Urban Governance: Between Competition and Participation

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Exopolis and Antipolis

[Jane:] ‚Eden-Olympia? Well, it has a lot going for it. It's open to talent and hard work. There's no ground already staked out, no title deeds back to bloody Magna Carta. You feel anything could happen.'

[Paul:] 'But nothing ever does. All you people do is work. It's wonderful here, but they left out reality. No one sits on the local council, or has a say about the fire service.'
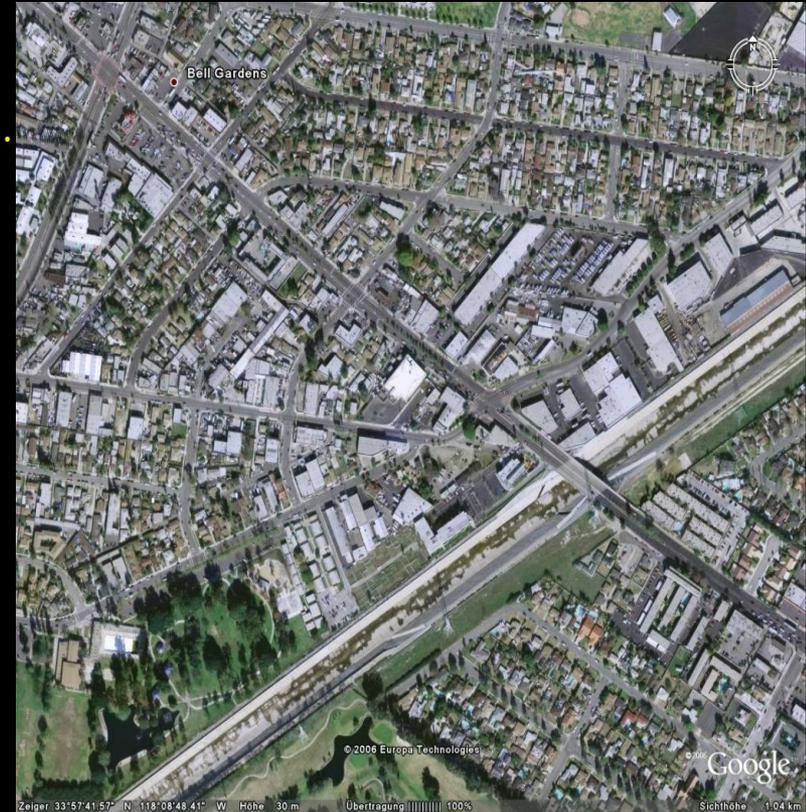
[Jane:] 'Good. Who wants to?' (79-80)

From J.G. Ballard's dystopian novel *Super-Cannes* (2000)

- Ballard's dialogue illustrates what, at the level of governance generally, the political theorist Danilo Zolo (2001) has dubbed the *Antipolis* and, at the urban level, what the geographer Ed Soja (1991) labels *Exopolis*. Both terms describe an efficient, clean but depoliticized environment.

Exopolis and 'city-full non-cityness'

- The LA-based urban geographer Ed Soja has coined the phrase „city-full non-cityness" to label the expansion of a built environment without a city character – i.e. one which is only loosely a form of sociation, social organization, or political institution (Soja 1991: 95).

- Exopolis has a campus character: everything is to hand in a self-contained environment: "now modernity itself is being displaced by deliberately post-modern architectonics, by a new kind of *campus* (field, plain, level space), as the inner rings are left behind." (*ibid* 104)

- "It is important to remember that the exopolis works – that it may be functionally the finest multi-purpose habitat to be found lying around the contemporary capitalist city." (*ibid* 121)

Orange County, California

The democratic and urban vs. the undemocratic and rural

- "Developed governance has always been urban." (Paul Hirst 2005: 11)

- "The bulk of the rural masses had little part in the advanced civilizations that their crops and labour sustained." (*ibid*: 11)

- This argument runs from Max Weber [1921] – early cities as a source of modern political citizenship – through Georg Simmel – *Kreuzung soziale Kreise* – and Louis Wirth– "enormous multiplication of voluntary organizations" (1938) – to Robert Putnam (1993) – social capital of the Northern Italian cities vs. the authoritarian South.

- Like the Siena Frescos, the commercial and the democratic nature of the city are thought to be intimately linked.

So, what went wrong?
1: Government vs. Governance

- *Good governance* is conceived in increasingly 'technocratic' – i.e. output terms: legitimation via 'performance' rather than participation or engagement (David Beetham 2001);

- *Network governance* is inherently exclusive; it does not even meet conventional standards of representativeness;

- *Multi-level governance* 'responsibilizes' individual agents (Rose 1996) while weakening institutional responsibility (du Gay 2000);

- *Post-democratic governance* requires the "maximum level of minimum participation" (Crouch 2004: 112).

Prenzlauerberg, Berlin. Photo: Alan Scott, 2006

So, what went wrong?
2: *Standortpolitik,* cooptation, exit

- *Standortpolitik* strengthens the local 'growth machine' and the 'growth coalitions' but weakens citizens' voice and increases spatial inequality (Logan and Molotch, 1987) and increases competition between cities and regions (Brenner, 2003). See [here](#);

- Margit Mayer: 'fragmented movement scene' (2000: 138), e.g. NIMBYs and 'home environment' movements which „reproduces, within itself, the exclusionary and polarizing tendencies characteristic of neoliberal politics" (*ibid*: 151);

- 'From movement to management' (Skocpol, 2003): increased institutionalization, routinization and professionalization of NGOs, social and grassroots movements;

- 'Tax flight' and 'white flight': "The affluent self-governing suburban township is a form of exclusive governance, where locals are willing to subsidize first-rate service for themselves and to zone out the poor" (Hirst, 2005: 17);

- 'Exurbanization' – the growth of 'edge' and 'hub' cities built along highways, around malls, golf courses, etc. (non-places) potentially creating a "decentred and post-public world beyond effective governance" (*ibid*: 18).

Counter tendencies:
urban experiments in democratic governance

- The city nonetheless remains the focus of experiments in participatory governance: deliberative democracy (e.g. Habermas, Elster); citizens' juries (Fishkin), associational democracy (Hirst); radical ('agonistic') democracy (Mouffe). 'rolling rule regimes' (Fung) (see Silver, Scott and Kazepov 2010).

- Some participatory experiments *do* produce redistributive effects – e.g. Ester Hernández-Medina's account of participatory budgeting in São Patulo;
- Others appear to be purely top down – Ruth McAlister's (2010) account of government-led community planning in Belfast – or neo-liberal – Marit Rosol's (2010) account of community gardens in Kreuzberg, Berlin.

- Some are grounded in a politicized civil society – Alex Aylett's (2010) account of environmental movements in Durban;
- Others simply fail even in their own terms – Debbie Becker's (2010) account of the Philadelphia Empowerment Zone (America Street) where it led to conflict between actors and their state sponsor.*

* All in Yuri Kazepov, Alan Scott and Hilary Silver (eds) 'Symposium on Urban Participation: Inclusion and Exclusion.' *IJURR*, 34/3, 2010.

Words of warning

- „Those who most need to participate in the political process are the nonparticipants." (Bachrach and Baratz, 1975: 903);

- „Sometimes people feel that consultation is the time between when an organisation decides to do a thing and then just goes and does it." (interviewee quoted in McAlister, 2010)

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