

Rescaling Global Governance: Imagining the Demise of the Nation-State

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ABSTRACT *Much has been written recently about the supposed decline in the sovereign power of nation-states due to global economic processes and the emergence of supranational governing institutions like the World Trade Organization, the World Bank, NAFTA, the EU, etc. This has posed what some consider a problem for still largely nation-state-centric social theory in terms of making sense of what appears to be a major transformation in global governance patterns and institutions. This article argues that the apparent transformation in global governance is less historically revolutionary than evolutionary with the key being a shift in power relations among capitalist class factions at all levels of governance. Toward substantiating this claim, the article focuses on what some argue to be the (re)-emerging global political-economic significance of subnational city-regions as a result of the apparent geographic rescaling of global governance downward from dominant inter-nation-state relations. Of importance is that this apparent (re)emergence of sovereign actors at the subnational city-region scale is largely the result of this contemporary new regionalist discourse essentially rendering itself a reality. It is therefore a highly contested, and contestable, phenomenon, even in the overwhelmingly neoliberal context of the United States.*

Keywords: global governance, city-regions, new regionalism

It is now increasingly commonplace to suggest that global processes are transforming the spaces of global political economy, particularly in terms of what appears to be the diminishing power of the nation-state in the face of growing supra- and subnational power. Yet, it remains the case that much theoretical and empirical accounting of global political-economic processes in the scholarly and policy literature still assumes what has been called a certain ‘methodological nationalism’ (Agnew, 2009; Wimmer and Schiller, 2002). This article first discusses why it is so difficult to think beyond this hegemonic spatial imaginary of the nation-state as primary

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global actor in order to make better sense of the current spatial rescaling of global political economies. Particular emphasis is placed on what appears to be the growing sub-nation-state regionalization of globally significant power as an alternative spatial imaginary of contemporary globalization. After surveying what I consider to be the four main strands of this 'new regionalist' literature, a brief account of subnational regional trends in the United States is provided as a possible harbinger of subnational regionalization processes in more centralized political economies. The key throughout is to determine better the precise characteristics, or even the reality, of this apparent subnational rescaling of power in order then to determine more precisely the potential implications for global political-economic relations in general.

Rescaling Global Geopolitics?

The specific focus here then is on the theoretical implication of what appears to be the growing prominence of subnational city-regions. The rise of so-called global city-regions as what some call crucial 'nodes' of power within rapidly growing political-economic 'networks and flows' would seem to have enormous implications for the reality of contemporary political power relations across the globe, particularly in terms of metropolitan activities that apparently cannot any longer be entirely regulated by nation-states. This growth in city-region-centric global relations is central to what has been called the 'hollowing-out' of nation-state power from 'below' (Brenner, 2004).

Before addressing this issue directly, however, I want both to think through the very difficulty of thinking away from the nation-state as primary global actor and, in turn, to think more carefully about what 'actor' means in this regard (Archer et al., 2008). Thinking away from the nation-state is so difficult because, again, state-centrism has become normal science in the academy (Lacher, 2003). There is a powerful path-dependence to our ontological commitments here which has rendered a rather broad ontological community that cuts right through disciplinary boundaries. While perhaps only mythically real (Teschke, 2003), the Westphalian episode has quite solidified what can be called an absolute understanding of space and spatial relations over the long centuries since 1648.

The Westphalian proviso that the sovereign had sovereign decision-making over a 'people', both rural and urban, is the very source of the still prevailing imaginary of space as absolute, bounded territorial containers of inside and outside. Exercising sovereign decision-making authority over a people rendered it necessary to determine precisely *where* this people were located with the utmost precision. In this new regime of political sovereignty, there could be no overlapping secular and ecclesiastic territorial jurisdictions.

While this may be a common account of the geopolitical importance of Westphalia, it is clear that this rescaling of geopolitical relations did not happen overnight; that is, state-centric, bounded territorial space took time to be established out of the complex, spatially overlapping geopolitical relations of the Middle Ages. This may seem an obvious point, but it serves to underscore that the current rescaling of global geopolitics will also take time and only be observable contemporarily through a glass darkly. Indeed, for much of the former imperialized, capitalist or communist, world, nation-state centrism, imposed in most cases by imperial force, never has been fully established.

Moreover, the post-Westphalian territorially bounded 'people' over whom the sovereign exercised power were, in most cases, really 'peoples' culturally speaking. The states most successful in exercising territorial sovereignty via the maintenance of their boundaries thus became those most able to create a more unified people-citizenry more accepting of the decisions of the

territorial state. Force and civil war were not enough for this to hold, so political concession and compromise were necessary in creating this territorially based 'imagined community' (Anderson, 2006). What will become known as 'nation-building' in the later age of nationalism was already an issue very early in new state-centric post-Westphalian territorial geopolitics of 'domestic' insides and 'international' outsides.

It is no wonder, then, that the spatial imaginary of territorially bounded nation-states remains the hegemonic one among Westerners and Western-trained. To this day, the legendary originality of the Westphalian ur-episode has been rehearsed repeatedly in the scholarly and policy literature, thereby ideologically reinforcing the lived reality of territorial sovereignty and the maintenance (fix and re-fix) of 'international' boundaries. The 'theory', indeed, explained the 'reality' of global relations all the way up to the last decades of the twentieth century; at least for most.

Others more critical, however, have long observed that some states have been more sovereign than others and that citizen-nations have never been fully constructed, even in the most powerful Western states as witnessed by recently resurgent ethno-nationalism. These critical accounts are important because they successfully expose more than one myth in the legend of Westphalia (Teschke, 2003). Nevertheless the present concern remains the continuing 'methodological nationalism' that cuts across social theory. This form of normal science, combined with what can be called banal nation-state centrism at more popular levels of discourse, makes it extremely difficult to develop an alternative spatial imaginary more conducive to understanding the rescaling of global relations in the contemporary age.

A major aspect in the maintenance of methodological nationalism is that the space-time of politics simply lends itself to an absolute or 'container' view of spatial relations as a result of the durability of institutions of government themselves. Yet critical geographers have long recognized the importance of understanding humanly constructed space in relative as well as absolute terms. Space is not always a container, in this regard, as even political space is always relative to how it is produced. Humans construct their spatial relations according to how they construct their lives, economically, politically, and culturally. And since such a construction process is always ongoing and open to change, so are spatial relations. In the most abstract terms, the form human relational space takes at any one point in time is merely the spatial confluence of ever changing social relations at that particular point; in short, social process creates spatial form, which in turn conditions social process which creates spatial form and so on (Harvey, 1982; Smith, 1990).

This socially constructed, relative understanding of space has been most worked out by Marxist geographers concerned with the production of space as a result of the process of capitalist accumulation. As Cox (2001, p. 753) so crisply summarizes:

... capital transforms both the objects that constitute space and their arrangement with respect to one another. Capitalist space is, to an unprecedented degree, an artificial one in which knowledge of the properties of naturally occurring substances and forces has been mobilized so as to transform the world and convert it into a form that will facilitate accumulation ... The creation of new spatial arrangements, new concrete spaces, further the development of the productive forces; while the speeding up of the circulation of capital made possible by improved means of transportation and communications, increases the mass of capital which can be valorized in a given period of time and indeed space.

This is a major sense of what Harvey (1982, 1985, 2006) calls the 'spatial fix' (and re-fix) of capitalist accumulation; once capitalist space is constructed, it conditions the next round of accumulation and the construction of new spaces of both production and consumption, or

spatially embedded, 'structural coherences' of social reproduction and potential class alliances (see below).

Yet, grasping what may be the significant reordering of contemporary political relations still presents a problem given the very nature of political space-time. There has been much discussion in the literature, for example, about new spatial 'scales' of the government and governance that are emerging as a result of globalization (Brenner, 2001; Jones, 1998; Lobao et al., 2009; Swyngedouw, 1997, 2004). As described below, this notion of the 'rescaling' of the state is meant to capture the relativity of political spatial relations. However, this rescaling literature tends in fact to reify scales in the same absolute spatial manner that normal nation-state-centric literature does; so much so, that others have argued for a conception of space 'without scale' altogether (Marston et al., 2005). It is necessary, then, to attempt to push this scalar argument further toward a fully relative view of political space-time.

Toward a New Spatial Imaginary of Global Relations

Rather than proceed down the post-structuralist path with these last cited authors, then, I suggest a twofold gesture in order to break away from an absolute, state-centric, container view of political space. First, a focus on the differential construction of economic, political, and cultural space-times is useful. The construction of political space-time proceeds at a different historical pace than that of economic space-time. This particularly has been the case with the emergence of capitalism. Yet, even capitalist economic space-time tended to move to rhythms mostly congruent with political space-times, as capital was nationalized via state regulatory regimes and internal homogenization on through the Keynesian era of the late twentieth century. The exception was outward imperialism, but even this was regulated in a nation-state-centric way. In short, it is only most recently that the ongoing construction of capitalist space-time has come out of sync with political and, indeed, cultural space-time, as has been described by the myriad commentators on contemporary globalization (Harvey, 1989; Jameson, 1991).

Second, one needs to interrogate more carefully the concept of the 'state' itself. Much has been written about the nature of the state that makes it clear that it is an institution that encloses political negotiation and even class conflict (Jessop, 2002). The state involves dynamic social processes, both in construction and function. And, yet, most commentators continue to reify the state as a homogeneous actor, one that, for example, is either losing agency in the face of globalization or is actively facilitating this very process. Consider the following set of questions posed in a recent book concerning the 'emergence of private authority in global governance':

Where evidence exists that functions that were once the exclusive, sovereign prerogatives of the state have devolved to the responsibility private actors, the question of state complicity arises. In such cases, is the state complicit in the devolution of its authority to private actors? Has the state delegated authority, enabled authority, or simply allowed authority to slip away, and for what purpose? Or is the state merely impotent to do much about this devolution of authority? (Hall and Biersteker, 2002, pp. 7–8)

The implication is that the state is an actor which acts as one that chooses one mode of action over another. But characterizing state activity in this way makes it difficult to conceive just how these final decisions get made; that is, *whose* interests within the state have, in fact, prevailed and why. In this respect, the 'state' becomes what Marcuse (2005) suggests the 'city' has become in the literature on global cities: a 'perverse metaphor' that hides more than it reveals in that it

suggests that the 'city' acts as one when in fact only certain, more powerful, agents within the city act in a certain way, to the detriment of less powerful agents.

The explicit recognition that the state is a dynamic social institution renders it possible to conceive better how different state agents pursue their interests as opposed to others. In terms of the issue at hand, those state agents most interested in promoting the process of globalization are the ones attempting to use state authority to promote this process at all levels, federal, state, and local. These agents are global actors within localized institutions: or what have been called '*glocal*' actors (Swyngedouw, 1997). But, importantly, when conceived in this way, it becomes apparent that the success of such state actors is never certain. Rather, it is always a contested outcome in this institutional arena of competing interests. This opens the possibility for conceiving points of resistance to globalizing pressures as well as recognizing state agents most likely to resist.

This twofold gesture toward differential economic, political, and cultural space-times as well as toward conceiving the state as a dynamic social institution allows for a quite different spatial imaginary to emerge. Now space is conceived as always relative to different social relations and complexly so. Similarly, the institution and authority of the state is conceived as relative to the social relations within the institution as well as to the ultimate decisions that are rendered from among competing interests. Thus, the relationship between the processes of globalization and the state, at any level of jurisdiction, cannot be determined a priori. Instead the role of the 'state' in this process can only be determined via close examination of the process and outcome of competitive social relations within both national and subnational state institutions.

An Emerging World of Subnational Regions?

To render this abstract discussion more concrete necessitates a closer examination of the growing literature concerning what appears to be the uneven, subnational or regional nature of contemporary globalization (Beaverstock et al., 2000; Cox, 2009; Etherington and Jones, 2009; Hudson, 2006; Jones and Macleod, 2004; Scott, 2001b; Scott and Storper, 2003). This transdisciplinary 'new regionalist' literature can be characterized as having a loosely fourfold focus, with admitted overlap. First, there is a focus on the importance of agglomeration economies of proximity involving what are called untraded interdependencies in the regionalization of particular 'clusters' of firms in similar or related industries. Sometimes considered as industrial districts, such clustering is considered to be the result of the competitive advantage of the spatial proximity of related firms and, it follows, such clustering should be encouraged actively by policymakers as a means to generate economic growth in general (Porter, 2001; Saxenian, 1994; Storper, 1997). The emphasis in this literature is on the ways in which such agglomeration economies represent a denationalization of economies to the regional level in a highly uneven mode of development. In turn, the very unevenness of such spatial development fosters an overall economic environment of increasing regional competition.

A second focus of this new regionalist literature on the growing prominence of subnational regions considers the more cultural aspects of regionalization. On the one hand, there are those who put emphasis on the creation of 'social capital' (Cooke and Morgan, 1998; McLean et al., 2002; Putnam, 2000) as part of the untraded interdependencies noted above: the idea of so-called 'learning regions', 'innovative milieux', and, in close respects, 'creative cities' (Florida, 1995). On the other hand are those who emphasize the human attachment to place, the continuing need for 'belonging' in an apparently increasingly place-less world of globalization (Croucher, 2004). Overall, this more cultural approach to regions is useful in its emphasis on actual human agency.

A third focus of the new regionalist literature is arguably more specific in its emphasis on the emergence and hierarchy of so-called 'global cities' (Abu-Lughod, 1999; Beaverstock et al., 2000; Sassen, 1991, 1994; Taylor, 2001). Emerging out of the wider world-systems literature, global city scholars describe global networks and flows which come together in metropolitan 'nodes' or sites of more or fewer command and control centers of such flows. The implication is that such city nodes have more in common with, and are more related to, other such nodes than they do, or are, with more nationally embedded cities or with the nation-state itself. This world system of cities is considered the frontal spatial manifestation of globalization itself. Monitoring the expansion, as well as the changing hierarchy of power, within the global city network, thus provides a gauge of the very progress of globalization.

The fourth new regionalist focus is different from the previous three, and much is made of this difference in what follows. This concerns what some have called the emergence and spread of 'multilevel' government or what others, more critically, have called the 'rescaling' of the state as a result of an apparent weakening of nation-states in the face of globalization as mentioned above. The idea here is that government has migrated 'above' the nation-state toward supranational institutions like the EU, NAFTA, etc., as well as 'below' the nation-state to regions and localities. Of interest here is the specific focus on what one of the main authors in this literature calls the process of 'state rescaling' toward 'post-national' scales of government (Brenner, 2004).

It is apparent from this wide and ever growing body of new regionalist literature, then, that the process of globalization is materializing spatially in a quite uneven manner. Global relations appear to be changing rapidly as a result of this subnational regionalization of the global political economy. The key, however, is whether or not these changes actually signify a geopolitical move toward post nation-state-centric relations—or perhaps a 'neo-medieval' return to pre nation-state-centric relations (Holsinger, 2007)—or, instead, that nation-state agents are simply rescaling governmental relations on the basis of the neoliberal market fundamentalist ideology of competition and efficiency. According to this latter view, the nation-state is not weak or disappearing in the face of globalization but, rather, it is being retooled in terms of regulatory oversight by some state agents in order for the national economy to succeed in the face of perceived global competition (Aman, Jr, 2004). In any case, it is clear from this fourfold focus of the new regionalist literature that significant economic, political, and even cultural changes are afoot at the subnational level that call into serious question the otherwise default methodological nationalism of much commentary concerning contemporary globalization.

The Discursive and Material Construction of Subnational Regions

Yet, again, do these subnational processes, as perceived in the new regionalist literature, actually constitute a significant rescaling of global governance away from the nation-state? It is now commonplace, for example, to state that globalization is as much a discourse as it is a reality. Could this be the case with regard to this so-called new regionalism? New regionalists, for example, provide study after study corroborating their particular focus on the regional nature of economic, political, and cultural relations as a result of globalization. But is any of this new or, in fact, real? Agglomeration economies have always existed in the process of capitalist accumulation (Marshall, 1890), and the possibility of consciously creating such as a means toward successful development has long been in vogue among policymakers (Boudeville and Antoine, 1968; Perroux, 1961).

The lack of conceptual and related empirical specificity in much of this new regionalist literature in fact has led some to argue that the new regionalist assertions are merely 'fuzzy', vague generalizations (Hudson, 2003). As such, they afford precious little opportunity for the empirical verification of either the descriptive/explanatory or the proscriptive/policy oriented proclamations. This is particularly true of notions like 'clusters', 'learning' or 'innovative' regions, or 'creative' cities. Martin and Sunley (2003, p. 25), for example, describe one recent governmental study on biotechnology 'clusters' which identifies such clusters in virtually every region of the UK; surely news to those in more peripheral, less developed regions. These authors go on to list no fewer than 10 distinct definitions in the literature of what a regionally specific industrial 'cluster' might be.

Similarly, precisely defining, let alone empirically identifying, 'untraded interdependencies' or 'social capital' and collaboration is well-nigh impossible. No wonder then that new regionalist approaches which emphasize such have caught on with policymakers (OECD, 2005, 2007, 2009). Who can be against social cohesion as a development goal? In short, it is worth recalling that the specific discourses of new regionalism, much like those of globalization, do not necessarily depict reality but certainly can create a reality when absorbed and acted upon by policymakers.

This is why it is important to interrogate this alternative spatial imaginary of contemporary globalization more critically. Reflecting more closely on the four main foci of the new regionalist literature outlined above, the question becomes what the relationship among these foci might be, or even if there is a relationship. For example, the driving force behind subnational regionalization would seem to depend on which of these foci one adopts. This suggests the very real possibility that new regionalists are not describing the same evolving regional reality, whether in more objective descriptive, or more hopeful prescriptive, terms. And this explains why, as others notice (Hudson, 2006; Lovering, 1999, 2001), political devolution to the regional level has not, in most cases, led to regional economic success; or, alternatively, why even 'global cities' at the top of the network hierarchy still suffer from internal wealth polarization and otherwise quite uneven economic development (Marcuse, 2005); or why, finally, cities like New Orleans or Detroit, with all the traditional and contemporary 'creativity' they enclose, cannot get on the bandwagon of global developmental success.

In the end, a more productive approach would be to pay closer attention to the connections among these economic, political and cultural 'regionalizations'. In the literature just such an attempt is made by way of the broader focus on the social production of spatial scales in general, not just politically (Brenner, 2004; Swyngedouw, 2004). This is closely related to—in fact, is the inspirational source of—the hitherto described state rescaling approach to be sure, but unlike this latter it emphasizes the production of spatial scale as an inherent aspect of the production of space in general, as noted above. Focus here is on the social construction of spatial scale and what are called periodic 'scalar transformations' or, in terminology introduced above, the 'fix' and 're-fix' of spatial forms in the process of capitalist accumulation (Smith, 1990; Swyngedouw, 2004) Importantly, in this literature, scales are not just produced via 'flows' through 'networks' condensing into agglomerative 'clusters' and 'nodes' and so on. Rather emphasis is placed on the making and remaking of cultural, political, and economic scales of organization and regulation. Attention is then paid to the significance of differential scalar positioning of social groups in the resulting spatial power geometries of capitalism.

In short, this enhanced scalar approach to spatial development pays closer attention to the contested political nature of the process. What regions actually are, as well as how they are formed, depends on the production of confluent (or power-geometric) subnational economic, political,

and cultural scalar spaces. And this production process and the spatial gestalt that is formed thereof are inherently politically contested phenomena rather than foregone conclusions that can be simply read off of economic agglomeration processes (Keil and Mahon, 2009).

The Real Geopolitics of Subnational Regions

This enhanced scalar approach to the production of spatial relations makes it easier to conceive of human agency in the process. In turn, the notion of periodic scalar change provides a useful lens through which to view current changes in global political economy. In this spatial imaginary, some human groups have more power in both the production and use of space than others. In the present context, some factions of capital which produce and operate within supranational space have much more power to secure their interests than other factions more tied to space at subnational levels. Yet, the scalar argument suggests that this might not always be the case. More subnationally bound groups may be able to 'jump scales' with their interests to contend on a more even political field. Prominent examples of this would be the Zapatista movement's successful global appeal for support for its subnational Chiapas-based movement or the European-wide labor movement against Renault in opposition to the closing of a major Belgian plant (Swyngedouw, 2004). Indeed, a major political goal of much of this enhanced scalar literature is precisely to reveal the necessity of such a 'jump' on the part of more place-bound oppressed in this age of globalization.

Nevertheless, as noted, even this notion of 'scales' tends to bias this otherwise sophisticated spatial imaginary toward an absolute view of space in that it connotes closed or bounded spaces. To avoid such reification, emphasis needs continually to be put on the *ongoing* construction of space and place as a result of the process of capitalist accumulation via Harvey's conceptions of 'spatial fix' and the construction of 'structured coherences' of economic, political, and cultural space (Harvey, 1985, 2006). Such an approach makes clearer the linkages among the quite differential space-times of capitalist economic, political, and cultural relations variously identified within the four foci of the new regionalist literature.

The basic idea is that capitalist accumulation always produces a concrete space of production and consumption via investment in production plant, transportation and communications networks, buildings to house command and control functions, etc. Capital has to materialize in a concrete geography of production and consumption and this geography is open to change as production processes change. Capital cannot be somehow 'deterritorialized' even in its most ethereal state of finance, as Sassen (2006), for example, has emphasized in her ongoing account of global cities. Harvey's notion of 'spatial fix' underscores this but also signals the very necessity of continually fixing and re-fixing space as a result of the needs of accumulation. The ongoing (re)production of space is thus a 'fix' that helps ensure the survival of the system as a whole as the construction of new spaces absorbs underutilized capital and labor surpluses via the actual construction of new spatially fixed production/consumption complexes as well as the new production processes that these complexes will host. And so regions are industrialized and deindustrialized and, perhaps, reindustrialized anew, as the experience of some parts of what was called the 'rust-belt' of the United States exemplifies. Spatial rescaling of capitalist accumulation thus is a crucial means by which capitalism survives.

The second part of this argument concerning the construction of capitalist space-time concerns what Harvey calls place-based 'social expenditures'. Unlike new regionalist literature on economic agglomeration emphasizing flows, networks, and nodes, Harvey makes much clearer the relationship among these economic structural forces and human relations within

the spatial forms constructed. Borrowing the notion from the French theorist Aydalot (1976), Harvey (1985, p. 146) considers more broadly the construction of a 'structured coherence' of *both* production and consumption:

This structured coherence ... embraces the forms and technologies of production (patterns of resource use, inter-industry linkages, forms of organization, size of firm), the technologies, quantities and qualities of consumption (the standard and style of living of both labour and the bourgeoisie), patterns of labour demand and supply (hierarchies of labour skills and social reproduction processes to ensure the supply of same) and of physical and social infrastructures ...

And this territorial coherence becomes even more established when formally represented by political institutions. It is all of these processes, economic, political, and cultural, according to this spatial imaginary, which give rise to the regional spaces of capitalist accumulation.

Given the ongoing process of accumulation, however, the spatial boundaries of such regional spaces are necessarily highly porous. As Harvey (1985, p. 147) notes, the 'persistence of any type of structured regional coherence ... appears surprising', especially as the spatial mobilities of now even industrial capital and labor have increased over the last several decades. In terminology used here, the velocity of the constructed space-time of the capitalist economy has increased dramatically in relation to that of politics and culture. This explains why, as others note (Hudson, 2006; Keating, 1998; Painter, 2008), the spatial boundaries of contemporary regional economic clustering are generally 'incongruous' with those of political and cultural 'clustering'. A differing answer to Macleod and Jones's (2007) question 'in what sense a regional world?' then has to be 'in many senses', but not in simply chaotic ways. The continuous drive of capital accumulation which leads to the fix and re-fix of spatial coherences of production and consumption ultimately forces adaptation of previously structured political and cultural spatial coherences. But, importantly, this adaptation is never smooth, nor is its outcome a foregone conclusion. Instead it is always a highly contested social process whether in terms of conflict between more or less place-bound state actors or, indeed, other actors with more or less cultural capital invested in previous regional spaces.

A Harbinger for a Subnational 'Regional World'?: The Experience of the United States

The subheading is intentionally provocative. The discourse concerning the contemporary process of globalization is overwhelmingly dominated by the idea that it entails a stark neoliberalization of the global political economy. The neoliberal ideal to deregulate markets, shrink and otherwise model government and governance on market principles via privatization, and devolve public authority and decision-making from national to subnational institutions and actors (or, indeed, for global 'efficiency' to supranational institutions and actors) apparently rules the day. In the words of former Democratic President Bill Clinton, the 'days of big government are over', a phrase repeated mantra-like ever since in the United States. In a word, a market fundamentalism has spread globally and, since the fall of communism, no alternative seems to exist in this globalizing 'end of history' discourse. Indeed, the new regionalist literature discussed above both describes and reflects this hegemony in its focus on the rise of regions as a result of the deregulation of spatial development at both the national and subnational state levels. But, again, is this regionalizing world an inevitability or even really as real as it is being depicted?

This latter is a question that must be asked repeatedly, particularly of what essentially is a quite conventional developmentalist discourse, however 'regionalist', and particularly of a

discourse from which emerges such a vacuous concept as 'creative cities'. Not only that, but in the context of the United States, it is difficult not to feel a certain familiarity after reading this largely European-dominated new regionalist literature. While some have argued that, even within the European context, the new regionalist literature overstates its case (Cox, 2001, 2009; Hudson, 2003), within the context of the United States this case seems to describe what has always, more or less, been the case. The nation-state has always been 'hollow' in the United States, compared to more centralized polities elsewhere and government and governance has always been highly decentralized, even through the Keynesian postwar period. Moreover, active state policy aimed at spatially balanced development has never been a major concern at any level, national or subnational. In short, in relative terms, neoliberalism always has been the norm in the United States rendering state regulation ever weak vis-à-vis private sector power and the hegemonic ideology of market fundamentalism. It would seem, then, that a closer look at the socially contested construction of globalizing space-times in the United States would be essential to understanding the likely effects elsewhere. In the remainder of this article, I can only gesture at such.

Subnational Regionalization in the United States

In many ways, the US case seems an unlikely one to exemplify best subnational trends identified by new regionalists. Again, unlike polities in Europe and elsewhere, state power has always been decentralized to the extent that one commentator, echoing common perception, has suggested that increasingly popular assertions of the recent 'devolution' of nation-state power as a result of globalization are relatively meaningless in the already 'devolved' context of US politics. For example, the US Census Bureau identified a total of 89,476 subnational municipal, town and township, county, special and school district governments in 2007, a number little changed today (US Census Bureau, 2007). Traditional American mistrust of centralized political authority is manifest in this system where it is quite literally believed that all effective politics are, and should remain, local. And this is really the key to the present argument. The changes taking place in subnational politics in the United States provide an important context within which the contemporary rescaling of political time-space can be identified. Glocal agents in local states are not promoting devolution alone. They also are promoting what they consider to be the best way to rescale the local state to better meet the pressures of neoliberal globalization processes: in this case, by actually scaling government up to the more expansive county level of jurisdiction.

In general, there has been an increasing involvement on the part of subnational states in the United States in the global arena (Savitch and Kantor, 2002). Most of this activity has been concerned with economic issues, but there have also been some attempts on the part of states like California to involve themselves in global environmental regulation. In turn, there have been the traditional cultural relationships like global 'sister-city' arrangements that appear to be expanding. Of interest is that this growing global role of subnational states has been a *perceived* necessity becoming reality. As responsibility for much social, economic development, and regulatory policy authority has long devolved from the national to the subnational state, subnational states have had to ensure their own fiscal viability as well the economic and social sustainability of their jurisdictions. And given the hegemonic neoliberal discourse concerning the economic exigencies of globalization, to ensure such things necessarily requires, in the first instance, more competitive engagement with global economic forces.

While economic boosterism on the part of what Logan and Molotch (1987) years ago termed the 'urban growth machine' (also Jonas and Wilson, 1999) has long been a characteristic of decentralized urban politics in the United States, there are two current trends that require more notice here. The first is the changing nature and focus of urban growth machines and the second is the characteristics of what also has been called, in the United States, the 'new regionalist' movement, although with a different, singularly political, connotation. In terms of the first, traditional growth machines involved major economic actors most central to the structured coherence of particular places: those representing major department stores, local newspapers, industrial firms, local banks, etc., in alliance with local politicians. These actors were thoroughly embedded in the specific spatial coherence the fortunes of which they hoped to 'boost'.

With the economic changes wrought by the fall of what Keynesian policies existed and the rise of exclusively neoliberal, efficient market-state policies, however, most of these actors have declined in local economic significance or have relocalized altogether, either nationally or globally. Traditional manufacturing firms have disappeared, and corporate changes have rendered department stores, banks, and even newspapers merely local brands of chains operating at the national and even global levels. As Strom (2008) describes, at the urban level, the locally embedded boosters that remain are mainly financial institutions with much local exposure, real estate developers, and, significantly, those firms in the entertainment and leisure industries marketing the city now as a place of consumption. I will not discuss the implications of this change much here except to underscore that this new growth machine has much weaker and fewer place-specific ties. Moreover, the focus on leisure consumption is creating urban economies of both low wage jobs and serial urban developments in which every city must have its aquaria, sports stadia, festival marketplace, arts museum, etc., whether truly economically viable or not.

What I will focus on is this contemporary 'new regionalist' movement. This US version is reenergizing the notion that, because of the myriad local governments in any metropolitan region, a more 'efficient' construction of political space would be the metropolitan region. In the US context this generally connotes city-county political consolidation, an idea that has a long history but which is here recast. Traditionally, the idea of regional political consolidation was presented as a means to simplify subnational governance, provide economies of scale for public services, and in general raise the economic profile of the entire region by evening out development among richer and poorer localities. This traditional approach to city-county consolidation put the most emphasis on the efficiencies garnered by the centralization and harmonization of public authority over wider territorial swathes of resources and people. Such a centralization of authority would lower the number of internecine political conflicts among myriad proximal jurisdictions at the same time as it would eliminate unnecessary duplication of public services. Interestingly, though, no matter the apparent logic of this traditional argument there actually have been very few large scale city-county consolidations over the last 40 years. Before the city of Louisville, Kentucky consolidated with surrounding Jefferson County in 2003, only Indianapolis, Indiana (1970), Jacksonville, Florida (1968), and Nashville, Tennessee (1963) had so consolidated (Savitch and Vogel, 2004). That this is the case suggests something about the cultural space-time imagined and constructed by the voting population as a form of resistance to more rapidly evolving economic and political spatial imaginaries and constructing space-times.

But this has come into view clearly only recently. The Louisville case is important, in this respect, because it has caused quite a stir among subnational politicians. Much like the idea of 'creative cities' (with its obvious linkage to the emerging metropolis of consumption),

Louisville's city-county consolidation is increasingly considered a successful model for many other aspiring new regionalist policymakers to emulate. As Savitch et al. (2009, p. 2) describe, other cities like Fresno, San Antonio, Milwaukie, Memphis, Buffalo, and 'many other localities showed an interest in following Louisville's lead' (also Brenner, 2002; Savitch and Vogel, 2004). Now, however, the key argument in favor of such regionalization, according to (Leland and Thurmaier, 2010), is not so much greater efficiency in governance, but rather that regionalization will lead to greater economic development, particularly in the face of growing global competition. To the extent that glocal agents at the subnational level can get this message across, these authors suggest, the more chance there is that rescaling local governance up to the regional level will be allowed by local voters. In short, this new regionalist energizing of the traditional city-county consolidation argument has come with a concerted, almost singular emphasis on the likely *economic* effects of regionalization. To be globally competitive, the argument goes, newly consolidated governments would be better able to harmonize regional economic regulation, make regulatory decisions much more efficiently, and otherwise serve as both a united voice and a one-stop shopping site for migratory capital interested in lighting down territorially.

This attempt to reconstruct the space-time of subnational governance clearly is an attempt to bring this space-time more in sync with that of globalizing capital. But, importantly, this is a highly contested attempt, as others have well documented (Bullard, 2007; Imbroscio, 2006). There is indeed opposition to this political move by subnational glocal actors that contests the otherwise hegemonic spatial imaginary of the necessity of regionalizing governance. This opposition considers questions of equity and democratic accountability involved in rescaling subnational governance up to a larger, more centralized power structure ultimately more attuned to suburban and dominantly white interests and thus involving a loss of institutional power on the part of more inner city actors and people of color. Stronger executive power at the regional level essentially renders the economic, political, and cultural interests of these latter ever of minority status and thus ever lacking political clout (Carr and Feiock, 2004; Kantor, 2007).

After thoroughly evaluating the outcome to date of the Louisville consolidation, for example, Savitch and Vogel (2004) conclude that the push for regional consolidation, while couched in terms of policy efficiency, was actually more about pushing what they call private—or what I call glocal—agendas of advantage and power in the reconstruction of political space-time. Not only that, but these authors found that none of the so-called 'efficiencies' of policy actually materialized, nor was promised economic development (let alone greater spatial economic equity) achieved. This failure to deliver on its promises, leads Feiock (2004, p. 49) to wonder why there has been a broad resurgence of interest of late in such regionalism in the United States. But there is really no mystery here. Glocal interests at the subnational level are simply attempting to render subnational governance more conducive to the needs of global capitalist accumulation. The bottom line is that the discourse of 'new regionalist' scholars and policymakers both in Europe and the United States actually provides the ideological legitimation for this resurgence of attempts to reconstruct political space-time at the subnational level in order to meet the needs of global capital.

Globalized Spatial Imaginaries and the Reality of Subnational Regions in the United States

I have sought to sort through the apparently substantive changes taking place in the global political economy which have, in turn, resulted in changing global relations. Much emphasis has

been placed on the role of new regionalist discourses and the materially productive role of such spatial imaginaries. The main impetus has been to determine at what spatial scales governance appears to be crystallizing in this age of globalization; or, in Allen's terms (2004, p. 29), to find the 'whereabouts of government' in these times of the apparent 'hollowing-out' of nation-state power.

To accomplish this task required coming to grips with what the ever-expanding new regionalist literature describes as a growing regionalization of political-economic activity as a result of globalization. Making use of Harvey's (1985, 2006) linked notions of 'spatial fix' and the construction of spatially 'structured coherences' of production and consumption, I develop an alternative spatial imaginary of the relative space-times of capitalist accumulation, politics, and, to a lesser degree here, culture.

On the basis of this new spatial imaginary, the suggestion is that studying the reality of the formation of city-regions in the United States is important for understanding apparent changes in global relations in general. This argument rests ultimately on a twofold foundation. First, the nation-state of the United States always has been relatively hollow, with state power highly decentralized in the new regionalist sense. This is not a new phenomenon brought on by the pressures of globalization. Determining better the characteristics and trends within this political context thus might suggest the direction of trends taking place in traditionally more centralized nation-states. The most important such trend seems to be the new regionalist movement that has emerged most recently, but, even more important, as Kantor (2007, p. 52) suggests, the already devolved state government structure makes it easier to detect the ultimately contested, political nature of state decision-making at all levels.

Secondly, the US experience makes clearer the ultimately contested political nature of trends like 'fend for yourself federalism' otherwise rendered in much of the new regionalist literature as largely inevitable on the basis of globalizing flows and networks. It also suggests how to investigate (and perhaps promote) contestation between what have been called 'glocal' and more locally embedded state actors and policymakers at both the national and subnational levels of analysis. In short, the trend toward subnational regional government in the United States remains contested and uncertain, as is more than suggested by the fact that actual enactment of such a change in the local state has been quite slow, no matter how much has been written in its favor.

In the end, understanding globalization as a process involving the continuing emergence of unevenly distributed 'spatial fixes' and 'structured coherences' as a basis for subnational regional class alliances makes it easier to determine the actual source of both movements toward regionalization and political contestation. The contemporary transition toward postindustrial, more spatially footloose office and digital, as well as more consumption-based, regional economies arguably has meant more rapid, and looser, spatial fixes and re-fixes as well as important changes in the social make-up of spatially structured coherences and thus regional class alliances and contestation. Ultimately, if we are indeed moving toward scalar changes in global relations at the subnational level, it will be the currently unforeseeable end result of this political contestation and not some inevitable, inexorable global drive toward a new subnational regional world as so often portrayed in the new regionalist literature, both in Europe and in the United States.

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