

The Generative Potential of Urban Crisis

Urban Apocalypse! or, What We Can Learn from Imagining the End of the City

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It is not difficult to find stories about the end of the city. Weisman's thought experiment, "The City Without Us," is especially provocative, as is Kunstler's tragic outlook for the next few hundred years; preppers produce guides for surviving the collapse of civilization, and any number of summer blockbusters have featured scenes of empty streets and crumbling buildings. But is there any real use in telling so many stories about the end of the city, aside from the illicit thrill of theoretical rubber-necking or any tactical advantage to be had from fear-mongering? I suggest that thinking about an urban apocalypse can have value as a heuristic device, fostering a kind of systems imagination as a necessary supplement to moral imagination. In order to inform responsible choice and action in shaping urban forms and living within them, there is a need to see the city clearly, in all its complexity. This need is as pressing for ordinary residents of the city as they engage in their daily lives and in processes of public deliberation as it is for experts in urban policy and planning. As a matter of lived experience, urban space is a field of opportunities and constraints relative to particular human projects. Those opportunities and constraints are shaped by the intertwining of natural, social and technological systems across various scales, systems that are readily ignored or forgotten. Imagining failures of such systems and the implications of those failures for vital human projects can inform of more adequate mental models of the systems that support human projects in urban places; this may then inform more responsive perception of the city, and more responsible judgments as to what it means for a city to be sustainable, and under what conditions it would be worth sustaining.

Failure or Fallibility? Critical Irony in the Construction of Urban Public Policy

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Ironists and rationalists pursue divergent approaches to the construction of urban public policy. Rationalists seek accurately to represent the world so as to identify universally applicable generalizations that serve as best practices to be applied across multiple contexts. Policy failure, for the rationalist, results when a misapprehension of reality leads to its inaccurate representation and generates unintended consequences, that is, outcomes that are unanticipated within the terms of the faulty representation. Failure under these conditions designates the end of policy and requires a new policy to correct the consequences so

produced. In the realm of policy-making, rationalists hope to get it right and are disappointed when they fail to do so. Ironists, in contrast, recognize the likelihood of getting it wrong in a complex, contingent, and uncertain world that resists reduction to universal generalizations. The ironist builds policy around an expectation of the unintended consequences that spell failure for the rationalist. If the rationalist views failure as the outcome and the end of policy, the critical ironist views fallibility as a necessary condition of effective policy-making understood as a process of continuous correction and improvement in which there can be no conclusion once-and-for-all. The divergent approaches of irony and rationality employ different methods of public policy-making leading to substantially different types of policy outcomes. While the rationalist understands science as a method of analytic objectivity practiced by distanced observers, science for the ironist is a method of democratic inquiry embracing a multiplicity of perspectives. While the rationalist seeks universally applicable best practices, policy outcomes achieved through a standpoint of critical irony prioritize resilience, flexibility, reflexivity, contingency, and responsiveness to change. The paper concludes by speculating on the characteristics of a critically ironic policy for housing and community development.

Urban Governance in times of fiscal stress: muddling through efficiency and democracy

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Recent worldwide financial crisis puts local governments under severe stress to change and reshaped their strategy, attitude and commitments to citizens in order to control spending patterns. Cutting-back services, breaking contracts, rethinking welfare and additional austerity measures are a worldwide path that local governments follow to handle financial adversities. In this trouble times, although keeping in mind the need to ensure the basic conditions for local government to perform its functions and the capacity to implement them, several actors struggle to reshape urban governance, according to their preferences (Pierre 1999). Political parties, unions and interest groups are joined by engaging citizens and aggressive media to build new forms of social ties (Clark 2000). The way in which rules, values and behaviors are established can alternate the equilibrium between the elements of urban governance forcing a change in kind and nature. Oscillations occur in a democracy-efficiency continuum promoting four alternative forms of urban governance: autocratic efficiency, democratic inefficiency, democratic efficiency and autocratic inefficiency (Waldo & Miller 1948; DiGaetano & Strom 2003; Norris 2012). The goal of this paper is to analyze the different divers that constrain the settings of urban governance. The paper's argument claims that political values, economic context and demographic conditions are the main drivers of urban governance complexity. The main hypothesis argues that the combination between elements will result on a combination of an urban governance more focus on civic engagement, political responsiveness and policy legitimation and a single-minded orientation towards efficiency and accurate levels financial sustainability. We use a quantitative approach collecting data from all Portuguese local government. We define the four types of urban governance as the dependent variable, which

result from the combination of two indexes: one to measure the degree of democracy and the other to capture levels of efficiency. The paper tests, using multinomial logit regression, the weight that political, economic and demographic factor has on the urban governance composition. With the results of the paper, I hope to contribute to some clarification on urban governance rules and nature to deal with challenging quests of fiscal stress.

Exploiting Crisis for the people! Prefiguration and the reclaiming of the urban public policy agenda

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Recurring and increasing instances of natural and manmade crises are endemic realities for contemporary urban America. Geographically limited, the effects of these crises are experienced unevenly, further compounded by class segregation and poverty concentration. Throughout history and up until the present day, radical grassroots activists in urban areas have utilized varying forms of prefigurative activism as a grassroots alternative to the existing political hegemony. Prefiguration is a deliberative attempt to give form to visions of a future society guided by the values of radical activists. Values such as mutual-aid, direct democracy and solidarity inform the creation of projects that seek to subvert existing hegemony dominated by elites, while also providing alternatives venues of empowerment and political organizing. For example, the Black Panther Party responded to the abhorrent conditions of poor black urban residents in the 1960's by implementing a number of prefigurative programs, most notable, free school breakfast. In this paper we will analyze the relationship between prefiguration and agenda setting. While mainstream public policy literature narrowly casts the role played by prefigurative movements in agenda setting as emergent groups simply rising to the occasion, we argue understanding the relationship between grassroots activists and agenda setting requires a much more systematic approach. As is the case with the Black Panther Party's free school breakfast program, radical prefigurative programs can find their way on the public and legislative agenda, often to the chagrin of these radical movements. Consequently, our paper will utilize a mixed methodological case study approach, examining the historical record by applying both policy and radical theoretical perspectives. Answering this question with a systematic approach will allow for more nuanced understand the role grassroots activists play in the agenda setting stage of urban public policy.