

FR10.30.18 Actioning the Progressive City

Winning at City Hall: Community Labor Partnerships in the Neoliberal City

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What explains the recent success of municipal minimum wages and other city-level reforms to labor policy? Noting the success of Occupy Wall Street and the long-delayed emergence of income inequality as a political issue, scholars and media accounts attribute success to the inequality moment, and the appeal of policies demonstrated to impact economic equity. Drawing on sustained fieldwork with community-labor advocacy organizations in Chicago, we argue that power, rather than persuasion, explains the policy shift. We identify three institutional and political transformations, beyond the growing focus on inequality, that suggest alternate means by which municipal employment reforms may succeed or fail. First, the maturation of community-labor partnerships in Chicago enabled reform advocates to take advantage of political opportunities. Second, the development of nationally networked urban policy communities positioned these coalitions as de facto policy entrepreneurs able to advance their measures as timely solutions to pressing problems. Third, these advocates drew on expanded coalitions and discourse communities mobilized through disruptive dissensus. These factors will differentially enable and constrain reform opportunities in U.S. cities, depending on local institutional arrangements, histories and political dynamics.

Distribution as Development: Rethinking the Politics of Urban Equity

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Distributional fairness constitutes a central goal of urban reform coalitions engaged in efforts to improve quality of life amidst growing inequality in cities. But the question of how to achieve fairness remains controversial, if not intractable. For decades, political economists have agreed that the weak powers accorded to cities under U.S. federalism, and the disproportionate influence of developers and corporate interests make urban distributive policy unobtainable. While conventional wisdom suggests a clear tradeoff between distribution and growth (or development), a growing body of work casts this as false: Rather than detract from economic development, distributional fairness constitutes an essential pre-condition for robust and sustained growth. Evidence that policies like local living wages are not “job killers” has shifted the argumentative terrain away from short-term questions about job loss and towards issues of self-sufficiency, upward mobility and public benefits uptake: developmental issues that locate municipal labor reforms within long-term questions about the growth, development and transformation of regional economies. We argue that these related conceptions of equity and development can be integrated into a formal theory of distribution as development. We draw on theories of regional development and recent empirical work on equitable regions to identify the pathways through which distributional fairness enhances the economic growth it has previously been seen to hamper. We then

propose a framework specifying the mechanisms, scales and outcomes through which distributional fairness contributes to economic development. We then illustrate the value of this approach by contrasting distributional and developmental approaches to municipal minimum wage laws. Clarifying a framework linking distribution to development can help to identify changes in conceptualizations and practices of equity politics, clarify the means through which current reform movements are circumventing longstanding urban political limitations, and open up new spaces of theory and practice for urban equity politics.

Progressive Options for Detroit Under Conditions of Austerity

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The progressive city of the 20th century relied upon community institutions, including local government, public schools, churches, labor unions, and neighborhood organizations, to build a progressive movement. Capturing the resources of the local state to pursue redistributive policies was the goal of many of these urban social movements. However, under the austerity measures of the 21st century, declining cities and especially declining local states and state-level budgets have meant a greater reliance upon privatization, venture philanthropy, and do-it-yourself governance. The case of Detroit, MI is a singularly extreme example of austerity politics as well as an important example of 20th century progressive urban politics, where the capture of the local state by African-American citizens was more complete than any other US city. But the question remains, does progressive urban governance of the 1960s provide any lessons for the 21st century, when foundational community institutions no longer exist in the same way, especially organization of the local state? This paper examines the efforts to reinvent progressivism as community has been dismantled in Detroit in the 21st century.

Inclusive Urban Development: The Role of Community Organizations Advocating for Housing across the US and Brazil

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Cities across the globe increasingly adopt formal institutions to provide civil society organizations with greater access to the policy process and greater voice in the adoption and implementation of policies and programs. In this paper I seek to compare the inclusion of community organizations in governance across four key cities: Washington, DC, Atlanta, Rio de Janeiro, and São Paulo. Though these cities differ by socio-economic characteristics and political histories, they all face the challenge of providing affordable housing and preventing displacement resulting from economic growth and gentrification. These cities also vary in the extent to which elected officials embrace a progressive vision and the institutions that exist to incorporate diverse voices. This paper answers two key questions: 1) how do community organizations across diverse contexts participate in city institutions to confront similar challenges, and 2) what is the effect of incorporation of community organizations on policies and programs related to low-income housing.

A Policy Agenda for the Progressive City

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There is an 'urban resurgence' supposedly occurring that frames cities as resilient in the face of external political and economic crises and innovative and facilitative in their search for solutions. 'New localism' represents a pragmatic 'third way' politics that uneasily combines elements of both dominant and alternative political projects such as neoliberalism, anti-statism, communitarianism, diversity, and participation. We find a massive gap in the magnitude of problems facing cities and the meagre political and policy responses lauded by this recent version of new localism. We need a wider policy vision and programme rather than siloed and ad hoc policy tweaks. This begs the question whether there is a coherent alternative urban vision based on transformative notions of social justice, equity, and public responsibility. While there may be instances of progressive policy experiments as well as cases of an emerging politics, cities lack substantive progressive visions, holistic policy agendas, administrations, governance relations, and political coalitions. In this paper, we make a case for actioning the progressive city by beginning with public policy. A critical policy focus allows for an understanding of how capital translates into peoples' everyday lives through their ability to access and inform decisions about essential services and amenities and how this intersects in practice with other forms of inequality, such as gender and race. It is this everyday experience that forms the basis for political mobilization. In this paper, we identify a 'five point' policy agenda that includes affordable housing, employment, social policy, transportation, and environmental sustainability. We then examine how a progressive politics and administration can be built around this policy vision to support the governance relations necessary for actioning a progressive city.