

AUSTERITY and its **ALTERNATIVES**



Urban Politics after the Crash:

(Un)Governability in the Crisis of Neoliberal Globalism

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"Rebuilding the Public Purpose: Beyond Alternatives to Austerity"

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Collaborative Governance under Austerity

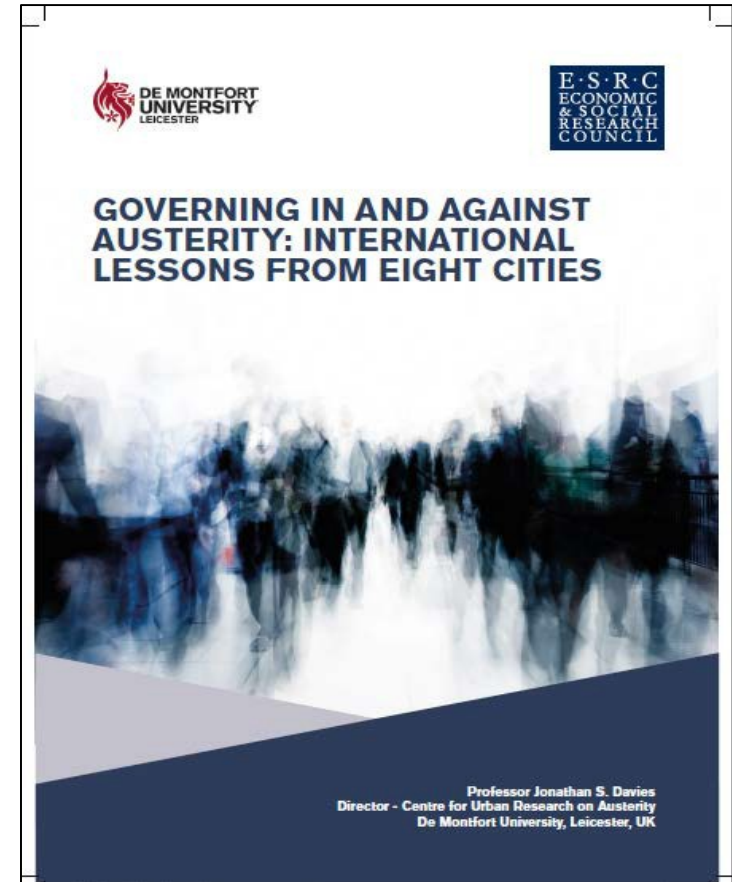
- ESRC Funded (April 2015 – July 2018)
- Exploratory study of how cities govern and contest austerity: state-civil society perspective.
- Eight qualitative case studies: Athens, Baltimore, Barcelona, Dublin, Leicester, Greater Dandenong (Melbourne), Montreal and Nantes.



The Academic Team

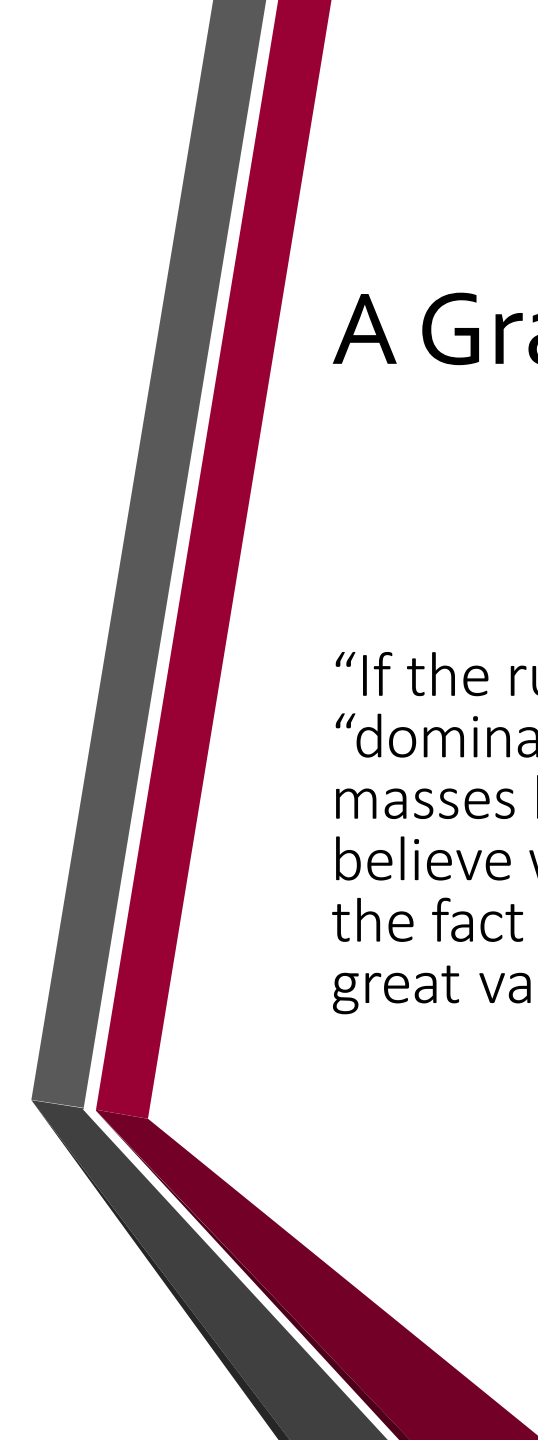
- **Athens:** Ioannis Chorianopoulos and Naya Tselepi
- **Baltimore:** Madeleine Pill **Barcelona:** Ismael Blanco, Yuni Salazar, Iolande Bianchi
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- **External consultant:** Paul O'Brien (APSE)

- <https://cura.our.dmu.ac.uk/2017/08/16/dissemination-report-governing-in-and-against-austerity>
... also in French, Greek and Spanish.
- Special Issue of Journal of Urban Affairs, issue 42(1). *Worlds of Austerity: Governance and Resistance in Eight Cities*. Open access window! <https://juablog.com/2020/01/28/special-issue-worlds-of-austerity-governance-and-resistance-in-eight-cities/>.
- Davies JS (2021), *Between Realism and Revolt: Cities in the Crisis of Neoliberalism* (Bristol).
- Team (2021), *New Spaces of Hope? (Bristol) Governing Cities in and Beyond Austerity*



Exploring Governability

- In what ways did the 2008/9 crisis bite/not bite in cities?
- What are the main austerity governance/resistance strategies employed by key governmental/non-governmental actors?
- How are state-civil society relations reconfigured?
- How do cities govern and resist waves of crisis and austerity? What makes them (un)governable?
- “Governability” as a relationship between ordering and dis-ordering dynamics in urban politics.
- Read through Gramscian reading of urban regime theory



A Gramscian “Interregnum”?

“If the ruling class has lost its consensus, i.e. is no longer “leading” but only “dominant”, exercising coercive force alone, this means precisely that the great masses have become detached from their traditional ideologies, and no longer believe what they used to believe previously ... The crisis consists precisely in the fact that the old is dying and the new cannot be born; in this interregnum, a great variety of morbid symptoms appear”.

Conjunctural Urban Analyses

- “Late Entrepreneurialism” (Jamie Peck)
- “Late Neoliberalism” (Theresa Enwright & Ugo Rossi)
- Perspectives suggest diminishing “governability” in the post-crash period: “interregnum” in the hegemony of neoliberal globalism.
- Research lends *qualified* support to “interregnum” conjectures: identifies five notable characteristics contributing to (un)governability in the eight cities.

Multi-valent Dimensions of (Un)Governability

- Pervasive economic rationalism (homo oeconomicus) (Neoliberal regime stabiliser). Fiscal conservatism, doctrines of scarcity, market-focused development
- Prominent tendency to weakening hegemony and
 - diminishing co-optive power (De-stabiliser): socio-spatial distancing, re-compositions/re-politicisation in civil society
- Increased vertical dominance through state rescaling (Re-stabiliser – dominance without hegemony)

Anatomies of (Un)Governability

- Tendency to **weak counter-hegemony** in the cycles of contention since the “Battle for Seattle” (1999) (**impasse/recuperation**).
- However, political mobilisations are **radically contagious** – generalisation from specifics, geo- political diffusion (**de-stabiliser**)

Dublin – The Water Charges Movement



Victory!



Ireland's Political Renaissance

- Before 2014: Ireland an “extraordinarily moderate and passive society’ comprising a ‘passive’ and ‘demobilised citizenry” (Hearne, Boyle and Kobayashi, *Geoforum*).
- City of Dublin subjected to harsh, authoritarian austerity.
- From 2014: A sustained political renaissance ignited by the water charges movement – Ireland’s “water wars”.
- Re-politicisation and generalisation in Dublin: from water wars to “the system”.



Re-Politicisation through Struggle

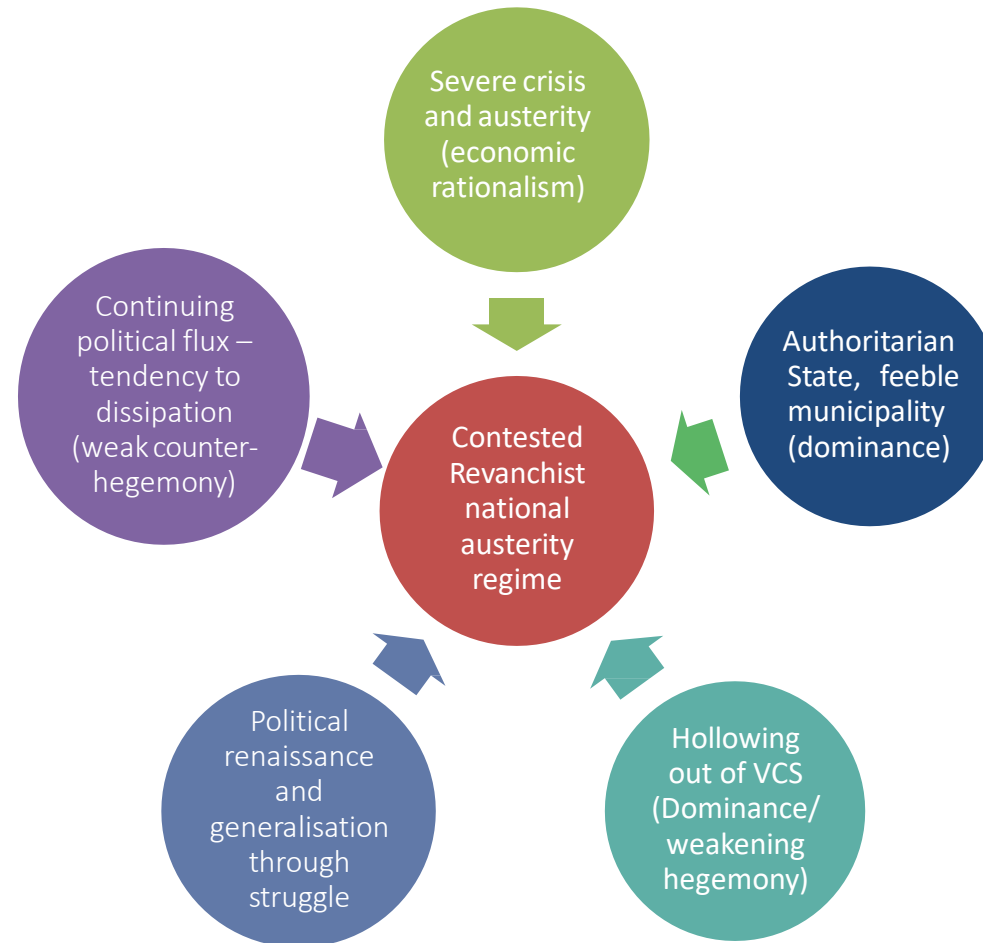
“I think there’s something fundamentally that’s changed in terms of people’s psyche in terms of how they see the world. Where previously they would have accepted it ... Now they say, ‘Hold on,’ you know. ‘The emperor has no clothes’. And once you switch that on in people, they start to see other things”.



Weak Counter-Hegemony

- Continuing political fragmentation at city-level
- Activist disillusionment with institutions
- No “new municipalism”
- Affinity-based movements tended to dissipate after the water wars, but civil society remains highly politicized.
- Ongoing political re-composition

Regime Analysis of Governability in Dublin



A Regime Perspective on Governability

Athens
Emerging Elite
Pluralist
growth regime

Baltimore
Durable Elite Pluralist
growth regime

Barcelona
Fragile "new
municipalist"
regime

Dandenong
Emerging inter-
cultural
revitalization
regime

Dublin
Contested
revanchist
austerity regime

Leicester
Austerian realist
growth regime

Montreal
Development
Regime
interregnum

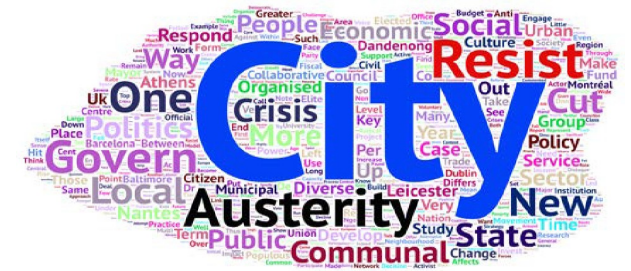
Nantes
Creaking
participatory
sustainable
development
regime

The Interregnum: Plausible Pathways?

- *Governable disequilibria*: Radicalisation of entrepreneurial urbanism through dominance, with weak hegemony (Athens, Dublin, Leicester)
- *Ungovernable disequilibria*: regime impasse/fragmentation – weak hegemony, diminishing governing capacity (Baltimore, Montreal? Nantes)
- *Governable equilibria*: Re-constituting hegemony through inter-cultural revitalisation (Greater Dandenong)
- *Counter-hegemony?* Radicalisation and spread of municipalism (Barcelona/Fearless Cities)?

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14. Conclusion: Financialization and Austerity

- Financialization ↔ accrual accounting: **profit-orientation** and investors' primacy
- Accrual accounting provides an unlevel playing field: **Short-termism** is enhanced and **procylicity** introduced
- EPSAS supports, justifies and potentially spurs austerity
- Reconfiguration of the state
 - **Accountability** relations are altered
 - Pressure to **reduce liabilities** (pensions, public services,...) and/or to sell assets (land, real estate,...)
- Political conflicts currently disguised as calculatory operations: politicization needed!

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