The Urban Governance of Austerity in Europe

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Abstract

The 2008 financial crash and ensuing austerity have brought critical perspectives on political economy into academic debates in democratic theory and public administration. One important area of contention regards "collaborative" and "network" forms of governance. Advocates argue that these comprise an epochal shift that resolves many pitfalls of state and market oriented governance, a consensus that was especially popular during the 1990's and early 2000's. This chapter reports research carried out in five cities in Europe (Athens, Barcelona, Dublin, Leicester, Nantes) exploring the impact of austerity politics on the ideology and practice of collaborative governance – would it endure, or be unravelled by, post-crash exposure to austerity and distributional conflict? The chapter concludes that severe austerity erodes the foundations for strong collaborative governance. The inability to survive the return of distributional conflict leads us to conclude that collaborative governance is fully functional only in times of growth.

Keywords

Austerity, Governance, Collaboration, Cities, Urban Studies, Crisis

Introduction

The 2008 financial crash and ensuing austerity policies (Blyth 2012) have impacted profoundly on European political economies (Streeck 2013). While Northern economies such as Germany have fared relatively well, the impacts in the Mediterranean countries as well as in France and Britain has been deep (Streeck 2013; 2016). Peck (2012: 651) highlights the importance of the urban sphere for understanding austerity politics, "as cities become beachheads and staging grounds for both tax revanchism and progressive forms of counter-politics". Furthermore, the intensity, propinquity and densities characteristic of the urban level make it an ideal terrain on which to engage with the actors and strategies that define, govern and resist austerity as well as mediate structures and institutions.

This chapter describes the urban governance of austerity in Europe, focusing on which actors are involved in the advancement of and resistance to austerity; how they are doing it; through which alliances between state and non-state actors. It outlines the strategies developed by different actors as well as the outcomes produced by the correlation of forces at the urban level. In doing so we draw on research carried out in five European cities – Athens, Barcelona, Dublin, Leicester and Nantes. In doing so our project contributes to literatures that since the crash have brought critical political economy forcefully back in to academic debates on democratic theory (Streeck 2013; 2016), public administration (Davies 2011) and urban governance (Peck 2012; Davies and Blanco 2017).

The main question addressed in our analysis of these cases is that which the research originally set out to answer- what happens to the ideology and practice of "network" and "collaborative" forms of governance under conditions of capitalist crisis and austerity (Ansell and Gash 2008; Stoker 2004; Sullivan et al 2013). Prior to the crash, collaborative and network forms governance were widely advocated as substitutes to outmoded state and market based governance forms. We call this tendency the "collaborative moment",[1] built around the notion of an epochal shift from competition and vertical hierarchies to trust-based association and horizontal networking. We set out to investigate the durability of the "collaborative moment" in times of austerity.

In this chapter we outline the main findings in our European cases of Athens, Barcelona, Dublin, Leicester and Nantes in relation to this question. In essence concluding that the harsh realities of austerity policies and politics have, one way or another, eroded collaborative governance, belying it as a governance ideology that seems functional only in "good times". We proceed as follows. First, we historically situate austerity politics in Europe as a further wave of neo-liberal re-structuring, and examine some of the current literature on austerity politics and governance to elicit our main themes of inquiry. The second and third sections respectively describe our comparative method and introduce our cases. The fourth, most substantive part discusses our findings, organised according to the main themes already identified. Finally, we outline our comparative findings before concluding along lines above.

Urban Austerity Governance

As the Fordism and the Keynesian compromise unravel, cities around the world have been central to the neoliberal drive to re-establish capitalist profitability through budget squeezes, administrative rationalisation, de-regulation and (re)commodification (Harvey 2012). These policies are part of the broader historical process of "unleashing" (Glyn 1994) capitalism from the constraints of Keynesian social democracy, including reduced state fiscal capacity, increased public and private debt-dependence and the manipulation of public policy agendas to appease creditors (Crouch 2004; 2011; Streeck 2013). We understand the austerity agenda following the 2008 crash as a further wave of neo-liberalisation (Davies and Blanco 2017), which accelerates the trajectory towards technocratic governance (Swyngedouw 2009) and the development of "market-conforming democracy" (Angela Merkel cited in Streeck 2014: 44) encapsulated in Streeck's (2015) concept of the "consolidation state".

Despite these powerful forces, scholars have established that the embedding of neoliberalism and austerity policies within urban administrations interacts with local contexts and institutional legacies (Brenner et al 2010; Blanco, Griggs and Sullivan 2014). Indeed, recent empirical research reported by Davies and Blanco (2017) has established the variegated nature of urban regimes and public policies under austerity. The depth and modalities of austerity policies are complex. Not all countries, or cities within countries, are

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[1] The term "collaborative moment" was coined by our colleague, Professor David Howarth, at a project team meeting in June 2015.

equally affected. National states and transnational institutions such as the EU exert more or less influence depending on the level of integration in transnational institutions, notably the Euro itself. Moreover, there is greater or lesser space for political choice at local and urban state levels, depending on the configuration of central-regional-local relations. For example, our case study city of Nantes was far more favourably positioned than Athens; the former growing robustly with a strong tax base, the latter bearing the brunt of waves of EU mandated austerity. Thus, we will introduce our cases by considering the priorities and public policies pursued and the degree to which austerity is embedded and / or contested within them. Our cross case findings are summarised in table 1 below, and "austerity embeddedness" constitutes the first row.

Second, we tackle the central theme - how practices of networked and "collaborative governance" (Ansell and Gash 2008) are affected by and operate under austerity. One of our key premises in the study in this respect is that of a "collaborative moment" of the late 20th and early 21st century. This was characterised by widespread enthusiasm about the potential for networks to improve governance (Stoker 2004). Intellectuals reasoned that prosperity had broken down old cleavages based on class, race and gender, allowing social relations based on trust to flourish (Beck et al 1994). Networks made up of capable agents could overcome the shortcomings of public hierarchies and market mechanisms (Newman 2004; Stoker 2004), and revitalise forms of participatory democracy (Griggs and Howarth 2007; Hirst 2000; Torfing and Sorensen 2014).

In public administration "collaborative governance" was institutionalised through new forms of public participation in policy making (e.g. Bua 2017; Gaynor 2011), statutory partnerships and co-production of public services (Durose, Justice and Skelcher 2013). We set out to ask what impact the financial crash and ensuing austerity policies would have upon the ideology and practice of collaborative governance – would the collaborative moment endure, or be unravelled by, post-crash exposure to austerity and distributional conflict? Would it prove to only be suitable for times of relatively high growth, or to be insulated from the volatilities and iniquities that come so strongly to the fore in crises? Thus, our second theme (and the second row in table one below) is that of "governance trajectories", where we summarise the lineage of governance practices across our cases.

At the same time, we know that austerity has led to a phenomenal expansion of protest movements (Ortiz et al 2013), leading urban commentators to identify the animation of resistance as one of the "double movement contradictions" of austerity (Peck 2012: 649). In response, states have policed and sought to criminalise protest, leading scholars to identify an authoritarian phase of neoliberalism (Albo and Finnelly 2014). That these social responses bear the genesis of counter-hegemonic projects has been borne out by the development of the "re-politicising city" (Dikeç and Swyngendouw 2017) - a space where the political rationality of neo-liberalism is challenged and alternatives that begin to arise through organisational and political experimentation. The intensity, modalities and effects, of resistance vary locally (Davies and Blanco 2017) and we can expect the nature and extent of resistance to have an important influence on the governance trajectories in our cities. Thus, our third theme (and third row in table one) of "resistance politics" includes the

strength and prevalence of anti-austerity movements in our cities, their aims and repertoires of action.

Resistance movements and social responses are widely varied. Although there is significant overlap, a rough distinction can be made between activisms led by traditional organisations such as political parties and trade unions, usually geared towards specific goals or policy demands; pre-figurative forms of protest that articulate more general grievances and demands, often calling for a new kind of politics; and social innovation that responds to crises of social reproduction bought about by marginalisation from state provision and market exchange (Della Porta 2015; Mayer 2013; Pares et al 2017; Tormey 2015). We will explain how these, as well as more muted forms of protest, have interacted with austerity governance in our cities, and to what effect. The final row in table one summarises the outcomes we have identified across the cases.

Methods

The broader research project focussed on eight cities (Athens, Baltimore, Barcelona, Dublin, Melbourne, Montreal, Leicester, Nantes, see ESRC Final Report 2017) and considers the broader question of the urban governance of the rolling crises of Fordism and Welfarism. In this contribution we focus on the five European cases because our scoping research revealed that it is here that the "collaborative moment" was most relevant and we can thus most clearly trace the impact of varying degrees of austerity upon it.

Research in each case was based on interviews and focus groups with key stakeholders, as well as observations at relevant collaborative encounters. We prioritised fidelity to our cases over a strict comparative framework (Robinson 2016) and thus case researchers had considerable freedom to develop the thematic focus of the study, which varies across our cases, within the overall problematic of collaborative governance under austerity.

Findings

The table below summarises our provisional findings across the themes above.

Table 1: austerity governance in European cities (source: author's elaboration from qualitative data)

	Athens	Barcelona	Dublin	Leicester	Nantes
Austerity Embeddedness	Embedded at central and local scales	Centrally embedded but locally resisted	Embedded at central and local scales	Embedded at central and local scales	Centrally embedded since 2014, deferred locally with strong local tax base.
Governance trajectory	History of clientelism - formation of "elite-pluralist" collaborative regime under austerity	Collaborative moment, collaborative retrenchment under austerity, radicalisation post-2015	Collaborative moment, collaborative retrenchment under austerity	Collaborative moment, to collaborative retrenchment under austerity	Collaborative moment; accelerated collaborative infrastructure under austerity, but mediated by the French Republican tradition

Resistance Politics	Widespread. Resistance disengaged from policy making following defeats.	Widespread; engaged in policy making; strong counterpower; state-social movement alliance	Ascending following recent waves of protest; generally disengaged from policy making; emerging counterpower	Limited and contained; disengaged from policy making; little counterpower	Some resistance; disengaged from policy making; seeks to avoid state co-option; exerts some counterpower
Outcomes	Elite pluralist regime, with legitimacy crisis; Volunteerism, atomisation	Radicalisation of collaborative moment; re-politicisation	Pro-austerity regime, collaborative retrenchment, nascent re-politicisation	Collaborative retrenchment Austerian realism, boosterism	Attempted radicalisation of "collaborative moment"; legitimacy challenges

Introduction to our cases: the embededness of Austerity Governance

All our cases operate in a context of austerity measures being imposed by higher tiers of authority. In Barcelona (Spain), Dublin (Ireland), and Athens (Greece), such measures were prescribed by transnational institutions such as the European Union and the International Monetary Fund, in order to ensure repayment on bailouts and loan programmes. As noted above, The French and UK state have had more freedom of manoeuvre, but austerity is also adopted at the national level despite recent adoption of anti-austerity policies by the British opposition Labour Party and a recent softening of austerity measures by the UK Conservative government. In France, the election of president Emmanuel Macron in 2017 signifies a potential deepening of pro-Austerity, neoliberal governance, though the city of Nantes remains the least directly affected of all the five EU case studies.

At city level there is more variation. Policy makers in Athens, Dublin and Leicester have followed a strict austerity agenda. For example, in Leicester the Local Authority budget is forecast to be cut by almost half by 2020, from a 2010 baseline. In Athens, the national economic contraction has also led to a fall in tax receipts and the City has been ruled by a pro-Austerity mayor who has implemented austerity over and beyond EU bailout conditions. Given the extremity of economic recession in Greece and poor prospects of economic revival in the near future, attracting large philanthropic investment to invest in programmes that can attenuate the severe social fallout and engender economic development is a significant priority in the City (Chorianopoulos and Tselepi 2017). Leicester and Dublin also implement austerity measures, whilst focussing on attracting inward investment to increase local employment and commercial rate intakes. Dublin seeks to build on its success in establishing itself as a global hub for IT companies, and Leicester continues to regenerate the city centre and build up its tourist and service sector industries. The City council has followed a policy of faithfully implementing nationally mandated austerity measures. However, it aims to mitigate impacts by using discretionary funding to help the most vulnerable, and, demonstrating remnants of a welfarist logic (Pierre 2011), co-ordinating local welfare services to maximise welfare benefit receipts and preserve municipal services as far as is compatible with austerity budgeting.

The cases of Barcelona and Nantes testify to the variegated and contestable nature of neoliberalism and austerity (Brenner et al 2010, Davies and Blanco 2017). The impacts of the crash and austerity in Barcelona have been deeply felt, especially through sharp increases in poverty, social exclusion and social inequalities, with the unemployment rate rising to 18.6% in 2012 (23.8% in Catalonia; 25% in Spain), and the at-risk-of-poverty rate reaching 18.2 in 2011 (20.5 in Catalonia; 20.6% in Spain). In response, the City's first Conservative administration (2011-2015) since the 32-year period of rule by the Socialist Party followed a conventionally neoliberal approach of cutting services, developing budget surpluses and building on competitive advantage in the tourism industry. However social impacts such as rising inequality, touristification and gentrification led to an anti-austerity left coalition taking office in 2015, developing a more interventionist social, fiscal, economic policies, that seek to invest surpluses accrued by the previous administration and regulate businesses more closely, especially in tourism where the City seeks to develop a more sustainable model. It is fair to say that Barcelona's "new municipalism" (OM 2014) and pro-democracy

ambitions have made it a global reference point for left-wing, anti-austerity urbanism with socially transformative aspirations.

Nantes is affected by national impacts of austerity such as increased unemployment and cuts to local government funding, but has arguably managed to avoid severe impacts due to a growing population and economic performance that is positive relative to other French cities. However, poor neighbourhoods have been harshly hit by the crisis, with much higher rates living in poverty and sharp decreases in household income. There is therefore an issue of inequality despite continued economic growth. Policy makers in Nantes frame the most important problem facing the city as one of "dechrochage", whereby certain communities have become disconnected from the economic motor that is Nantes. In the words of one policy officer

'for people, the financial crisis is more about décrochage and isolation, and it is that which we are worried about, that is to say people exiting [what we might see as] the community of residents'.

Whereas the Barcelona administration has more socially transformative aspirations, the main consensus in Nantes is for a more reformist agenda, based on often technocratic solutions that do not fundamentally question the (broadly neo-liberal) growth model of the city. As we will see, however, local resistance movements and some more critical officials argue such problems cannot be resolved within the existing growth model.

Governance trajectories

Our cases vary in terms of governance trajectories and specifically how practices of networked and collaborative governance have fared. We found variance in, first, the existence of and institutional make-up of the "collaborative moment" and second the forms of post-crash austerity governance and the role of collaboration within these.

Athens is a city with a strong history of clientelism, which, combined with legacies of authoritarianism arrested the development of local collaborative dynamics (Chorianopopulos 2012). However, more recently a range of state-led collaboration initiatives were developed in response to Greek state and EU directives. In response, municipalities set up deliberative forums, and launch partnership schemes with businesses and civil society groups. These forums are driven by state, corporate and third sector elites. They are also substantially animated by the prospect of attracting investment by large philanthropic funders, focussed especially on urban regeneration, economic development and social policy. For example the most prominent municipal social policy scheme is a venture with an NGO called Solidarity Now, established in 2013 by George Soros's Open Society Foundations (OSF) and "Innovathens", a municipal economic development initiative in the tech sector, is funded by Samsung.

Thus, the post-austerity "collaborative turn" in Athens has occurred mainly among a limited range of "elite" corporate and NGO partners. This "elite pluralist" regime excludes grassroots groups, which have been sidelined by large national and transnational charities and in any case do not wish to participate. It is also strongly rejected by the multitude of

fragmented anti-austerity groups, which, as we shall expand upon below, have proliferated since the crash but turned in on themselves following the capitulation of the national Syriza government when attempting to confront the EU and develop an anti-austerity agenda.

The history of collaborative public administration in Barcelona predates that of the "collaborative moment". Public-private and public-community collaboration had a key role in the governance of the City at least since Spain's transition to democracy. Commentators even talk of a "Barcelona Model" of collaborative public administration (Blanco 2009). The only Conservative administration (2011-15) to have governed in recent history was critical of this approach, but was unable to fundamentally change it due its high degree of embeddedness. The Conservative administration led by Xavier Trias followed a strongly neoliberal policy programme, aiming to develop a budget surplus including, cutting social provisions, privatising public assets and building on the city's competitive advantage in tourism. It succeeded in all three, and generated considerable social fallout in doing so. Combined with the already significant effects of austerity, this animated resistance movements, which led to the election of anti-eviction leader Ada Colau to the City administration on a Municipalist platform in 2015.

Colau's administration adopts a more radical participatory and collaborative rhetoric that seeks to reclaim public goods, and create new ones often in partnership with the many social movements that exist in the city. In contrast to Athen's "elite-pluralist" regime, Barcelona seeks to develop bottom-linked (Garcia 2006) forms of collaboration, characterised by strong organic links between to-down state-led practice and policies and bottom-up social movements. The co-production of public policy, public-commons partnerships and transformative forms of social innovation (Pares et al 2017) are all collaborative concepts that the city administration is attempting to operationalise. One city official, for example, spoke of the emancipatory potential of the "commons" (as in resources held in trust for, belonging to or affecting a whole community, but not under direct state control)

"The Commons aren't spaces owned by the public sector, but they represent a shared and common wealth. The attributes of universality, redistribution, accessibility... characteristic of the Public are missed in many public administration projects. This is why I think that the Commons are more capable of acting as the Public than the public administration itself" (Government Official)

This could be said to amount to a radical revival of the ethos of the "collaborative moment". However, unlike the collaborative consensus in the golden years of neo-liberalism, this more radical approach accepts, and seeks to address, the iniquities of the neo-liberal political economy and bring back into the realm of politics much that has been kept at arms-length by it (Dikec and Swyngedouw 2017).

Dublin and Leicester share some similar traits in governance trajectories. The "collaborative moment" of the late 20th and early 21st century was strong in both cities (e.g. Gaynor 2011, which went with the grain of public policy trends in Ireland and the UK (described by Davies 2011 as the 'paradigm case' of collaborative governance) and developed a thicket of

collaborative infrastructures. Both Cities experienced collaborative retrenchment with the onset of the crash and austerity policies, as central government imposed cuts on local administrations, which reacted with a centralisation of authority, as well as funding for civil society groups and collaborative partnerships. In Dublin retrenchment had begun before the crash and ensuing austerity policies, which then firmly consolidated it.

In Leicester the Mayor's agenda is strongly focussed on cutting whilst attracting inward investment and boosting growth. This approach is underpinned by what we have called "austerian realism" (ESRC Final Report 2017) – that is, regretful, but diligent, compliance with austerity for perceived lack of alternatives. This austerian realist logic inflects policy throughout the City council. It leads, for example, to accepting market led economic development as the only way out of the crisis. Collaboration is still alluded to by local policy actors, but the emancipatory rhetoric of the collaborative moment is gone, replaced with a strongly "functionalist" logic, whereby collaboration becomes a tool to confront and manage scarcity, as one policy officer put it:

So there is an acceptance that to get things done in a positive way here, private and public sector and indeed the voluntary sector have to work together, that we can't fight with each other because that's wasted energy and wasted resource.

In Dublin, collaborative governance continues along a similar path – in retrenched, rationalised and bureaucratised form and focussing mainly on coping with austerity. Moreover, in both cities service rationalisations and cut backs to third sector funding have deeply impacted upon small locally based voluntary organisations, and favoured large national and international organisations. For example, one respondent in Dublin explained:

"there were about 55,000 people working in the community sector, and, after austerity, there were about 20,000 that were taken out of the mix. So, there was just a massive cull, if you like, at that level." (Community Activist).

The voluntary sector has been decimated by cuts, undermining civil society networks. The result is a hollowed out voluntary and community sector engaged more in competition than in collaborative relationship-building, and with a diminished ability to voice the needs of citizens or, importantly, speak truth to power.

Our fifth and final case, the city of Nantes, has a tradition of participatory governance most immediately rooted in the last Mayoral administration of Jean Marc Ayrault (1989-2012). The City's collaborative approach is explained in reference to the "*jeu a la Nantaise*", in reference to the City football team's slick passing game. The current Mayor, Johanna Rolland, also made citizen engagement a policy priority committing to a "constant dialogue" between local councillors and citizens. Out of all our cases, Nantes is the one in which the rationale remains closest to that of the "collaborative moment". Collaborative governance is deemed to go beyond the merely managerial objectives of improving services and efficiencies, to harnessing the expertise of citizens, countering political disengagement and building social cohesion within the contours of a pro-business, relatively boosterist growth model.

Critics question the authenticity of the City's collaborative forums, arguing that they are strongly influenced by the state, warranted by the French Republican tradition, and provide little else than window dressing for decisions that have already been made. They also label City sponsored participation initiatives as forms of incorporation, with little real influence. In this vein one respondent commented on the "jeu a la Nantaise" analogy

"who do you look for when building a team, and when [do] you pass the ball? [...] You may pass the ball, but in the final instance you are obliged to follow [...] because the project is too advanced."

The criticism here is that the policy process advances irrespective of citizen dialogue, which is bought into line with it through information giving and pedagogy. Indeed, critics charge the kinds of groups represented at collaborative forums with being "apolitical", "non-adversarial" and deeply embedded in top down governance practices. At the same time, elected representatives and policymakers question the legitimacy, and 'political' motives of critical actors, associating them with narrow party political or ideological interests, rather than those of the general citizenry – an accusation often made by traditional political actors against new forms of participatory governance in the "collaborative moment" (Baiocchi and Ganuza 2017). Indeed, a common response to the charge that power remains firmly in the hands of politicians as "no bad thing, as *it is [the local politicians] job after all".* In this rationale, the basis for judgements about the governance of the city shifts from input to output forms of legitimacy. This is a vision of the purpose of citizen dialogue that sits uneasily with the "renewal of public action" rhetoric advanced by the Mayor in her participatory policy making programmes. It is also questionable to what extent this kind of collaborative governance can generate inclusion and overcome the challenge of "dechrochage" without developing a more socially transformative agenda.

Resistance politics

Our cases cover a range of responses to austerity and forms of resistance. First, Athens was a key site of anti-austerity struggles after 2010, mainly centred around trade unions and the rise of Syriza, a party of the left that has governed since 2015 and which anti-austerity popular movements helped bring to power. However, the capitulation by Syriza to creditors and the EU and adoption of austerity measures in July 2015 deeply affected the anti-austerity movement, rooted in traditional forms of working class organisation. Since then a diffuse network of grassroots organisations has emerged. This network is made up of predominantly small-scale schemes, mainly focussed on managing the human crisis – but with a strongly anti-austerity identity.

The diverse organisations share a few common traits, such as informality, a focus on meeting human needs, rejection of cooperation with the state and a profound aversion to state institutions associated with austerity. Strongly influenced by the disappointment at Syriza's capitulation, their rebellious political stance feeds on the marginalisation from formal structures and institutions. As local activists put it:

"there's this growing realization that we're on our own, under no protective umbrella of any formal authority or institution. Not only that, but that we're actually against them. Hence

the shift towards self-organisation … The election of SYRIZA and the great disappointment that followed it shattered any remaining illusions that there's a chance for a way out via formal politics and institutions".

"volunteerism is a form of resistance. It's a statement, exposing the absence of the authorities from where they are needed; it's a way to show and deal with the problems the city is facing".

Despite the proliferation of initiatives, thismovement remains diffuse and has not developed the kind of synergies necessary to develop a transformative politics at scale. This is perhaps because recent disappointments loom large, leading to a rejection of more organised forms of struggle at city or national level.

Like Athens, Barcelona has witnessed a proliferation in grassroots projects that aim to mitigate the fallout from Austerity. However, the trajectory of the protest movement has been different, essentially because it connected with a pre-existing tradition of co-operativist and left-wing activism and also fed into a national wave of protest politics that has led to a project of reform in the City and also significantly influenced national politics (Feenstra et al 2017). The immediate roots of this phenomenon lie in the Spring of 2011, with the eruption of the indignados movement (also known as the 15M) which began a process of resurgence of the left, that led to the election of the "Barcelona en Comu" administration led by Ada Colau in 2015 on a "new municipalist" platform (OM 2014). This process gave a political platform for the small-scale self-help initiatives that proliferated in the years following austerity (Davies and Blanco, 2017).

This confluence of movements has made Barcelona arguably Europe's most significant site of political resistance to austerity in Europe. The Barcelona experience is rightly taken to demonstrate that urban social movements can spearhead broader processes of political reform. Significant challenges are of course faced. To name a few by advancing policies that contradict the preferences of local and national elites, the existence of a hostile national state that aims to centralise authority in order to dutifully implements austerity measures. As one respondent put it:

The tools are very tiny and the expectations are great. How can the City Council of a city that is globally located on the map of the relevant cities in the world, which attracts migratory flows, capital flows… how can it manage a power that it does not have? The City Council does not have the power of the city. It is a very small portion of power.

Moreover, "Barcelona" en Comu faces a significant political challenge in negotiating cleavages between separatist and non-separatist forces, though these do overlap to an extent. The municipalist movement, as well as the broader Catalan and Spanish left, is split in terms of support for and opposition to separatism, as well as on strategic questions related to the nature of its response to the centrality of the Catalan independence struggle in the Spanish political agenda (e.g. Miley 2017; Navarro 2017).

This reality means that while Barcelona represents an important beginning, it cannot be the end of the process. Urban struggles must gain traction on the national and international

stages. The City administration and protest movements are aware of this, and have developed a broadly complementary relationship which might be summarised as the social movements giving the City government political support and legitimacy in exchange for representation, and the City administration using the political capital of social movements to make transformative demands at higher tiers of authority.

Our third case, Dublin, has recently experienced something of a political renaissance as communities become involved in diverse practices of resistance, resilience, solidarity and support. As the austerity measures above ratcheted up, public opposition grew in scale with protests catalysed by the introduction of new water charges in 2014. The so called "water protests", however, developed into a broader process of resistance to austerity policies in general that attracted significant parts of the population. This broad-based support for anti-austerity politics was highlighted by respondents from the City Council

 "People are just incensed. Not because they are the left-wing. Not because they are radical revolutionists. It's because they've been shafted. They can see that they do not have pensions. They see no future for their kids" (Councillor).

A movement with a relatively wide repertoire has developed, that is perhaps unique in the history of the Irish state for the diversity of the people involved and its "bottom-up" nature, largely by-passing formal political institutions. Thus, a survey carried out in 2015 of 2,556 people involved found that 54 per cent were 'new activists' (Hearne 2015) that had never protested before, and many of our respondents highlight the high levels of female participation. Thus, the movement cuts across class and gender divides and largely involves people that are new to activism, perhaps signalling the rise of a new political class. The challenge now for emancipatory social movements is to engage these new political actors in innovative and non-traditional ways that can also articulate an effective and genuinely transformative political process.

Above we noted that Dublin and Leicester share similar traits in terms of Austerity Governance. However, the extent and nature of contentious politics in both cities is very different. Cultures of resistance to austerity in Leicester have been seriously undermined by waves of de-industrialisation, and the decline of militant trade unionism. As one official suggested *"that confrontation thing is…that's just not the British spirit anymore"*. Thus, unlike Dublin, austerity in Leicester has not led to sustained city-wide resistance. Resistance is led by traditional institutions such as trade unions, is relatively sporadic and defensive in nature, seeking to prevent cuts to specific services. Moreover, local politics are deeply influenced legacies of defeat of municipal socialist resistance to Thatcherite reforms in the 1980's – and waves of centralisation under Thatcher and Blair governments. Thus, recent calls by local trade unions for the council to implement a no cuts budget were dismissed out of hand by the city council, whose lesson from history is that resistance to the centre is futile and counterproductive. The spectre of disobedience leading to rule from Westminster looms large.

In this vein, one councillor we interviewed argued that "drama and conflict are not in the best interests of the City". This is certainly true from the perspective of attracting external

investment and generating economic growth – which has become the main, and perhaps the only, strategy being pursued to improve the situation. However, some of our respondents lamented the lack of contentious politics, arguing that it could serve for democratic revitalisation and social justice. There is also a sublimated yearning for social democratic solutions amongst many politicians, public officials and parts of the voluntary sector, but this has not yet materialised into sustained protest. The "austerian realist" (ESRC Final Report 2017) logic is at play here, undermining resistance for lack of perceived alternatives.

Despite these limitations, there have been some instances of successful resistance to cuts. A campaign to save a local library from being cut managed to mobilise citizens, organised groups and found allies within the council – showing what a vigorous campaign can do. Yet, as is the case throughout the UK, austerity has been delivered with few signs of any sustained revolt. Beyond the legacies of defeats and the austerian realist logic, some argue this is also due to the severity of the social impacts of austerity measures such as cuts and punitive welfare reforms that keep people preoccupied with managing acute personal crises, as per one respondent:

"They say to us 'why aren't the English kicking off like the Greeks'"? "I think it is precisely around the issue of everyone is being made to look at their own individual crisis … they are so ensnared in looking at the latest change affecting them, that it's a full-time job sorting out these issues"

In Nantes there are resistance movements. Opposition to the building of an airport became an issue that tied together demands against national and local policies including urban boosterism. However they generally had little to do with formal politics and institutions, despite the involvement of some groups of interest and direct action protestors. There is also scepticism towards the top-down form of participatory governance described in the section above, which creates an opportunity for resistance. As one respondent put it:

"each time that you put a debate into the public arena, there are always those people who seize it and manage to construct some counter-power."

Thus, despite its constraints, there is room to use the collaborative process to construct challenges and contest the municipality. Forms of resistance are therefore part and parcel of participatory governance and citizen dialogue in Nantes , a dynamic found by analysts of comparable exercises in participatory governance in other cities (Baiocchi and Ganuza 2017). However, on the whole, in similar fashion to Athens, civil society actors who advance anti-austerity politics, such as unions, choose not to engage in formal politics, including the structures of citizen dialogue across the city, mainly because they see little value in investing in arenas that they see as tokenistic, with little chance of influencing policy and certainly no prospect of advancing the socially transformative agenda that inspired them. Equally, actors engaged in contentious politics are not 'welcome' in the participatory governance arena.   As a consequence, collaborative governance in Nantes tends to be marked by parallel systems of participation and protest, whose actors have different goals and view each other with considerable scepticism.

Finally, one of the reasons why an anti-austerity resistance project is not articulated from the City institutions is because they have articulated austerity within a broader discourse of the social and political crises facing Nantes. At the same time, they have arguably sought to deploy local investment and taxation powers to ward off the impacts of the global financial crisis. Thus, foregrounding the agency of the local authority in governing the city, a local official told us that 'we are Keynesian here!'. This links a discourse which views poverty and inequality as problems that are resolvable through the City's policy interventions. However, these policies are coming under increasing pressure since 2015.

Comparative insights

Our cases portray a range of differences and similarities across the three central themes that concern us. These include the degree of which austerity is embedded, through which policies and the social and political effects, the impact of austerity on the ideology and practice of collaborative governance and the development, and nature, of resistance, understood as one of the "double movement" (Peck 2012) effects of austerity.

All our cities have at some point engaged in substantial cuts and service rationalisations and privatisations. Thus, cuts are a general feature of urban austerity across the board, but its depth and continuity varies across our cases. The measures have been softest in Nantes which is an outlier in terms of its sustained, relatively positive economic performance in the post-2008 period. Moreover, the City has experienced spending pressures but governing elites do not see themselves as engaging in significant austerity cuts, proclaiming instead that "we are Keynesians here". Athens, Dublin, Barcelona and Leicester, on the other hand, have implemented swingeing cuts. Political change in Barcelona, however, has recently challenged this agenda, developing a more expansionary economic policy (within the limits of the City's authority) and seeking to reclaim public assets and generate public goods.

Austerity has gone hand in hand with processes of state re-scaling and reconfiguration.A degree of centralisation has occurred everywhere because local austerity targets are set by national governments. In the case of Spain, centrally driven local government reforms such as the 2013 Montoro law have overtly sought to recentralise power.French municipal reorganisation in 2015 displays a complex interplay between centralising and decentralising dynamics, which scholars have explained in terms of new forms of 'steering' (Ghorra-Gobin 2015). In England and Ireland this process has also been nuanced. In Ireland, local government reforms that accompanied austerity and were putatively intended to empower localities are deemed to have had the reverse effect. Local Government in England, the case with perhaps the highest levels of pre-existing centralisation, has been in a more or less constant state of churn since 2010, with successive national governments engaging in putatively decentralising reforms such as those contained in the Localism Act of 2011 and the devolution drive of David Cameron's Conservative administration of 2015-16.. However, the general consensus is that the direction is one of centralisation, with even nominally decentralising reforms leading to greater central control over local government (Bailey and Wood 2017; Bua et al 2017; Davies 2008). Centralisation is not limited to public institutions, but also to civil society, where austerity conditions lead to a retraction of funding from

small, locally based VCO organisations, and an empowerment of large, national and multi-national charities, called "super-majors" in the UK context.

Forms of urban economic boosterism are a popular response to austerity, which often leaves city policy makers thinking that of economic growth is the only way out of crisis and into a better future. Branding and place marketing is central to urban growth strategies for coping with and moving beyond austerity. Cities integrate context-specific features, such as cultural and ethnic diversity, or specialisation in luxury tourism, into their branding. However, growth alone cannot compensate for austerity. There is an ever-present tension between the realities of urban development and the idea of a socially just, inclusive city. In fact, as might be expected, austerity cuts, welfare reforms and housing foreclosures hit the worst-off hardest of all. In some cases, austerity hits the middle classes too.

In terms of austerity and collaborative governance, our analysis suggests that the ideology and practices associated with the "collaborative moment" appear to wither on the vine in conditions of fiscal stress, low growth and intensified distributional conflicts. The only place where we see discourse and practices approaching that of the collaborative moment is Nantes, a city that has avoided many of the impacts of austerity through relatively positive economic performance - and even here, the authenticity of collaboration is frequently questioned. A very different story applies to other cities. In the cases of Leicester and Dublin, the collaborative ethos was profoundly affected by austerity, from one aiming to create social cohesion and improve policy-making by harnessing the capacities of networks, to a consolidation of a shift towards retrenched and rationalised networks firmly focussed on survival, and closely aligned with the economic boosterism of the local state. Athens differs in that the "collaborative moment" did not penetrate the political culture of Greece, despite attempted reforms. A more determined effort has been made to establish collaborative institutions in the austerity period, but with high levels of grass roots alienation, a participatory governance culture seems untenable. Rather, post-Austerity collaboration can be described as an "elite-pluralist" model, heavily focussed on philanthropic funding, exclusive of small VCO's and anti-austerity actors. The marginalisation of small VCO's and anti-austerity actors is also evident in Dublin and Leicester, where austerity has served as a tool to discipline and control civil society as well as leading to the collapse of many organisations. This empowers large NGO's over organisations with more organic local links, which fundamentally undermines the capacity to carry out collaborative governance.

Barcelona's trajectory differs in the key respect that it has resulted in the recasting of a collaborative ethos that is more critical vis-à-vis the neoliberal system, and based on alliances with organisations and social movements that espouse a socially transformative agenda. This highlights the re-politicizing (Dikeç and Swyngedouw 2017) potential of anti-austerity urban movements. Whilst resistance to austerity features in all our cases, Barcelona is the only case where a significant anti-austerity and broader agenda of resistance to neoliberalism has developed in state institutions. Anti-austerity movements of comparable dimensions developed in Athens, linked to a national movement. However, since the 2015 defeat at the hands of creditor interests and the EU, the urban resistance has

disengaged from state institutions, while organised working class resistance has also diminished. The challenge here is similar to consolidating the politicising potential of the anti-austerity movement in Dublin – to engage these actors in ways that maintain and collectivise their critical energy.

Conclusion

Our study highlights the importance of the urban for austerity governance – what happens in cities matters and cities affected by crisis and austerity respond in varied ways, with local histories, economies, traditions, struggles, conflicts and geographies making a big difference. Forms of collaborative governance vary widely on a continuum from those concerned with radicalising participatory democracy to those preoccupied mainly with managing austerity and maintaining state control. However, in relation to the "collaborative moment" it seems that austerity policies have significantly diminished it. Austerity clearly weakens the prospect for building strong, inclusive and equitable social partnerships between governments and citizens. It leads governments to demand greater levels of citizen activism, while making it harder to achieve. At the same time, austerity concentrates government resources in large third sector organisations, often with little connection to locality. The capacity of these larger organisations to campaign and influence policy is itself reduced. Austerity governance therefore tends to be either hierarchical and state-centred, or rooted in "elite" partnerships involving governments, business leaders and NGOs. Conversely, the evidence from Nantes suggests – as Davies and Blanco (2017) also argued of Donostia – that it is much easier to sustain a participatory collaborative governance apparatus, however flawed or inadequate, when fiscal pressure on municipalities is limited and public services are sustained. Thus, far from being the expression in public administration and democratic practice of an epochal shift from competition and vertical hierarchies to trust and horizontal networks, collaborative governance is belied as a governance ideology, which is functional, in its ideal-typical sense, only in the "good times" where boom and bust were supposedly abolished.[2] The "collaborative moment" is thus weakened by post-crash exposure to scarcity and intensified distributional conflict – the rose-tinted spectacles of democratic theory are shattered by the harsh realities of political economy.

Anti-austerity movements do, however, abound – and cases such as Barcelona demonstrate the potential they have to turn into a project for democratisation and profound institutional reform and change. Resistance to austerity is clearly very uneven. However, given a felicitous alliance between electoral and grass-roots anti-austerity forces, change is possible. As the recent suspension of Catalan autonomy highlights, attempts to challenge austerity governance orthodoxies will encounter much hostility from embedded forces with immense power. In response, emancipatory politics must aim to link opposition movements, build alliances between cities, social movements, workplace and community organisations

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[2] A famous mantra of the UK Chancellor of the exchequer from 1997 to 2008, Gordon Brown, was that of having overcome instability and "boom and bust" cycles - see "No Return to Boom and Bust: What Brown Said when he was Chancellor", in The Guardian, Thursday 11th September 2008, last accessed via https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2008/sep/11/gordonbrown.economy on 16/11/2017

capable not only of winning urban power, but also of challenging higher tiers of government.

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