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The post-industrialising city: political perspectives and cultural biases

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Abstract

Many Western cities face marked changes that are associated with post-industrialisation of the urban environment. In this article, four political perspectives on the threats and opportunities associated with post-industrialisation are discussed: liberal productivism; communitarianism; institutional perfectionism and participative democracy. In cultural terms these four approaches appear to be remarkably biased. As such, they are unlikely to match the complicated, confusing and unpredictable processes that are taking place in Western cities. The complexities of post-industrialisation demand cultural variety in the public domain. This, in turn, requires connectivity and openness in the institutions that structure urban politics and urban policy making.

Introduction

Since the mid 1970s, many cities in the advanced economies of the world have gone through marked changes, which are commonly associated with the coming of a new phase of capitalist development, described by epithets such as 'post-industrial', 'post-Fordist', 'post-modern' or 'fifth Kondratiev' (Amin, 1994; Gottman, 1983; Hall, 1988; Castells, 1989, p. 254). A semantic discussion of these terms will not be presented here. For practical purposes the concept of post-industrialism will be used as a container-concept, covering concepts like post-Fordism (referring to changes in the economy) and post-modernism (referring to cultural transformations). The city is generally seen as the catalyst as well as the culminating point of profound cultural, economic, social and spatial changes. Some of the underlying trends associated with these changes will be described in this article. Also, four influential political responses to changes in the urban fabric will be discussed: liberal productivism, communitarianism, institutional perfectionism and participatory democracy. Next, the cultural biases behind the four approaches will be assessed using the cultural typology developed by Douglas and others (Douglas, 1970, 1978, 1992; Thompson et al., 1990). The exploration of a cultural approach to policy-oriented learning will then culminate in a plea for cultural pluralism in the decisionmaking system of the post-industrialising city. Finally, questions of cultural variety and interaction in the real world of urban policy making will be explored and related to questions of institutional design.

Post-industrialisation and the coming of the informational city

The most important trend associated with the advent of the post-industrial city is the rise of a new mode of production – characterised by flexible specialisation, economies of scope and just-in-time logistics – partly replacing and partly displacing the Fordist mode of mass production based on Taylorist ideas, economies of scale and just-in-case logistics. The Fordist mode of production, adjusted to mass-consumption of standardised goods, met its social and technical limits in the 1970s, when quality and uniqueness of goods and services became all the more important. New technologies facilitated the rise of a new (post-Fordist) mode of production, geared at responding flexibly to ever-changing consumer tastes (Hirst and Zeitlin, 1991; Lipietz, 1992; Esser and Hirsch, 1994).

Post-industrialisation is associated with the coming of the informational city. The informational city is a centre of strategic decision-making about production processes which are often taking place somewhere else. With the help of modern means of communication, this could easily be at the other end of the world (Hall and Preston, 1988; Castells, 1989). An excellent social and technical infrastructure for knowledge-intensive activities is of crucial importance for post-industrialising cities. This explains why many cities invest in so-called 'knowledge-centres' (technopoles, science parks, universities, archives, museums) as well as in other facilities that may attract knowledge-industries or knowledge-workers (Castells, 1993). In this context, a pleasant residential and recreational environment has become a major asset. Highly-educated and relatively individualistic knowledge-workers are not likely to be amused by standard

(let alone sub-standard) facilities and services. Informational cities need to offer quality, variety and amusement in line with the changing tastes and life styles that are part and parcel of post-modern culture. In this culture, the aestheticisation of commodities and the commodification of aesthetics go hand in hand (Harvey, 1989; Fainstein and Gladstone, 1997).

In the post-Fordist era international competition between cities is tougher than ever. De-regulation of the economy and technological innovation in the fields of communication and transportation have loosened conventional constraints of time and place. Cities are competing with many other cities in an expanding market place, pursuing activities that are increasingly footloose. Cities that want to compete in the global marketplace have to meet high standards. According to Parkinson et al. (1992) competitive cities must offer: (a) human capital in high-technology sectors, (b) knowledge-based institutions, (c) cultural and environmental quality of life, (d) diversity of the economic base, (e) adequate economic, physical and telecommunications links, and (f) institutional capacity for strategy formation and implementation. Considering this set of criteria, it is not strange that many urban policy makers experience the feeling of being 'out of step'.

The rise of flexible specialisation and the development of advanced transport and communication systems have stimulated the further confluence of cities and their surrounding areas (Hall, 1988). Cities are not only parts of urban regions, these urban regions are often part of extensive polycentric urban fields as well. The traditional distinction between town and country has diminished as lower income groups migrated from core cities to new towns and 'villes nouvelles', while higher income groups gentrified parts of the core cities. As a result, socio-economic and socio-cultural maps have become more capricious than ever, with various life styles and activity patterns intersecting in both the centre and the periphery of the urban field.

Disagreement about the logic and impact of change

Although many authors subscribe to the idea that cities are facing profound transformations, there is not one universally accepted theory: indeed, there is much debate about the logic and the impact of change. One particularly persistent argument concerns the spatial implications of post-Fordism, with one group of authors stressing localisation and fragmentation (Piore and Sabel, 1984; Sabel, 1994), and another group of authors emphasizing globalisation and centralisation (Amin and Thrift, 1994; Sassen, 1991). A complicating factor in this debate is that there is plenty of evidence supporting both arguments.

Even when authors agree about the nature of social and technological changes, they may still disagree about the normative evaluation of these changes. Here we also find optimistic accounts of post-modernists who celebrate the penetration of aesthetics into everyday life, making urban life playful, colourful and exciting (Mulgan, 1989). At the positive side we can also find authors who argue that flexible production provides good opportunities for a new

compromise between capital and labour, involving broader opportunities for non-industrial pursuits and leisure activities which could improve the quality of life without requiring quantitative increases in consumption (Lipietz, 1992)

On the other hand we find pessimistic accounts of authors such as Harvey (1994), focussing on the rather dull and uniform 'mobilisation of spectacle', the spatial and social segregation of the affluent from others and the rise in poverty and anomy in post-industrialising cities. The informational city and the dual city seem to be closely related. Castells (1993, p. 255) describes the dual city as a social system suffering from a lack of communication between the directional functions of the economy and the locally oriented population that experiences an ever-deepening identity crisis. In his view, the informational city bears the seeds of a new urban crisis, requiring a radically different way of conducting politics.

Political perspectives on the post-industrialising city

Despite the absence of a universally accepted theory of transition, there appears to be a general feeling that cities face an uncertain future as a result of technological and social changes that are volatile, complicated and confusing at the same time. In addition, there appears to be a rather strong need to reformulate, in some cases reconfirm, the approach taken towards politics in general and towards urban politics in particular. Below, four influential approaches to the threats and opportunities associated with post-industrialisation in general, and the coming of the informational city in particular, will be discussed. The selection comprises the hotly debated distinction between liberalism and communitarianism (Avineri and De-Shalit, 1992; Mulhall and Swift, 1992), but also the diverging approaches of institutional perfectionism and participative democracy, which should not be underestimated in this context (Lipietz, 1994; Goodin, 1992).

The first approach is referred to as *institutional perfectionism*. This approach is geared at perfecting the model of representative democracy institutionalised in the Fordist era. Institutional perfectionists see the political community as one organ that can be governed as a whole by a political class which is given primacy over public affairs on the basis of popular elections once in a few years. Institutional perfectionism is rooted in the guardian model of democracy described by Dahl (1989). The guardian model of democracy underwent a serious crisis in the 1970s, when the relationship between those who govern and those who are governed became increasingly tense (Lipietz, 1994). The public was said to be losing faith in politicians, who were perceived to be losing grip on a rapidly changing society. The crisis was commonly described as a crisis of governance as well as a crisis of representation.

Proponents of institutional perfectionism acknowledge the need to improve the way in which politics is conducted, but they do not want to go as far as changing the institutional logic of representative government. Instead of changing or

lowering expectations in face of the immanent control crisis, they search for more sophisticated instruments and arrangements in order to meet the aspirations of the institutionalised model (Tops and Depla, 1994). Intervention in the relationship between citizens and politicians is meant to improve both the effectiveness and the responsiveness of government. Some champions of institutional perfectionism focus on reforms that should make public opinion better known to government. Others focus on reforms that should make government better equipped to translate public choice into actual policies. Institutional perfectionists agree on the idea that the scale of government should be attuned to the scale of public problems. For most urban areas, the logical conclusion of this approach would be scale-enlargement or consolidation of urban government (Dente, 1990).

While the first approach is rooted in the control model of Fordism, the second approach, *liberal productivism*, the term is borrowed from Lipietz (1994), is firmly attuned to the market model of post-Fordism. In this approach, the fragmentation of society, the pluralisation of life-styles and the commodification of the public domain are wholeheartedly accepted as realities, which cannot and should not be controlled. While institutional perfectionism aims to bring a more sophisticated version of government 'back-in' as the main problem solver, liberal productivism looks to the rolling back of government in favour of the market mechanism, which is seen as a superior mechanism for coordinating needs and means. In this sense, liberal productivism echoes the economic liberalism of political philosophers such as Hayek (Kukathas, 1991).

The state conception consistent with liberal productivism is the pluralistic conception of the minimal state designed to guard a limited set of rules of the game – a game which is supposed to be played by market actors. Moderate advocates of liberal productivism would retain a substantial role for representatives of market forces in the political arena. Champions of a radical version of liberal productivism would deprive politics of a substantial role in public affairs altogether. According to radical libertarians, the seat of political power should remain empty (Frissen, 1996). In the urban sphere politicians should refrain from advocating any substantial idea about the 'good city' or the 'good urban life', and should limit their activities to the procedures of decision-making, making sure that the market of goods, services and ideas, produced by various networks and sub-cultures, can function without distortion. Referring to public choice research, the need for scale-enlargement or consolidation of urban government is strongly questioned. Different functions are assumed to have different optimal service areas. These areas are best served by a multitude of overlapping, semi-autonomous suppliers of public goods and services (cf. Ostrom, 1973; Dente, 1990).

The third approach, *communitarianism*, is based on a critique of both approaches discussed above. Communitarians strongly criticize the trend towards individualisation and commodification embraced by liberal productivists. Instead

of watching man as a utilitarian 'homo economicus' competing with others in a free market, communitarians would rather see man as a 'homo sociologicus', socialised by and integrated into a community that plays a central role in reinforcing and reinventing shared norms and values (Etzioni, 1995a). In times of moral relativism, communitarians pin their faith to values and norms handed over by the humanistic and Judeo-Christian tradition. While liberal productivists focus on freedom as a crucial criterion, communitarians stress the value of fraternity. It is however not the abstract, bureaucratic type of solidarity established in postwar welfare states, upon which proponents of institutional perfectionism tend to embroider, but rather a concrete, localised type of brotherhood, rooted in various communities (usually written in the plural). Referring to Tönnies, one could say that communitarians want to regenerate the good parts of 'Gemeinschaft' as a corrective to the bad parts of 'Gesellschaft' (Gutmann, 1992).

At the urban level, communitarians support developments towards neighbourhood-governance in combination with other ways of returning responsibilities to communities of citizens (cf. Bish and Ostrom, 1979). Proponents of the communitarian approach may support the liberal productivist claim of social plurality, but they will warn against individualised forms of fragmentation. Communitarians reject the modernistic control model, which takes the political community as one indivisible whole that can be governed from a political centre. They would instead endorse a vision of society as constituted by a multitude of communities, which to a certain extent act as self-conscious, self-determined communities. While champions of this approach agree with proponents of the first approach that civic leadership is important, they stress a rather different 'moral-messenger' rather than 'instrumental-fixer'-type of leadership.

Reading some of the literature (e.g. Mulhall and Swift, 1992; Avineri and de Shalit, 1992) one could get the impression that liberal productivism and communitarianism are the only two alternatives to the Fordist way of conducting politics. There is however another alternative, *participatory democracy*, which should not be ignored (Goodin, 1992; Lipietz, 1994).

The breakthrough of this fourth approach, at the end of the 1960s and the beginning of the 1970s, is associated with the crisis of Fordism, which reached a much-debated climax in the same time period. Cities, in this period experienced a growing wave of criticism at the way in which important aspects of urban life (living, working, relaxing, travelling) had been separated, rationalised and commodified as a consequence of modernistic growth-oriented town planning. The quality of urban life became an important theme, which inspired many actors to oppose large-scale projects, especially infrastructural projects designed to accommodate the growth of car traffic. Urban activists not only criticized the modernistic, technocratic imposition of such plans, they also rejected the compulsive consumption patterns associated with liberal productivism.

The general rejection of the 'establishment' and its ethos was common to activists belonging to various 'New Social Movements' (ecologists, feminists, gays, squatters, anti-nuclear activists). These new social movements agreed on, and still foster, the necessity of establishing a 'new politics', furthering a participatory grass-roots type of democracy (Brand, 1985; Klandermans, 1989). Key words are initiative, autonomy, solidarity and ecology. The new politics is organicist in a radically non-hierarchic way, which distinguishes the champions of participatory democracy from those advocating institutional perfectionism (Pateman, 1970; Goodin, 1992). The new politics is highly normative, but the values that movement actors embrace are only partly the same as the (traditional) values that communitarians stress. Unlike communitarians, most movement actors favor radical emancipation, not shying away from unconventional forms of political pressure and protest.

Those who think and write about the consequences of social and technological changes in cities, and those who try to formulate a political response to these changes, tend to lean heavily on one of the four approaches discussed above. The possibilities of combining various approaches tend to be neglected – at least in the world of political thought. Notwithstanding the elegance of intellectual consistency and rigour, it is not very likely that one specific approach or ideology could be a match for the dynamic, complicated, confusing and unpredictable post-industrialisation process that is taking place in many cities of the world. Ideological consistency is usually accompanied by cultural bias, and its reverse, cultural blindness. Cultural bias and cultural blindness are not without risks, as will be argued below.

Political orientations and cultural biases

Cultural bias can be analysed using the group-grid typology originally designed by Douglas (1970, 1978, 1992) and further developed by other social and political scientists (Wildavsky, 1987; Thompson et al., 1990; Coyle and Ellis, 1994).

In its current version the group-grid typology distinguishes four cultural positions based on the juxtaposition and dichotomisation of two dimensions of sociality - the group dimension and the grid dimension (see the introduction to this special issue).

The four cultural positions are individualism (low group, low grid), egalitarianism (high group, low grid), hierarchy (high group, high grid) and fatalism (low group, high grid). It is important to note that these cultural positions are ideal-typical in nature. They are theoretical constructs, analytic coordinates that can be used to detect and locate actual positions taken in political or policy debate. Below, the Douglasian cultural typology is used to map and position the four political approaches discussed previously (see Figure 1).

The assumptions, preferences and beliefs behind *liberal productivism* are very much in line with the cultural ideal-type of *individualism*. The typical individualist dislikes being subject to group decisions and group pressures (low

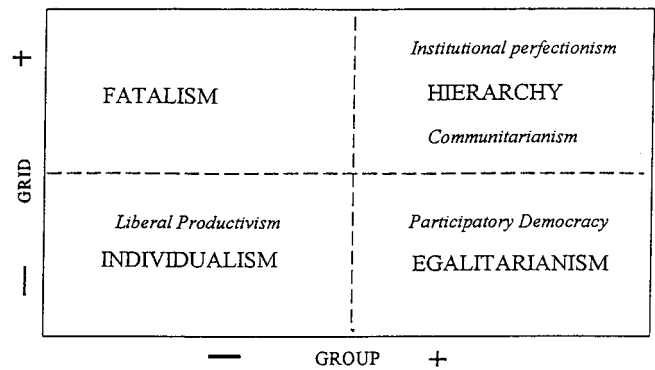


Figure 1. Political perspectives and cultural biases.

group position). The roles that individualists play are preferably achieved and not ascribed (low grid position). The individualistic concept of human nature takes human beings as incurably egotistical. Individualists believe in healthy competition between wilful people, who settle their affairs in a process of give and take. They embrace the market as a general mechanism for conflict resolution, as an invisible hand creating acceptable social and economic equilibria. In the hypothesized individualistic world there are no limits to expansion as there are assumed to be no limits to human resourcefulness. The city in particular is seen as an inexhaustible source of creative energy and as a free port for individual expression. Creative destruction is seen as a necessary and valuable process. Conservation of urban life is anathema to the individualistic mind.

The thought style behind *participatory democracy* comes remarkably close to the position of *egalitarianism*. Egalitarians share with individualists an antipathy for externally imposed prescriptions (low grid), but unlike individualists they tend to find fulfilment in bounded and exacting social units (high group). The egalitarian culture glorifies modest life and ecological sound behavior in relatively small communities, based on voluntary cooperation and ruled on the basis of participatory decisionmaking. An important strand in the egalitarian culture is the assumption that the institutions and technologies of modern life have alienated human beings from their social and physical habitat. To egalitarian eyes the world is a terrifyingly vulnerable place. Egalitarians see humankind celebrating modern life at the verge of the volcano. According to them, social and ecological disaster is just around the corner. The assumed crisis of modernity is particularly pressing in the city, which is seen as a threatened organism rather than a benovolent cornucopia. In line with the egalitarian philosophy, relief and rescue can be found in an alternative way living as well as in a new way of making politics.

The *hierarchical culture* is consonant with strong group ties as well as strong role prescriptions coming from external sources. Hierarchists strongly believe that life will be a mess, unless it is socialised, regulated and organised in a proper way. The hierarchical culture is preoccupied with the boundary between normality (tolerance) and abnormality (perversity) which should be guarded with all possible means by those who are supposed to have superior insight.

Institutional perfectionism and *communitarianism* can, for partly different reasons, be typified as relatively hierarchical approaches. Both are preoccupied with order and stability of social and political systems. Both assume that authoritative government requires special qualifications, either in terms of merit and competency (institutional perfectionism) or in terms of morality and integrity (communitarianism).

Institutional perfectionists continue to think in Fordist terms about the relationship between those who govern and those who are governed: citizens and politicians occupy vertically separated positions. Institutional perfectionists do not question the primacy of official politics, but rather defend it and fashion it by applying new and better effecting and detecting tools (cf. Hood, 1983). While champions of institutional perfectionism emphasize rules and practices defined by constitutional doctrine, communitarians underline values and norms coming from other external sources: the bible, the thora and humanistic philosophers. These sources specify rules of appropriateness that, according to communitarians, should be taken seriously. (Note the difference with egalitarians who argue that norms and values should be defined and shared within the group on the basis of consensual decision-making.) Communitarians assume the existence of a cascade of communities, with smaller communities springing from and belonging to larger communities. When it comes down to it, the smaller parts are expected to comply with the wishes of the larger whole (Etzioni, 1995b, p. 24).

The *fatalistic culture* is a culture of passivity, isolation and powerlessness. This culture can be found among the many who are confronted with the confusing and partly frightening developments affecting the city. In the intellectual discussion about the best way of dealing with post-industrialisation this culture plays a very limited role. Notwithstanding their differences, the four approaches discussed above are united in their rejection of fatalism.

Cultural biases and collective learning

The Douglasian cultural types are not only useful as coordinates that help to make sense of political debate, they also help to explain and predict learning processes in the public domain. Each type of cultural bias is inevitably connected to a certain type of cultural blindness. Each way of seeing is also a way of not seeing. Adherents of rivaling cultures can compensate for each others' blind spot by looking at the same issue through different cultural lenses. Things that adherents of one culture tend to neglect can be brought in by adherents of other cultures, and *vice versa*. Cultures are not only ways of perceiving, they are also ways of doing. Adherents of different cultures display varying strengths and weaknesses in the process of getting things done. This again offers prospects for correction and cross-fertilisation.

Correction and compensation across different ways of thinking and acting can stimulate what Sabatier (1987) has coined *policy-oriented learning*. Representatives of a single culture tend to be restricted to 'single-loop learning', that is, being able to detect and correct error in relation to a given set of norms. When representatives of different cultures get

together, their eyes may be opened to other norms and other ways of defining and solving a problem. This is a necessary requirement for 'double-loop learning', which implies the ability to take a double look at the situation by questioning the relevance and importance of taken-for-granted norms and rules (Argyris and Schön, 1978). Single-loop learning tends to restrict policymaking to a 'single-problem/single-solution approach', characterized by a focus on a single problem definition and – as a consequence – a fixation on a particular type of solution. Double-loop learning, on the other hand, can push decisionmaking up to a 'multiple-problem/multiple-solution approach', characterized by sensitivity for more than one way of defining and tackling a problem (Thompson and Warburton, 1987).

The urban risk society and the importance of cultural pluralism

With the post-industrialisation of cities, interaction between different cultures, different ways of approaching issues, is more important than ever. Post-industrialising urban society is becoming all the more a 'risk society' (Beck, 1992) in which economic, social and ecological risks are distributed in an unpredictable and uncontrollable way. Uncertainty and unpredictability are central features of cities subject to parallel processes of localisation and globalisation, the former creating a kaleidoscopic mix of urban life-styles, the latter a complex and volatile system of interdependencies. Some groups are arguably better positioned than other groups to deal with the whims of the post-industrial economy. The parallel processes of de-industrialisation and post-industrialisation have fueled the fear for the coming of the 'dual city' – a city with highly mobile knowledge-workers living in gentrified quarters on the one hand and a permanent underclass stuck in decaying neighbourhoods on the other hand (Källtorp, 1997). Many authors thus advocate a better balance between 'hard' policies, focussing on the competitiveness of cities, and 'soft' policies geared at keeping society together (Brotchie et al., 1991). Many argue that the economic perspective needs to be checked and balanced by an ecological perspective as well (Harding et al., 1994), not only because quality of life is becoming a relevant factor in the competitiveness of cities, but also because the post-industrialising economy is creating a growing pressure on the environment. Intensification of environmental policy is, however, complicated by the fact that stricter environmental rules may increase unemployment in the industries that are already having a hard time.

Risk and culture in the post-industrialising city

The post-industrialising city thus faces a colossal challenge: it has to reconcile economic, social and environmental policies (Parkinson et al., 1992), while the opportunities and the risks associated with these policies are increasingly difficult to grasp and predict. Finding a balance between economic, social and environmental goals is highly necessary, but at the same time extremely difficult. Finding such a balance

requires an open and reflective political process, in which substantially different values and ideas are taken seriously. It is unlikely that a political process designed in line with only one of the four political approaches discussed earlier would be suitable in this respect. The four political approaches are culturally biased. They are sensitive to some contingencies and risks associated with post-industrialisation, but they are relatively insensitive to others.

The liberal productivist approach is very much alive to the business opportunities provided by 'glocalisation'. This approach suggests interesting avenues for restructuring the public sector in a more market-analogous way. As a radically individualistic approach, it certainly has liberating elements to it as well. On the other hand, however, the liberal productivist approach tends to be insensitive to the environmental aspects of economic growth as well as to the marginalisation of a semi-permanent underclass (Ley, 1980). This can be criticized from a normative perspective but it can be criticized from a pragmatic view-point as well. The States of the Cities Report, issued by the European Community in 1992, demonstrates that problem areas are often harmful to the competitiveness and the welfare of cities.

The model of participatory democracy is highly sensitive to the social and ecological risks of economic liberalism. The model is to a certain extent an answer to the problem that many groups – for example environmental groups or alternative living communities – do not feel represented by traditional political actors. It lends support to new social and political movements that often serve as a corrective to the established interest group system. In urban planning processes, these movements call attention to values that market forces tend to neglect. On the other hand, these groups tend to be so fundamentally critical about economic restructuring, that it blinds them to the potential benefits of it. Another disadvantage of the participatory democracy model is that it often leads to viscous policy processes: endless debate about public problems that in the meantime grow bigger and bigger.

The strength of communitarianism lies in the recognition of values and norms that the former approaches tend to dismiss as dull, conservative or not (post)modern enough. Communitarians dare to stress that 'tradition' has served a function for many people for quite a long time – that it contains a set of extensively tested ideas and practices. With its stress on substantial rationality, it is a corrective to the functional rationality that dominates the minds of many institutional perfectionists. Counting against communitarianism is its claim to moral superiority, which is potentially totalitarian in nature. The strong focus on one hierarchically ordered set of values can be interpreted as a denial or a rejection of alternative sets of values.

Institutional perfectionists are specialised in system-maintenance and dynamic stabilisation. They promise to bring stability in times of great uncertainty. Institutional perfectionists have an eye for the gap between politicians and citizens, which they intend to close with better (more responsive and more effective) institutional arrangements. Their focus on the system's functional rationality is, however,

detrimental to the system's substantial rationality. Apart from that, their vertical interpretation of politics is going against the grain of trends in civic society that tend to stress horizontal ties. With their backs turned to the future, institutional perfectionists can be criticised for showing too little institutional imagination.

The four political approaches discussed above possess strengths as well as weaknesses. Not one of them is strong in all respects relevant to post-industrialising cities. Because they have different biases and different blind spots, the approaches can in theory be combined to the effect that strengths get connected and weaknesses corrected. To put it differently, the approaches can in theory be combined in such a way that actors inspired by one approach can learn from others inspired by other approaches. To increase the chance of achieving this effect in the real world of policy making, it is necessary to arrange policy processes in such a way that none of the discussed approaches can be repressive or predominant in advance. Post-industrialising cities need the involvement of actors with different interests, preferences and points of view regarding the transformation process.

Cultural pluralism and institutional connectivity

The real world of urban policy making is in many ways less dogmatic and more pragmatic than the abstract world of political theory. Many cities combine elements of different political models in their response to complex transformation processes. Cultural checks and balances are, however, not always as strong as they could be.

New forms of public-private collaboration and new bargaining systems, spanning different policy fields and bringing together actors from different backgrounds, can be observed in the real world of urban politics (Mayer, 1994). The new bargaining systems often exhibit a round-table structure and a cooperative, non-hierarchical style of policymaking. On the other hand, the new bargaining systems and the new forms of public-private co-operation do not always imply a greater sensitivity to local social and environmental needs, nor a greater openness to all parties concerned. Very often, the participants in policy networks are chosen in a highly selective and strategic way. All actors concerned are (in theory) equal but some actors are (in fact) more equal than others. The same goes for policy fields: although many cities try to bridge the gap between the soft sectors and the hard sectors of urban government, it is no denying that economic policies often prevail over social and environmental policies in cities confronted with intensified competition for foot-loose activities. Mayer (1994) sees an important role for new social movements challenging the powerful post-Fordist trend towards inequality and its political forms of exclusion. In her view social movements should make the voluntary, not-for-profit 'third sector' accessible to and resourceful for marginalized groups. Social movements should also mobilize to create pressure on local government. Mayer thus urges egalitarian movements to act in ways that may contain

the growth of a socially isolated and politically marginalized fatalistic culture.

The containment of fatalism is surely crucial to the development of a reflective public domain, but the question is whether egalitarian institutions suffice to perform this function. The main challenge to cities that pursue to foster learning capabilities in face of rapid social changes is the simultaneous activation and coupling of cognitively and normatively *different* approaches. Institutional arrangements should not only stimulate the egalitarian culture – through participation structures, neighbourhood government, procedures for environmental accounting, guarantees for whistle-blowing and for transparency. Institutional arrangements stimulating an individualistic conception of citizenship and an entrepreneurial approach to public policy-making – such as public-private partnerships, marketing techniques, arrangements for quality management, citizen's charters – should receive further attention as well.

The hierarchical culture is often disqualified as a bureaucratic or technocratic culture that is unfit to resolve the crisis of Fordism, which it has helped produce in the first place. In a non-traditional way, however, the hierarchical culture can still play a role in the transformation process. In cinematographic terms one could say that the hierarchical culture should start to rear and educate 'stage-managers' instead of omniscient 'scenario-writers'. In a society characterised by a proliferation of varying and conflicting life-styles, it becomes all the more important to manage the policy arena in such a way that all relevant arguments and ideas can be heard and considered. This does not mean that all points of view should necessarily be rewarded. All minorities deserve equal attention, but not all minorities can always be satisfied simultaneously. Authority in such matters can never be assumed, but must be earned by acting as an effective, responsive and fair stage-manager. Examples of local actors that put a growing emphasis on such a role in urban politics can be found among the mayors of many Dutch cities where interactive policy practices have assumed large proportions (Tops et al., 1998).

Towards an interactive public sphere

Some institutional settings stimulate cultural correction and cross-fertilisation, and thus policy-oriented learning, while other settings do not. Comparative policy research has revealed the importance of institutional openness and institutional connectivity. Political and administrative institutions which stimulate critical interaction between dissentients are more likely to foster double-loop learning than institutions that separate cultures, or, even worse, consolidate the dominance of one particular cultural bias (Hendriks, 1996).

Institutional thickness – the presence of many institutions of different kinds fostering high levels of interaction – is also a favourable condition for the creation of 'social capital', characterised by a high level of trust as well as a general willingness to communicate and co-operate. Studies conducted by Fukuyama (1995), Putnam (1993) and others have revealed the crucial importance of social capital for the well-being and competitiveness of nations as well as regions.

Social capital is a special type of capital in the sense that consumption does not decrease its stock. On the contrary, social capital grows when it is used. Trust breeds trust in virtuous circles, just as distrust breeds distrust in vicious circles (Putnam, 1993).

Insight into the logic of social capital creation is highly relevant for the theory and practice of institutional reform. Institutional reform geared to raising the degree of interaction and interdependence between actors seems to be superior in terms of social capital building than institutional reform geared to separating responsibilities and streamlining policy networks. The latter, however, is central to many current ideas about institutional reform. Many reform schemes start with the assumption that tiers and sectors of collective choice should not overlap. Responsibilities should first be separated, and then be attributed to disconnected, semi-autonomous units. It is assumed that this will improve the robustness and alertness of administrative units as well as the unity and the velocity of policy processes. This approach to institutional reform seems to be rather dubious, following the argument developed here. An approach geared to constructing an interactive and interdependent policymaking system seems to make more sense. Such an approach is not dominated by fear of overlap and complexity. It is, on the contrary, based on the idea that sharing power and responsibility is conducive to both responsiveness and effectiveness in the urban political arena.

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