals tend to promote harmonious, natural views of market societies controlled by those hard working bourgeois, reconciling merit, hard work, « enrichissez vous » strategy and the search for the common good, neglecting, ignoring power and class relations or conflicts, excluding other social groups.

Neo liberalism

Similarly neo liberalism has many strands from the austrian group, german ordo liberalism, Hayek and the Mont Pelerin Society, the Virginia public choice school, the chicago school of economics of Milton Friedman, or the economic libertarians in the US (Gamble 2013). Most authors agree there are different strands, including strong contradictions between different currents, with more or less strong elements of continuity with liberalism.

As always therefore, it is difficult to define the beast. In his book "*Constructions of the neo liberal reasons*", Jamie Peck clearly underlines the non linear development of this paradigm, the input from Hayek, Friedman and the Mont Pelerin Society, from different experiences, including the contradictions, the strange mix of ideas, the intellectual project (hegemonic ?), the process, the institutional matrix, the relations to capitalism and globalisation, the Thatcher touch of neo

² For a classic great critique see A.Sayer,

liberalism, or what he eloquently calls “normalized neo liberalism.....-which- can fade into invisibility” in the American debate.

Peck concludes that “neo liberalism defies explanation in terms of fixed coordinates”. Taking a constructivist position, stressing the different meanings in different contexts, he concludes that no fixed definition should be used³.

However, taking into account that neo liberalism is more than a simple set of monolithic ideas does not necessary lead to the most fluid and constructivist position. Even Dean argues that “if the notion is to be of any use, it needs to be severely circumscribed, above all to a limited range of schools or forms of thought and certain practices and policies concerned with the construction of market and market-like relations, and fostering and utilizing capacities of economic freedom. To do so would mean that the term should no longer be used to characterize all aspects of state governing in contemporary liberal democracies and the majority world beyond them » (2014 p. ?) .

One way to make sense of neo liberalism diversity is to focus on different periods. For instance Stedman-Jones (2012) establishes three periods in the development of Neoliberal ideas and practices. The first is from the 1920s to 1951, a period in which mostly European authors worked to resuscitate Liberalism in a tumultuous context of the growth of European collectivism and the political and economic crises of the early 20th century; the second runs from the mid-1950s to the 1980s, where mostly American scholars invent new models of the working of the market that defend a radical extension of the domains of markets rather than states; a third period begins with the Reagan-Thatcher politics of the 1980s until today, where a distinctive politics of class and private power are added to the mix.

From the 1920s through the 1940s, the Austrian sources of neo-liberal thought – Popper, von Mises, Hayek and Schumpeter – emerged in reaction to the specific

³ This is a classic position for scholars interested in the genealogy of concept and ideas. Famously dealing with the concept of state, Quentin Skinner (2009) and his group at Cambridge has developed the « Ideas in context » method, : «...the term state. I consequently focus as much as possible on how this particular word came to figure in successive debates about the nature of public power.....to investigate the genealogy of the state is to discover that there has never been any agreed concept to which the word state has answered” (2009, p.325-326).

context of Europe in the 20th century. For these thinkers, the 18th and 19th centuries saw the expansion of liberalism, albeit with fits and starts. But the early 20th century in the West seemed to be one where the forward march of liberalism had been reversed. This reversal began with totalitarianism (Soviet) and authoritarianism (fascist and Nazi) in Europe. It continued, as the Great Depression worked its damage across Europe, in the societies that had been mostly spared totalitarianism and authoritarianism, but which turned to more state-governed and nationalistic economic governance regimes. For these neo-liberal thinkers, these experiments in social market economies or democratic-socialism were based on excessive faith in collectivism. They considered this to be an over-reaction to the Depression and they saw the new “planned economy” policies as edging toward authoritarianism through the back door. For them, western Europe was turning its democracies into illiberal ones that placed too much faith in collective will, at the risk of losing the fundamental advantages of Liberalism.

The founding public moment for what we will call “early neo-liberalism” was the Colloque Walter Lippmann in Paris in 1938, organized by the French philosopher Louis Rougier to consider the implications of Lippmann’s book, *The Good Society* (1937). Neo-liberalism as a term was chosen to underscore the intent to reinvigorate the liberalism that the attendees saw as being under attack by the collectivist policies mentioned above. The initial phase of neo-liberal debate led to the founding of the Mont Pelerin Society in 1947 and culminated in Milton Friedman’s seminal analytical treatise on market and state in 1951.

When the term neo-liberalism is used today, however, it bears only a faint resemblance to the positions of the Mont Pelerin group. Hayek was indeed concerned with individual rights in relationship to bureaucratic forces and he worried especially about democratic majority tyranny, echoing Tocqueville. He believed that the growth of state economic planning bureaucracies – as represented by the administrative machines of Keynesianism – would ultimately trample individual freedoms in the name of a new form of *raison d’état*. Hayek, von Mises and Popper also invented the modern theory of information impactedness in planning: they extended Frank Knight’s (1921) theories of information to argue that centralized bureaucracies were worse – in most circumstances – do better than the market in

terms of their ability to process information and allocate resources. Planning was therefore likely to be inferior to markets in solving many problems of economic development. Joseph Schumpeter added a critique of the “society forming” aspect of the new collectivism. Schumpeter saw capitalism as a dynamic system of “creative destruction,” which required a certain type of person, the dynamic entrepreneur, to drive economic growth, first innovating and earning monopoly rents, but ultimately being dethroned by competition. But bureaucracy, even that which resulted from majority democratic decisions, would discriminate against these creative agents in favor of the collective norms of the “average good.” All these concerns, of course, emerged in Hayek’s famous polemic about the new “road to serfdom,” where the ideal free individual of Liberalism would be subjected not to a reassertion of aristocratic privilege, nor the church, nor totalitarian or authoritarian dictators, but to something more subtle: the diffuse power of many masters in the state bureaucracies.

Pulling back from Hayek’s polemical overstatement, the young Milton Friedman struck a more balanced tone, with the language of modern economics. His 1951 article, “Neoliberalism and its Prospects,” criticized 19th century Victorian laissez-faire doctrines as not having sufficient concern about concentrated economic power and inequality. But Friedman then argued that the solution was not the 20th century forms of collectivism that had emerged from the 1930s onward. Indeed, the early Friedman to be found in this article argues instead for a focus on policies to ensure competition. It is less anti-state than it is pro-competition and anti bureaucracy.

Hayek actually reserved an important role for the state in regulating markets and insuring provision of public goods. *The Road to Serfdom* advocated universal minimum levels of food, shelter, clothing and other basic needs. Hayek and Schumpeter both wrote extensively about market failures and the need for many kinds of public goods. Moreover, Hayek deplored the use of market ideas by conservatives, writing that they were “paternalistic, nationalistic and power-adoring....traditionalistic, anti-intellectual and mystical” (Easterly, 2013: 23).

The second phase of neo-liberalism’s development pushes it, step by step, toward what it would ultimately become in the 1980s. This phase emanated from

Chicago, Virginia, and Rochester, beginning in the 1950s. Stedman-Jones (2012) shows how this “transatlantic neoliberalism” became “divorced from its complicated and varied origins.” Second-phase, American neo-liberalism arose specifically to challenge the Keynesianism and welfare states were growing in both Western Europe and North America. It also arose when memories of the Great Depression and doubts about capitalism’s ability to function as a system were receding. The North American context was different from Europe, where neo-liberalism began. In the USA, even a growing welfare state was at most seen as a complement to a market economy in a commercial society. In Europe, there was greater purchase for democratic socialism, with its basis in notion of rationally- and democratically-achieved indicative economic planning, with significant degrees of economic nationalism and income redistribution. There were somewhat different versions in “social market” (more liberal) northern Europe and corporatist southern Europe. Even at the apogee of Keynesianism and labor union power in North America, the USA was more fertile terrain for reasserting of the virtues of the market and of the individual because it drew on the deep anti-Whig sentiments of the founders of the American republic. In this context, the second wave of neoliberals were considerably more radical than the first.

Chicago economists such as George Stigler, Aaron Director, Ronald Coase and Gary Becker extended free market analytical models into areas such as macroeconomics, industrial organization, information theory and consumer choice. James Buchanan and Gordon Tullock in Virginia extended these insights into models of competitive, decentralized government, deftly labeling them “public choice.” They drew on the growing skepticism of “social choice” by liberal economists such as Lionel Robbins (1938) and Kenneth Arrow’s early 1950s “impossibility theorem.” Buchanan and Tullock again underscored the problem of centralized public decision-making, as reflecting majority tyranny and median voter interests at the price of personal freedom and economic dynamism. This line of reflection culminated in Mancur’s Olson’s thesis of interest-group sclerosis, which echoed in a more modern form, Schumpeter’s earlier concern about bureaucratic interest groups killing off capitalism’s dynamism.

The theories and models developed in this period were technically solid and empirically tractable. They were applied to a wide variety of public policy problems and so they began to gain credence in policy circles. Whereas Europeans continued to worry about corporate power, corporate size, and monopoly, the Chicago school worried more about the monopoly power of trade unions, and emphasized the positive role of large corporations in solving problems of industrial organization. Added to this outpouring of well-financed technical work were the polemics of an increasingly radical Milton Friedman, in his *American Road to Serfdom*. The market was not only efficient at delivering private and social goods, said Friedman, but market life was the good life itself, an end and not only a means.

Perhaps most significant was the slide away from concerns with concentrated private power, market failures, inequality, and community, concerns that were central to both classical Liberalism and early neo-liberalism. New think tanks emerged in the USA in the 1950s and 1960s. The Institute of Economic Affairs and the American Enterprise Institute, the Cato Institute, among others, were wedded to the idea that social and economic inequality were necessary to social progress and hence inevitable. They were also concerned to provide responses to 1950s critiques of post-war capitalism and market society, as found in prestigious publications such as *The Power Elite*, *Who Governs?*, and *The New Industrial State* (Mills; Dahl; Galbraith), as well as conservative or traditionalist critiques of the effects of market society on community and social fabric, ranging from Daniel Bell to Christopher Lasch to Emmanuel Todd (????).

The stage was set, in this way, for the emergence of a third phase: contemporary neo-liberalism from the 1970s and 1980s. The stagflation crisis of the 1970s created receptive audiences for monetarist macroeconomic models developed in Chicago to counter Keynesianism. The difficulties of the post-war manufacturing economy and the beginnings of the New Economy opened the door to models of deregulation of industries such as telecommunications and air travel. Interest-group politics seemed inadequate to the task of governing, and in this context, public choice theory was ready-made to step into the void, arguing for a more internally fragmented, competitive minimalist public sector.

Ronald Reagan and Margaret Thatcher emerged as the political leaders who would crystallize the Neoliberal program and extend it in certain ways. At the core of their actions were deregulation, ending the power of labor unions, and what they believed to be pro-competitive policies in many different domains. And both propounded the ideology of self-sufficiency and individualism, echoing classical Liberalism, Hayek, and Schumpeter against the collectivists, with a belief in the importance of self-organizing human communities.

Neoliberalism further radicalized itself from the 1980s onward, in several ways. The first was its development of models that justified the deregulation of banking and financial markets, stemming from the “efficient markets hypothesis” papers of the Chicago School (widely discredited in the 2008 financial collapse). The second was the development of deeper theories of deregulation, based on notions that new technologies inherently impeded monopoly. In this context, increasingly, even mild market failure models were rejected as Left-wing bias against markets. A third was a more and more rigid defense of corporate power, with less and less attention to monopoly or strategic power in markets. A fourth was – especially in the USA – an increasing tolerance for cronyism in markets and politics, a defense of the influence of corporate and private funding of public policy decision-making. This latter feature was shielded by the defense that since markets have become so much more competitive and efficient, politics is just a mirror of that rough-and-tumble but efficient process, a new pluralism. And finally, again in the USA, Neoliberal think tanks were more and more comfortable with marriages of convenience to neo-conservative social policies, arguing that social order and integration should be achieved by individuals or affinity-communities, but not through state regulation or collective order, because those would encourage irresponsibility and backfire.

Neo liberalism has also been interpreted in more direct class terms most famously by Harvey (2005), in Polanyan terms in relation to the making of the market society or through the template provided by Foucault that has led to the search for a neo liberal governmentality (Dean, 2010, Miller and Rose 2007). Neo liberalism has some points in common with liberalism. Classical Liberalism and Neoliberalism are both concerned with circumscribing the power of the state, so as to promote a society based on freedom from either arbitrary power of state elites and managers

(authoritarianism) or the possibility of majority or conservative-traditionalist tyrannies (collectivism). They also make property rights the cornerstone of society and are always worried about the « tax state » (Gamble 2013).

Without concluding the discussion, several points remain central for us not to give a definitive definition but to stress some elements of the core of neo liberalism.

- The first point is about the market. The market is seen as always good and a superior form of social and economic organisations, and an end in itself. This is major difference with both political and economic liberalism : there is no such thing as market failures. Solutions to problems or crisis are always requiring more market⁴. Markets should govern every domains of social life and as long as some activities make money they are legitimate. State regulations should be limited to the extreme cases. The capacity of the state to tax has to be strictly limited. By contrast, for Liberals, markets are efficient for a wide range of goods and services, but there are exceptions. When externalities are high, when there are free rider effects, when transaction costs are very high in decentralized markets, and when there are economies of scale that make for the existence of natural monopoly, then public provision is often more efficient than private markets.

- The role of the state is central to extend property rights and to enforce market logics. The mobilisation of the power of the state is required to force a change in the conduct of conduct, to impose the creation of a new political and social order. The question of democracy is second (Remember Chile). In many ways, neo liberalism contradicts some pillars of liberalism by supporting illiberal measures and policies in the interest of the market and does not protect the freedom of individuals. The state is crucial in two ways in the making of the market society: 1) to control and destroy social relations, 2) to create market actors by institutional mechanisms that maximize insecurity and unpredictability. Central to the constitution of an economic subject is the structure of rewards through which the social order seeks to assure its maintenance and reproduction. Market societies are established by new institutions which legitimise, reward, sanction different behaviours

- Hayek has written at length on the problem of politics. Many neo liberal strands are marked by the systematic criticisms against politics, democracy, seen in terms of rentiers, corruption, clienteles. They advocate strict rules and what is often analysed in terms of “Depoliticisation” which is a different forms of politics excluding the people. Democracy is not a priority to say the least when forms of oligarchy or plutocracy don't seem to be seen as issues. By contrast to liberals the rule of law is used in aggressive way to

⁴ See Pecks's clear developments on the crisis and the search for more market solutions

protect the rights of firms and property rights against anything else including the states. K.Pistor has analysed the development of transnational laws, norms, private arbitration or bilateral investment treaties creating extensive rights aiming at structuring an hardly reversible political order protecting large firms and property rights before anything else, profoundly undermining urban governance capacities or more generally self governance capacity (Milhaupt, Pistor 2008).

- Neo liberals do not see the market as natural but as Polanyi had so clearly understood, the market has to be created, constructed consolidated, imposed. In other word « laissez faire was planned ». In Friedman's account in particular the state has to be mobilised to create the market society, to disciplin the individuals, a language of disciplin very strong in Hayek's thinking too (Peck 2009).

- In neo liberalism, the question of the articulation between individual interest and the general interest is simple : the maximisation of individuals interest more or less automatically results in the maximisation of the general interest⁵.

- General competition in all domains is seen as a universal norm (central element of the neo liberal governmentality for foucauldians). For foucauldians, the neo liberal governmentality is defined as the discourses and dispositifs determining the government of populations in accordance to the principle of universal competition (Dardot and Laval 2009). Firms, individuals, households, governments should be organised along those lines (Dardot and Laval, 2009).

- Contemporary neo-liberalism is little concerned with the concentration of private power and wealth, in contrast to classical Liberalism, early neo-liberalism and all the social philosophies. As stressed by Crouch (2011), by contrast to liberals, neo liberals ignore the threat to freedom and the ressources accumulated by the large firms, their capacity to constrain the democratic process and to edict regulations in their favour, including to limit competition (in obvious contradiction with the godspel of generalised competition). As seen in the case of finance, corruption is largely tolerated at the centre of the system. Indeed, contemporary Neoliberalism finds justification to use state power enhance private economic power and wealth, including active intervention to preserve it, as was the case with rescuing the world financial system after 2008. It generally uses a combination of public choice theory and "efficient inequality" arguments to do so. It argues that state intervention should be used to counter majority tyranny and other collectivist forces that it believes would destroy the efficiency-enhancing qualities of concentrated wealth and power.

- Allied to the preceding point, contemporary neo-liberalism ignores inequality in income distribution or wealth, arguing that it comes from efficient markets and has benefits for economic growth and social mobility. Some progressive versions of Liberalism also have a strong concern for

⁵ See the developments in Laval (2007) on the maximising of interest according to Bentham by contrast to Gary Becker.

equity. Even when private markets are more efficient in the aggregate, they may unevenly provide certain goods or generate unequal benefits from providing them. When aggregate efficiency conflicts with such distributional effects, then Liberals recognize that society needs to determine how these two may be weighed against one another. There is no universal “aggregate social welfare function,” but a question of the preferences of each society for inequality, redistribution and economic freedom. Early Neoliberals would argue that collectivist (simple majority) determination of the social welfare function must be resisted, as it will tend to trample on liberties. But within liberalism there are many perspectives on this borderline, from Rawls, to Dworkin, in dialogue with the Robbins-Arrow tradition⁶.

- Neo liberalism can also be defined in relation to its political enemies, socialism, social democracy, all sorts of leftist or green ideas, and progressive liberalism for instance in the form of Keynesianism

- The conception of freedom has moved from autonomy to the disciplined self governed calculating entrepreneurial homo economicus who may be incentivised by rules. As stressed by Dean (2002, p.157), for Hayek, Freedom is not natural but an artefact resulting from the development of civilization and its disciplines.

- In other words, neo liberalism is about the enforcement of what Marx and Polanyi named a market society. Marx and his followers define a market society by stressing two elements, a society in which abilities to resist market mechanisms have been annihilated by constraining legislation and a society in which a neo-liberal program has become hegemonic in Gramsci's sense. Some elements should be added to these points following Polanyi (Le Galès and Scott, 2008). Within a market society everyday behavior of organizations and individuals is oriented and indeed constrained by, aligned or realigned by the principles of market economics. It could be defined as :

- 1) A society within which the behaviour (not the culture or the values) of organisation and individuals is oriented, constrained, aligned or realigned towards the principle of the market economy (homo economicus) : maximising self interest, rational calculating actors, Individual pursuit of self interest

⁶ Some public policy choices are not easily characterized as liberal, neoliberal, or social market, but rather involve intricate tradeoffs of the different elements shared by each of these types of thought. For example, there are many areas of basic services where it is no longer clear whether public or private provision is more efficient (some areas of infrastructure provision; garbage collection in cities; some education services). Being a Liberal or a social democrat does not answer who should provide. Additional tradeoffs then present themselves. Sometimes efficiency effects are in favor of private provision, for example, but there are strong distributional effects that disfavor certain groups (e.g. privatizations that raise productivity and lower consumer prices, but disfavor public sector workers). Other times efficiency is greater in public provision (mass urban transit, hospital-based health care), but the distributional effects favor public sector workers over private workers and taxpayers. In other words, there is no ordinal preference function that distinguishes the Liberal from the early Neoliberal from the social democrat, but many grey transition zones and overlaps among them

- 2) A society within which resistance capacity against markets mechanisms is destroyed
- 3) A society within which the ideas of the superiority of benevolent, natural self regulated market has become hegemonic
- 4) An unstable political order, because of inequalities and the domination of large firms hence requiring a punitive or security state

Contemporary Neoliberalism has eliminated most concern with the efficiency-equity criteria that are at the core of Liberalism, early neo-liberalism, and social market thought. Instead, it has a bias in favor of private provision, and resists evidence about the limits of private market efficiency. It also has eliminated most concern with distributional effects, in favor of a belief system that concentrated wealth, concentrated scale, and unequally distributed income are good for economic dynamism. Contemporary neo-liberalism has become quite ambivalent about even the pro-competition focus of early Neoliberal policy theorists. This leads contemporary neo-liberalism to favor deregulation even when efficiency justifications are lacking, and to ignore distributional effects as inherently illegitimate considerations.

What might be a neo liberal city ?

Both urbanisation processes and the trajectories of cities were influenced by liberalism, but that has taken different forms over time and in different context. In many parts of the world, and in different historical periods, the development of cities had nothing to do with liberalism. In Europe by contrast, the medieval and then renaissance urban bourgeois were the avant garde of liberalism. In those cities, liberalism was promoted to limit the influence of feodality, the king or religious and military authorities as eloquently analysed by Weber. In urban policy terms, cities have developed with public private partnership, private capital, public interventions, political projects, calculating capacities, knowledge and equipments or ad hoc actions from various groups and organisations. Cities were also the result of political strategies and capitalist accumulation creating massive inequalities and differentiated power relations as stressed by Marx. In the European context, capitalism, welfarist nation states and war have strongly oriented urbanisation processes and the developments of cities. Metropolis in the US are often seen as illustration of the

liberal city more structured by market logics, property rights, private actors but also political strategies, policies, regulations and public investment. In other part of the worlds, many other processes have been central from religion to colonisation.

Before addressing the question of the neo liberal city one may first note that in the western world, most of the time, cities and urban regions are highly governed environments, where many public policies are implemented, where the level of public goods and the level of regulation of the pattern of urban development – through land use rules – is far from liberal or neoliberal. Socialist ideas sometimes, social democratic and environmental ones more often have supported the rise of public policies, rules, or social redistributive policies now under pressure. This high level of publicly-imposed order and public investment is called for by the extreme “liberal” complexity of the city as a decentralized interaction system. This creates a tension-filled reality of the city, where even high levels of ongoing public intervention never create a rationally-ordered, fully planned city. But to interpret the absence of such a fully-achieved order as a sign that the city is neoliberal is to make a fundamental error of theory and evidence. Cities and urban regions are more or less governed by governments and alternative formal or informal governance mechanisms are always combined uneasily with official institutions of governed. Cities are more or less governed, and there are many discontinuities over time and space (Le Galès, Vitale 2013). The quest for the creation of social and political order in cities, to plan and implement policies is always incomplete and fraught with contestation, implementation failure and lack of knowledge. That’s a general statement about the state. For Weber, the state is related to massive process of rationalisation and domination. In James Scott’s account (1999), the state contributes to make society more legible, more predictable for those who govern. In other words, a social order must secure its stability by creating institutions which guarantees a degree of stability but at the same time cities are too complex for any centralized authority to monitor completely, to plan, and control, without losing its essential dynamism.

One reason for wondering about the governance of large metropolis and urban policy has to do with the uncertainties about the limits of urban regions or the frontiers of the city and the variety of urban trajectories. The point is taken but within a classic social science epistemology, (they are many stimulating alternatives based upon different epistemology and ontology) the defining condition of most cities or

urbanized areas is that they are complex systems of representation and interaction between many types of human agents, groups, technologies and organizations in close proximity, encased in an immensely complex physical infrastructure more or less governed and regulated. The city is the locus of complex, flexible, unequal interactions, more or less organised, stabilized, contested or governed that may evolve more rapidly than institutional or organizational frameworks. This is why cities are capable of being so economically, culturally, and technologically productive.

There is another sense in which the city expresses a fundamental concern of classical Liberals and early Neoliberals, captured in the old medieval saying *stadluft macht frei*. There is something about the intricacy and complexity of urban interactions that pushes against regulation of organized human behavior, though state authority over individual behavior can be rather effective. This dynamic is uneven and can roll backward, as with the imposition of authoritarian or totalitarian regimes, but throughout history, cities have been the crucibles where new forms of interaction have escaped existing rules and monitoring hence the central conflictual relations between states and cities that Tilly has underlined. This is not necessarily a reference to political or “revolutionary” action, but just to the normal inventiveness of human beings attempting to carry out practical tasks, where the urban is an environment of rapid innovation of those practices. Early urban sociologists such as Simmel or Tonnies capture this Hayekian point, underscoring the kaleidoscopic, uncontrollable, dizzying nature of modern urban society and its effect of battering down traditions and enabling people to invent new forms of interaction and perception. So, to state this polemically, we might characterize dynamic cities as fundamentally Liberal.

But cities are also fundamentally illiberal. A city is the dense spatial polarization of many types of activity, crowded together on urban land. Since these activities – productive, residential, military, symbolic, consumerist, leisure, and so on -- cannot co-locate on the head of a pin, there are power relations and mechanisms for sorting them into a more or less organized city including some groups, excluding others. They are organized into a land use pattern that marries conflict for urban use, and a degree of efficiency. This is the urban land nexus. The urban land nexus has a never-ending political puzzle to keep solving: it can never accommodate the many competing uses and claim of urban land, it should limit the negative

consequences of such crowding (for whom ?), and link it all together as the system expands, so that the costs of distance and time do not overwhelm the *raison d'être* of the urban area (Scott, 1980). As pointed out by liberals, land markets and their regulation are a key underpinning of the urban land nexus, an institution that sends signals to shape the pattern of location, proximity and distance.

Cities are great place for both government and market failures. Land markets generally fail to provide the roads, the schools, communication systems and other transport infrastructure and service support on which most activities depend, social services, redistribution; hence, these activities almost always fall under the purview of government and are provided as public goods. Markets also have certain failures in providing culture and recreation facilities or to deal with sustainability or obscene inequalities. Moreover, at any moment in time, the different and competing uses of urban land one the one hand, implemented policies on the other, have unanticipated effects, positive and negative, on other uses. Positive effects that emerge from proximity include learning from one another in dense spaces, or “buzz”. But markets without regulation also tend to generate pollution, traffic or crime, which are the classical negative externalities. This is why most users of the land and space of the city have contradictory preferences: they desire both proximity to urban resources (productive, knowledge-based, social services, cultural, and consumption-based), and separation from the negative effects of close-by activities and people, particularly the poor. The desire to avoid these effects in turn leads to an outpouring of demands that the urban environment be governed by something more visible than the market's invisible hand. Governance is of course not good in itself, it is politically oriented and create losers and winners. Effective governance can have the worse social or environmental effects and allows for stabilised patterns of domination. Governance is achieved through rules, instruments, policies, procedures, and plans, on one hand, and through the provision of public goods, on the other. But the many different users of urban space do not have identical priorities for rules/procedure/order and public goods! So, there is strong incentive for such rules and goods, and thus for the basic activities of governance; but abundant and inherent conflict or difference over the precise content of these demands. These two issues – market failures and public goods, and urban land use -- get dealt with in mostly non-liberal ways. Though the precise content of these zones of non-liberal governance may differ from city to city

and across historical periods, it is striking just how deliberately and illiberally most cities are ordered and governed.

For economists, there are four major structural influences on the provision of public goods: density, income level; divisions and borders; and distance. First, certain kinds of public goods increase as a share of total consumption as density rises, because density is accompanied by increasing land prices and this causes, *caeteris paribus*, a reduction in housing size at a given level of real income. With smaller housing units, households turn to public parks and recreation facilities rather than their private yards, to public spaces for “hanging out” rather than extensive privatized spaces. Second, public goods provision has a U-shaped relationship to real per capita income. At first, public goods rise with increasing per capita income because this expanded private income -- combined with economies of scale in service provision -- lowers the opportunity cost tradeoff to private consumption. However, as incomes become very high, households and individuals tend to switch back to private provision, as budget constraints diminish and preferences for privacy can be satisfied. At very low income levels, where needs are the highest, there is less capacity to provide such goods, and this distinguishes low-income cities from middle-to-high income ones. Third, divisions of the population by ethnicity, social class, and territory affect the level of public goods. The more divided the society, the lower level of public goods provision at a given level of real per capita income. More ethnically homogeneous societies provide, on average, more public goods than divided ones, due to the role of social affinity in political decision-making; this can operate at a national scale across all the constituent jurisdictions, or it can operate at local or regional scale. When a national territory has strong internal borders, goods will be provided more locally, but sometimes at the price of foregoing economies of scale. The spatial and social divisions can mix and interact in various ways to influence public goods provision. Finally, effective “distance” has a role in certain kinds of public goods provision. In highly divided national territories, the costs of accessing public goods and services at a distance will be relatively high, and inversely in highly integrated geographies. As costs related to access at a distance decline, then it becomes cheaper to access those kinds of public goods that have high economies of scale, and hence there will be more of them. Conversely, if there are strong political or economic borders, goods provision will be more fragmented

and local, with foregone economies of scale, hence raising the cost and nature of such goods.

Public goods provision across cities is less variable according to political philosophy than it is according to the interaction of these four forces. Public goods provision in cities in more politically liberal societies resemble those in social democratic countries if the four forces are similar. Melbourne and Amsterdam are more similar in local public goods provision than their respective countries, Australia and The Netherlands are, in their national social policies. Moreover, though the aggregate pattern of public goods provision is very different when the four forces have strong variation, at a similar level of real per capita income, per capita provision of total public goods is similar. For example, Los Angeles has a population density of about 8000 persons per square mile, while Paris has a density of 58,000 per square mile. Paris has more parks per capita than Los Angeles. But if we subtract the large part of the population in Los Angeles that has private outdoor space and calculate the public park space per Angeleno that has no such space, Paris and Los Angeles have very similar levels of this public good. Los Angeles has rather little public transit compared to the four other mega-cities of the developed world: London, New York, Tokyo and Paris. But the share of users of public transit is also much lower, because Los Angeles accommodates private cars at a much higher level than its comparison group. Hence, the effective provision of public transit services per user of transit in Los Angeles is quite high, since the share of population using it is low.

These are obviously not one-way causal relations over the long run. Cities have strong path dependencies in their built environments and ways of life. But as they go through phase changes in their urban land nexus – notably as they go from lower to higher density -- there is a remarkable degree of convergence, at any given level of economic development.

The regulation of land use and land development in cities is generally resistant to the deregulation that may occur in many types of product and service markets, including the deregulation of some formerly public services such as garbage collection, or even education. Land use regulation is the central policy authority of city governments, and powerful landed interests spend a great deal of time and resources in trying to obtain advantage in it. At the same time, it is one of the domains in which they find themselves persistently most limited in their ability to achieve deregulation. Even in the most liberal of cultures, they must content

themselves with case-by-case struggles to win approval for their projects without obtaining overall liberalization in principle. Indeed, the global trend is to add layers of regulatory considerations to land use changes, such as environmental effects, density limits, social composition criteria, traffic generation criteria, design standards, and so on. Why is this case? The obvious explanation is that land use is an area of little information obscurity for the general public: they see what it does, they can fairly easily visualize how their local environment is affected by these rules, and small landowners have a very strong interest in how such rules will affect their property values. Combined with majority voting at the local scale, land use decisions are one of those rare instances in which concentrated economic power -- big landowners and developers -- find themselves systematically confronted by a highly mobilized public. There is simply no plausible basis of support for radically Neoliberal -- or even very classically Liberal -- land use policies in cities. Local majority collectivism reigns supreme.

Housing policy involves both structural and ideological determinants. The provision of housing as a public good usually responds to very strong market failures at certain stages of urban development, whether from rapid growth, high inequality, or deleterious neighborhood effects. As income levels rise, however, the share of private housing almost universally rises. However, the absolute share is limited by effects from the past: cities that have, at earlier times, had strong public housing provision, do not transform that housing into private stock very rapidly, because there are strong incumbent interests in keeping it public. But why is it that nevertheless, there is a strong tendency to increase the private share of housing? This is exactly the kind of problem that early Neoliberals like Hayek identified: centralized authority has limits in absorbing and managing highly complex and varied information on housing needs and possibilities in different places; and it is strongly subject to majority capture and thus has a crowding out effect on choice and freedom in a context of limited urban space. Another problem that affects public housing is adverse selection: as average income levels rise beyond those that might have stimulated it in the first place, public housing becomes the resort of the less favored in the society, and imposes very high costs on the public sector that manages it, so that the public sector becomes saddled with the costliest problems in the housing market. Finally, when public housing occupies a significant amount of urban land, especially in dense cities, it drives up the price of land for private housing, which in

turn unleashes an inequality-enhancing dynamic in that market that erases some of the inequality-abating purpose of providing public housing in the first place. In other words, there are many issues to be reckoned with in determining whether and to what extent housing will be a public good other than whether one is a Liberal, neoliberal or social democrat, though the different weights on choice and equality may tip decisions differently for these three groups, even in the face of similar sets of facts.

As is rightly underlined in different accounts of neo liberalism, the question of the state is crucial, a strategic site to take the words of Brenner or Jessop. That is the reason why those two authors in particular have focussed on explaining state transformation to analyse urban changes. Jessop now classic analysis of the post national Schumpeterian entrepreneurial state aiming at developing supply side and innovation policies together with the restructuring of existing social relations and social policies relates more to the changing form of capitalism than the rise of neo liberalism as such, although the two may go hand to hand.

This question of the state and neo liberalism is not an easy one and brings back classic debates in social science.

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