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**Abstract**

This paper brings geographical research on urban policy mobility into conversation with historical research on the transnational municipal movement. It argues that much of conceptual and methodological interest can be found in this second literature, especially in Pierre-Yves Saunier's research on the 'Urban International' of the late 19th and early 20th centuries. It also uses findings from Saunier's work to identify and highlight salient characteristics and new lines of inquiry regarding contemporary urban policy mobility. These include that urban policy circulation in the 21st century is (dis)organized, geographically extensive, fast, and anti-political.

**Keywords**

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**1) Introduction**

This paper brings two academic literatures into conversation with one another: a relatively new 'urban policy mobility' literature that is currently emerging within Geography (see McCann 2010, McCann and Ward 2011, Peck and Theodore 2010a), and a relatively well-established 'histories of the transnational municipal movement' literature that has emerged from History and related disciplines over the last decade or so (see Randeraad 2004, Saunier 2002, Saunier and Ewen 2008). The latter of these literatures is not widely known within Geography (though see Clarke 2009, 2010) but has much to contribute methodologically and

conceptually to the 'urban policy mobility' project. This is especially the case with Pierre-Yves Saunier's research on 'the Urban International' (e.g. Saunier 2001). A second reason for bringing these literatures together is that a comparison of their findings brings certain elements of contemporary urban policy mobility into sharp focus – especially its level of organization, geographical scope, speed of circulation, and relationship to anti-politics.

This comparative exercise is not straightforward. The temptation is to use these literatures to compare urban policy mobility over time and to ask what changed between the present period and that studied by historians of the transnational municipal movement (primarily the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries – though see Saunier and Ewen 2008). But one literature is concerned with urban policy whereas the other is concerned with municipalities and their connections. They are not, then, comparable in a formal, categorical sense. So comparison is being read in this paper 'expansively' and used as 'a strategy of alterity' to generate new positions and lines of enquiry for urban theory (McFarlane 2010; see also Robinson 2004, Ward 2009). Histories of the transnational municipal movement are being used to identify salient characteristics of contemporary urban policy mobility.

One of these salient characteristics or new lines of enquiry describes the relationship between urban policy mobility and anti-politics or post-politics. Here is another literature (or pair of literatures) that is not widely known or utilized within Geography (though see Swyngedouw 2009, 2010) – despite widespread concern about partnership and participation in urban governance (e.g. Perrons and Skyers 2003, Raco 2000). So the paper in its entirety reviews two literatures from beyond the discipline of Geography – histories of the transnational municipal movement and the anti-politics/post-politics literature – bringing them to bear on the growing research field of urban policy mobility.

Section 2 introduces this growing research field (urban policy mobility), distinguishing it from Political Science studies of urban policy transfer, situating it within broader intellectual programmes, and discussing its emphasis on certain mobilities and spatialities. Section 3 reviews histories of the transnational municipal movement, with a particular focus on Pierre-Yves Saunier's research. This provides an important example to geographers of how to research the transnational components of urban policy. It offers a lightly theorised framework incorporating his 'connections approach' to globalization and his useful concept of the 'Urban International'. Saunier's focus on organisations and associations – an almost

necessary focus in archive-dependent historical research – provides a useful counterpoint to 'flow methodologies' (Peck and Theodore 2010a) and 'policy genealogies' (Peck and Theodore 2010b) favoured by human geographers at the present time.

Section 4 uses findings from Saunier's historical research to identify and highlight salient characteristics and new lines of enquiry regarding contemporary urban policy mobility. In particular, this comparative strategy helps to isolate what is novel and distinctive about current developments (and, alternatively, what is significant by virtue of its historical depth). Seen through histories of the transnational municipal movement, contemporary urban policy mobility looks to be organized, disorganized, geographically extensive, fast, and anti-political. This last point is taken up in Section 5 where the literatures on anti-politics and post-politics are critically reviewed to shed further light on contemporary urban policy mobility. The stimulation to think of transnational policy circulation as dependent upon and productive of anti-politics comes from Saunier's work on the Urban International. This plural environment involved diverse networks only held together by a pretence that urban policy constitutes a technical and managerial achievement (as opposed to a political achievement). The argument of Section 5 is that anti-politics – the reduction of public policy to questions of science and technology, along with strategies of populism and moral absolutism – derives from numerous sources at the beginning of the twenty-first century. As such, urban policy mobility and anti-politics now come together in a mutually reinforcing system, with each helping to explain the other's prevalence.

The paper concludes with a summary of its three main contributions. An introduction is provided to Saunier's exemplary research (and histories of the transnational municipal movement more generally). A comparison between the transnational municipal movement and contemporary urban policy mobility is used to provide a distinctive characterisation of urban policy circulation at the beginning of the twenty-first century. Finally, an agenda is elaborated for research on contemporary urban policy mobility – again, generated by the comparative exercise at the paper's core – to supplement those already available (see McCann 2010, Peck and Theodore 2010a).

**2) Urban policy on the move**

Studies of urban policy mobility distinguish themselves from 'orthodox', 'conventional', Political Science studies of urban policy transfer in at least two ways (Peck and Theodore 2010a). Firstly, notions of rational, voluntaristic transfer and objective 'best practices' are replaced with notions of mobility structured by institutions – their path-dependencies, dominant paradigms, powerful interests and so on (McCann 2010, Peck and Theodore 2010a). Secondly, notions of static, fully-formed, complete policy packages are replaced with notions of learning, translation, and mobility. Policies 'move as they move' because cities are not only relational but also territorial – meaning that policies must be deterritorialized from one place before being reterritorialized elsewhere (McCann and Ward 2010, McCann and Ward 2011, Ward 2006). Policies arrive in cities not as replicas of policies from elsewhere but as 'policies-in-transformation' (Peck and Theodore 2010a).

Because of this latter point, there is no hunt for global convergence or homogeneity of outcome in the urban policy mobility project (Peck and Theodore 2010a). But there is a will to map and explain how neoliberal programmes get extended across space (Brenner and Theodore 2002, Peck 2003) and how neoliberalization processes are simultaneously patterned and interconnected but also locally specific, path-dependent, contested, unstable. These concerns with 'actually existing neoliberalism' (Brenner and Theodore 2002) and 'variegated neoliberalization' (Brenner et al 2010) drive some parts of the urban policy mobility literature. Other parts are driven by a will to understand how cities and urban policy get assembled using elements from a wide field (see McCann and Ward 2011).

One way of imagining urban policy mobility (as intellectual project) is to order it along two lines distinguished by their characteristic form of spatiality (see Robinson 2011). On the one hand, there is work that emphasizes the topographical and physical mobility of policy-makers, knowledge, models and so on (e.g. McCann 2010). These are studies that focus on how people and things move across absolute space (Harvey 2006), and why some people and things travel further than others. In the foreground are 'mobility events' (e.g. conferences or site visits) and the variables explaining participation in such events (e.g. financial or cultural resources). Global ethnography is advocated to capture this world of topographical and physical mobility (ibid).

On the other hand, there is work that emphasizes topological and imaginative mobility (e.g. Robinson 2011). Cities are pulled together and pushed apart in relational space (Harvey 2006) by comparisons made, for example, in the rankings and league tables of popular media (McCann 2004). This 'actually existing comparative urbanism' also takes place via knowledge transfer and 'best practice' publications, and urban network and partnership schemes (Clarke Forthcoming). It means that policy mobility is rarely a linear event between individual jurisdictions and rather involves nonlinear production within transnational expert networks and practice communities (Peck and Theodore 2010a, 2010b).

Of course, most studies of urban policy mobility consider both of these spatialities – the topographical and the topological. This is not least because most examples of urban policy mobility involve not only physical travel (of people, models, texts etc.) but also imaginative travel of the kind associated with comparative urbanism. Indeed, mobility across relational space may well be a necessary precursor to mobility across absolute space, although the latter need not necessarily follow the former (Urry 2000). This is one advantage of a vocabulary derived from Mobility Studies. Not only does 'urban policy mobility' signify the double-movement of policies that circulate between cities while also changing in character to fit with different institutional contexts. It also accommodates the various mobilities and spatialities involved as contemporary urban policy gets produced – from the physical to the imaginative, the topographical, the topological, the absolute, and the relational.

Having introduced the urban policy mobility literature, we now turn to histories of the transnational municipal movement. A case is made for the value of Pierre-Yves Saunier's approach to urban policy circulation (Section 3), before contemporary urban policy mobility is viewed in the distinctive light of the transnational municipal movement (Sections 4 and 5).

## 3) Pierre-Yves Saunier, the connections approach, and the Urban International

Pierre-Yves Saunier is a historian of transnationalism seeking to historicize Globalization Studies (Saunier 2008). He is one of a number of historians working to convince social scientists that transnational interdependencies and connections are not new, do not simply have their roots in the 1960s and 1970s, and cannot be confined to particular historical periods such as the medieval and early modern period, or the last three or four decades. More specifically, Saunier is a historian of the transnational municipal movement seeking to

territorialize histories of transnationalism (Ewen 2008). His research forms part of a collective project directed towards showing how the local state played a key role in forging interconnectedness during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. This project was inspired by earlier studies of municipal knowledge diffusion (e.g. Aspinwall 1984, Hietala 1987) and broader studies of transnational political connections (e.g. Rodgers 1998). Its products can be found in edited collections including a special issue of *Contemporary European History* (Saunier 2002), a *Yearbook of European Administrative History* (Randeraad 2004), and the book *Another Global City* (Saunier and Ewen 2008).

The focus in this literature ranges from political individuals, groups, and movements such as Emile Vinck or the Fabians (e.g. Dogliani 2002, Saunier 1999a), to municipal associations, organisations, and institutions such as the International Union of Local Authorities or the Council of European Municipalities (e.g. Gaspari 2002, Ewen and Hebbert 2007, Saunier 2001), to practices and traditions such as town twinning (e.g. Vion 2002), to the agency and experiences of particular cities (e.g. Brown-May 2008, Ewen 2005, Payre and Saunier 2008, Saunier 1999b). Among these numerous studies, Saunier's work is outstanding. In particular, his writings best articulate the most useful conceptual and methodological aspects of the broader literature.

The rest of this section reviews Saunier's research on the Urban International and discusses the strengths of his methodological and conceptual approach − from the perspective of someone interested in researching contemporary urban policy mobility. These strengths include that historical research of this kind is dependent on archived documents (reports, correspondence, regulations etc.) and so takes the organisation or association as a primary unit of analysis. This is not popular in human geography at the moment where research that 'follows the policy' (Peck and Theodore 2010a) via 'global ethnography' (McCann 2010, McCann and Ward 2011) appears better suited to mobile times. But Saunier's archival research uncovers the breadth of attempts to extend networks through which urban policy might be governed. Some of these attempts have been more successful than others. Such a broad-based narrative provides an important counterpoint to the impression given by some geographical writing at the moment that networks are extended with relative ease, so that policies are mobilised more often than not. Following policies identified by their mobility can lead to this impression. Another strength of Saunier's approach describes its light theorisation (but theorisation nonetheless), leaving room for elements of induction and

empiricism. His view of municipal internationalism is not clouded by prior and external normative concerns. This is sometimes the case in current social scientific engagements with urban policy mobility which, say, approach the field seeking to explain processes of neoliberalization and so look for travelling neoliberals, neoliberal ideas, and neoliberal programmes (such that other subjects remain overlooked). The rest of this section discusses these strengths further and introduces some others too, while it constructs an example or model for human geographers from Saunier's research and the broader field of municipal history.

One of Saunier's main contributions is his concept of the Urban International (Saunier 1999a, 2001). He argues that, in the last decades of the nineteenth century, against a background of urbanizing societies and new transportation and communication technologies, connections arose between municipalities in the North Atlantic area (i.e. Europe and North America). Gradually, complex systems were established for the circulation of people, ideas, texts, designs, information etc. between municipalities. Initially, these were based on pre-existing networks (e.g. the Socialist International or the co-operative movement), the personal networks and letter-writing activity of key individuals (e.g. John Nolen or Patrick Geddes), and various universal exhibitions and international congresses (e.g. the International Housing Congresses, founded in 1889). Eventually, these systems became relatively fixed through associations such as the Union Internationale des Villes (UIV – established in 1913 and developed into the International Union of Local Authorities or IULA in 1928) and their conferences and journals (e.g. *Annales de la Regie Directe*).

This Urban International, an international milieu focused on the urban question, became 'an environment where ways of judging, apprehending and acting on the city were defined, where expertise and professional legitimacies were created, where knowledge and disciplines were constructed, and where the profiles of politicians responsible for urban issues were modified' (Saunier 2001: 32). It became 'a place of struggle for definition of the most appropriate objects, methods, tools and people to think about and act on the city' (ibid). Out of this context emerged late nineteenth and early twentieth-century policies on poor relief, employment and unemployment, housing and town planning, and urban services including water, sewerage, electricity, gas, and public transport.

This last insight brings to mind transnational histories of planning which consider how planning ideologies and practices emerged from transnational processes and flows (King 2003, 2004), transnational discourses (Ward 1999, 2000), and transnational communities of practice (Healey 2010). In this connection, it should be noted that urban and social policy associated with the Urban International owed something to earlier and more distanciated colonial connections (King 2004, McFarlane 2008, Nasr and Volait 2003). As such, it is tempting to identify a narrow temporal and spatial focus in Saunier's work – limited to late nineteenth and early twentieth-century Europe and North America – and claim it as a weakness. But this should be avoided. Saunier is drawing on research in the archives of municipalities, municipal associations, and philanthropic foundations to make claims primarily about municipal connections. Empirical material of this kind also supports broader claims about urban policy circulation. But his work does not purport to be a transnational history of urban policy. Rather, it allows comparison between the transnational municipal movement and contemporary urban policy mobility. With this comparison in mind, we now turn to some strengths of Saunier's territorialized history of transnationalism.

One strength derives from Saunier's 'connections' approach to globalization (Saunier 1999b, 2002). He finds much of globalization theory to be rather grand and overly normative. His own project is empirical and modest by comparison. It is to establish how relationships are extended and organized across space and time. He writes:

> I should like to depart from these theoretical discussions, which often turn into prescriptions for what globalization ought to be, or can or cannot be, and espouse the more modest aim of contributing to a more precise contextualization of the ways in which cultural models are diffused, markets extended and relationships organized between governments, and among institutions and non-governmental groups, and how relationships among individuals, groups and institutions are multiplying on a global or macro-regional scale. (Saunier 2002: 508).

In Saunier's account of linkages, relationships, and associations established between individuals and organizations, globalization is – if anything – a constructed, fragmented, and unstable phenomenon. As such, there is much in this approach to remind geographers of work inspired by Actor Network Theory. For example, Latham (2002) rejects theories of globalization for an ontology of actor-networks that may be short or long, and may combine

to produce geographical scale as an effect (but more often do not combine in this way). Similarly, Kendall (2004) argues that global networks are plural (and not singular as Castells would have it), are hardly ever global and have their own spatial specificity, are constructed from the ground up, and require continual maintenance. 'My contention', he writes, 'is that 'big' phenomena – such as globalization – are merely the piling on top of one another of hundreds of specific (international) networks' (p67).

This network or connections approach avoids three problems commonly encountered by Globalization Studies. Firstly, it avoids the problems of scalar geographies of globalization such as the hierarchy between global and local. These problems continue to haunt writings on urban-policy-mobility-as-neoliberalization, even after significant attempts to retheorize scale (e.g. Herod and Wright 2002, Sheppard and McMaster 2003). Secondly, this approach avoids the determinism of sociologies which explain transnational municipalism (or urban policy mobility) in terms of long and linear processes such as urbanization and improvements in transportation and communications technologies. Saunier (2001) writes of 'connection men' by which he means those individuals (most commonly men in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries) who forged connections between municipalities. These were often 'men of goodwill' who served associations and international organizations voluntarily, inspired by visions of peace or socialism or modernity (ibid). They certainly responded to situations in which they found themselves (including those of urbanization with all its attendant challenges and opportunities), but they were never simply blown around like feathers on the wind. Again, some current geographical writing on contemporary urban policy mobility is too preoccupied with processes of neoliberalization to recognise the range of agents involved in the field – the range of their political projects, and the extent of their agency. Finally, Saunier's connections approach avoids the conflation of correlation and causation found in diffusion studies. As Saunier puts it:

> Quite often we talk about models and their direct, unmediated effects. The Haussmannian model, the American model, and the functionalist model follow one after the other in our minds when we draft the scholarly apparatus of our research. But foreign influences, even colonial ones, perform through processes that are not bounded by domination or imitation. Is it enough to evoke influence (usually a 'foreign' influence) to explain a similarity? What is influence if not a social process to be deciphered? [...] it is not satisfactory to deduce influence from synchronicity or

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precedence of ideas or concepts [...] How did people, ideas, texts, designs, information and books circulate? How were they transformed in the process? What were the specific means of circulation, their trends, their effects? (Saunier 1999b: 20).

Here, Saunier uses a central claim of the urban policy mobility literature – that policies change as they move – to critique diffusion studies. He argues for a shift in focus away from the hunt for similar policies in different places, towards the study of policy *circulation*. Who circulates policy? What circulates? How does it circulate? How does circulation change policy?

Another strength of Saunier's approach is the way it produces a number of insights of relevance and interest to contemporary urban policy mobility research. Firstly, the Urban International rested on two shared assumptions or collective pretences. Municipalities were held to be similar and thus comparable, while local government was held to be technical and not political (Payre and Saunier 2008, Saunier 2002). This latter assumption – that urban policy exists in a world of science and administration, a world of professionals seeking a common good – was necessary to allow different groups to come together (and stay together) in the transnational municipal movement. These included Catholics, the freemasons, socialists, reformists, liberals, pacifists, and internationalists (Saunier 2002). We return to this insight in the next two sections as discussion turns to the relationship between urban policy mobility and anti-politics/post-politics. It is argued that local government is commonly perceived to be technical (and not political) in the contemporary period too. One reason for this, in a context of urban policy mobility, is presumably the corresponding need to hold together internally diverse networks. Another reason, however, is the rise of anti-politics more generally in society over the last few decades. Each of these developments supports the other so that anti-politics and urban policy mobility describe a mutually reinforcing system.

A second insight is that certain agencies sought to universalize particular values and models through the Urban International. For example, the US State Department and related philanthropic foundations sought to universalize American values and models during the Cold War (Saunier 2001, 2002). They were concerned to find scientific and managerial solutions for what they perceived to be a chaotic world, but they were also keen to strengthen America's place in the world – by disseminating 'ways of seeing, thinking about and

managing the city that suited the American liberal project' (Saunier 2001: 387). This insight lends historical support to narratives of attempted universalization in the field of contemporary urban policy mobility (e.g. those of neoliberalization). A final insight is that urban policy mobility was used rhetorically from the very beginning of the transnational municipal movement (Payre and Saunier 2008, Saunier 1999a, 1999b, 2002). Stories about other cities were used by politicians and municipal officers to subvert – or to strengthen – the local status quo. For example, John Nolen used stories from Europe to convince colleagues and opponents in North America that his own planning ideas were not so extreme and could be trusted (Saunier 1999a). Again, this insight provides historical support to certain claims in the urban policy mobility literature. McCann (2010) refers to 'the local politics of policy transfer' by which he means the way in which policy mobility is used in local political struggles by city authorities but also urban social movement organisations. Gonzalez (2010) found recently that urban policy tourism to Barcelona and Bilbao is used by participants less to discover new policy ideas and more to legitimize and provide cover for existing policies.

## 4) Urban policy circulation in the twenty-first century

Regarding contemporary urban policy mobility, Saunier's territorialized histories of transnationalism can be put to work in at least two ways. Firstly, his conceptual approach to globalization can be used to inform contemporary analysis. Urban policy mobility can be viewed as a constructed and contingent field of connection, exchange, and circulation; a field populated by numerous individuals, cities, and their networks; a field structured by the events and publications of associations and governmental organizations; a field in which urban questions, problems, solutions, and expertise get formulated and struggled over. This view has advantages over those which reduce the field to successfully mobilized policies, or seemingly neoliberal policies, or particularly well-known cities, or policy transfer (as opposed to policy co-production in transnational policy communities). Such points of focus derive from important broader projects to understand how certain policies get adopted over others, or how certain cities come to be thought of as exemplars, or how certain political programmes travel and get localized. But they are selective and together fail to make up a comprehensive picture of contemporary urban policy mobility.

Secondly, Saunier's findings regarding the Urban International of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries can be used to cast light on certain aspects of contemporary urban

policy mobility, including its organization, geographical scope, speed (of circulation), and relationship with anti-politics/post-politics. This section is organised using these five themes. One purpose of the comparative move through which they are generated is to identify those elements of contemporary urban policy mobility which are historically distinctive – to answer the question of what makes current developments different from those of the recent and not so recent past. Another product here is the identification of elements with long historical roots and significance by virtue of their relative permanence. A further purpose is to elaborate a research agenda for studies of contemporary urban policy mobility. Elements identified for their historical distinctiveness or depth demand further consideration by scholars in the field. They give rise to new questions which are introduced in the remaining sections of this paper.

For Saunier (2001), the Urban International was structured around three sets of organizations: international associations (e.g. the UIV/IULA or the Garden Cities and Town Planning Federation – also established in 1913, and known from 1929 as the International Federation for Housing and Town Planning); North American philanthropic foundations (Carnegie, Rockefeller, Ford etc.); and international institutions (the League of Nations, the International Labour Office, the United Nations etc.). From this perspective, contemporary urban policy mobility looks to be *disorganized*. Power in the field is distributed to relationships not just between cities and a limited number of relatively large and easily identifiable organizations, but also between journalists, think tanks, consultancies, and even technologies of government which take on a life of their own such as 'quality of life' rankings and 'competitiveness' league tables. For McCann (2010), urban policy circulation in the twenty-first century involves not only this supply side (populated by researchers, consultants, entrepreneurs etc.) but also a demand side that is similarly multiple and diverse (containing local politicians and government officers but also local business representatives and urban social movement organisations). Contemporary urban policy mobility involves a vast informational infrastructure of people, organizations, and technologies that interpret, frame, package, and represent information about urban policies, 'best practices', 'successful cities' etc. (McCann 2004, 2008, 2010). So agents of this process include educators, trainers, professional bodies, non-governmental organizations, the popular media and so on.

From the perspective of Saunier's Urban International, then, contemporary urban policy mobility looks to be disorganized. But this view also derives from the perspective of cities in

the so-called Global North (which constitute the empirical field for McCann's research). From the perspective of cities in the Global South, and through the lens of Saunier's Urban International still, current urban policy circulation also looks to be notably *organized*. For Saunier (2001), international institutions became increasingly important during the first half of the twentieth century. Associations such as the IULA increasingly followed the priorities of relatively well-financed institutions such as the International Labour Office and the United Nations, providing information to them and being employed by them as consultants. This direction of movement continued during the second half of the twentieth century so that power in contemporary times is not only distributed to the relationships between numerous and diverse agents (as in the paragraph above) but also concentrated in the relationships between certain cities and what Peck and Theodore (2010b) call a 'fast-policy complex' comprised of two kinds of institution. On the one hand are those international bodies like the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) which narrate, highlight, showcase, recommend, frame, document, and codify urban policy – a 'soft' form of governance (Theodore and Peck 2010) much like that attempted by Saunier's associations and institutions. On the other hand are those organizations like the World Bank which make and enforce rules in the areas of social and urban policy, especially for poorer national states and their cities. Some commentators write of a global 'rule regime' associated with the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, and the World Trade Organization which sets the parameters in which much contemporary urban policy making and circulation now takes place (Brenner et al 2010, Peck 2002, Peck and Tickell 2002).

A second characteristic of contemporary urban policy mobility that is brought into focus by Saunier's research on the Urban International is its geographical scope. It has already been mentioned that much of Saunier's work focuses on the North Atlantic area from the late nineteenth century onwards. This is explained by his focus on municipalities and their associations (as opposed to urban policy more broadly). It is also explained by what Saunier calls the 'beats' or phases of municipalization (Saunier 2008), of which there have been three to date. First came the invention of local authorities from the beginning of the nineteenth century as cogs in the (European) nation-state machine. Then came the adoption of this state-municipality framework by former colonial possessions after the Second World War. Finally, in the period since the 1980s, Europe has been remunicipalized (after the collapse of the Soviet Union and with continued European integration) while Latin America has been

municipalized (after transitions from authoritarian to democratic regimes, and in national contexts of fiscal austerity).

Saunier's research has been confined mostly to the first of these beats – to informal transnational exchanges between municipalities beginning in the late nineteenth century, and the formalization of these connections via structured organizations during the early twentieth century. But the geographical scope of contemporary urban policy mobility follows from (or dances to) all three beats. A common form of intermunicipal exchange at the present moment is the technical-assistance or capacity-building partnership or network between cities in the so-called Global North and South (see Clarke Forthcoming). These can be organized from the bottom-up, as when cities from the Global South respond to the challenges of rapid urbanization by seeking out ideas and solutions from elsewhere – much like European cities did at the turn of the twentieth century (Hietala 2008). They can also be organized from the top-down by international governmental organizations which perceive a 'developing' world characterized by two processes: urbanization (i.e. more and more people are living in cities); and decentralization (i.e. more and more of these cities have their own relatively autonomous and democratically legitimate governments). An international development strategy follows from this perception which focuses on municipalities, their existing capacity, and means of building their capacity in the future (through municipal connections and urban policy circulation) (Clarke Forthcoming). We see this in policy areas such as 'towns and development' (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization – UNESCO), 'decentralized cooperation' (the European Union), and 'city-to-city cooperation' (United Nations Centre for Human Settlements – Habitat).

Speed of circulation is another line of enquiry suggested by the juxtaposition of histories concerning the transnational municipal movement and discussions of urban policy circulation in the twenty-first century. Much of Saunier's work describes study tours and overseas visits which took months to complete by ocean liner and train. Politicians, engineers, reformers and others would accompany each other on long journeys, stay in each other's houses, work in each other's officers, get to know intimately alternative cities, alternative policies, alternative lives. Much of the urban policy mobility literature, by contrast, describes something called 'fast policy' (see Peck and Theodore 2001, Peck 2002, Peck and Tickell 2002). It is argued that urban policy circulates rapidly at the present moment for a number of reasons. New transportation and communications technologies enable quick visits to other

cities while new forms of evaluation science enable quick engagements with other policies (Peck and Theodore 2010a). Policy intermediation institutions such as think tanks and consultancies have grown in both size and number since the 1970s, and profit from the policy ideas and models they generate and circulate (Peck 2003). In addition, the contemporary neoliberal settlement demands continual reengineering in order to manage its contradictions and failures. But such experimentation takes place within a narrow (neoliberal) policy repertoire that contains few solutions to problems of poverty, unemployment and so on. The result is that new 'variations on a theme' are continually sought out so that policy cycles shorten while policy turnover times accelerate (Peck and Tickell 2002). Finally, we have seen over the last few decades 'the triumph of politics over policy' (Peck and Theodore 2001). Policy turnover times have been aligned with political cycles. Each new politician needs a new policy for each new campaign.

It seems to me that more could be made of this local politics of fast policy. Most municipalities are democracies of some kind or another. Urban policy, therefore, must not just be negotiated between local politicians and council officers on the one hand, and national or international politicians, bureaucrats, consultants, researchers, journalists etc. on the other. It must also be negotiated with local citizens and their representatives, groups, movements, and organisations. A properly relational geography of urban policy must recognise this and consider not just relationships between municipalities, or between municipalities and national or international governmental organizations, but also relationships between local authorities and their constituents. These latter relationships are highly mediated. What role do they play in fast policy? How do local democracy, twenty-first century media, the discipline of public relations, and fast policy come together? These questions demand further empirical investigation.

Another outstanding question which follows from reading fast policy through Saunier's research begins with Gonzalez's notion of policy tourism (Gonzalez 2010). For Gonzalez, policy professionals who visited Barcelona and Bilbao during the 1990s and 2000s undertook policy tourism – a brief and guided engagement with a mythologized, exoticized, spectacularized city. Given how some commentators claim that we now live in touristic times (see Franklin 2003, Franklin and Crang 2001), we might ask the following questions of contemporary urban policy mobility. To what extent is policy tourism generalized as a form of engagement between urban policy professionals (and their cities)? Is policy tourism

something new that can be distinguished from an earlier (and slower) policy travel? What characterizes such policy travel in the research of historians like Saunier? Can policy tourism and travel be identified by the different breadth and depth of engagement they afford to participants? Similar questions have been pursued in Tourism Studies ever since Boorstin (1961). Geographers of public policy have found much of use in the mobility literature just recently (see McCann 2010). The suggestion here is that more could be found in the tourism literature – including now classic work on 'pseudo-events' (when tourists confuse authenticity with proximity to the media images with which they are already familiar – Boorstin 1961), 'staged authenticity' (when host cultures sell tourists the spectacles they seek, maintaining a front-stage/back-stage division where necessary – MacCannell 1976), and 'the tourist gaze' (a particular way of seeing other people and places, contingent on particular material and cultural conditions – Urry 1990).

This exercise of viewing contemporary urban policy circulation through the lens of historical research on municipal connections provides one more line of enquiry. For Saunier, late nineteenth and early twentieth-century urban policy was reduced to the technical and managerial – as opposed to the ideological or political – in order to sustain internally diverse municipal networks. A collective pretence that local government inhabited a world of science and administration, populated by professionals seeking the common good, was required to enable various groups – from Catholics to socialists – to hold together in the Urban International. Similarly, at the present moment, across much of the world, urban policy is frequently reduced to the technical and managerial. For example, a recent Local Government International Leaders Symposium (organised in 2009 and hosted in London by the Improvement and Development Agency of the Local Government Association Group) was structured into knowledge transfer sessions focused on the 'small things' that supposedly make up local government, such as light-switch timers that help reduce carbon emissions from council-owned buildings (see Clarke Forthcoming). So why do we find urban policy reduced to the technical and managerial at the present moment? One reason is that internally diverse networks of policy professionals still need maintaining, just as they did a century ago. But there are other reasons suggested by two related literatures: anti-politics and post-politics – both of which are concerned with how politics and the political have become squeezed out of policy spaces by management and the technical in recent decades.

**5) Anti-politics and post-politics**

This section introduces and critically reviews the literatures on anti-politics and post-politics. Together, they suggest that in recent decades, public policy in the so-called West has been reduced to questions of science and technology, along with strategies of populism and moral absolutism. This has been at the expense of discussion and struggle over questions of value and priority. It has resulted from the failure of the Left to reconstruct itself after Stalin and again after 1989, the deregulation of markets during the 1980s (which undermined faith in nation-state politics), and the rise of liberal technologies of governance such as partnerships between stakeholders prepared to accept certain parameters of debate. These broad moves provide a context for contemporary urban policy mobility. We have learned from Saunier that anti-politics is produced by urban policy mobility which requires that diverse networks be maintained (through avoidance of contentious issues) and that policies be generalizable (as opposed to being products of site-specific political struggle). We can learn from the anti-politics and post-politics literatures that anti-politics is also produced by other means in contemporary society, providing a generalized supportive background for urban policy mobility. These points are developed further below after the relevant literatures are introduced.

The anti-politics literature, by which I mean all those academic texts using the term 'anti-politics' in a prominent way, is relatively small and yet stretches from the 1970s to the present day, and from Philosophy to Political Science, Anthropology, and Geography, such that it is characterized by considerable internal diversity and, in some places, inconsistency and incoherence. One starting point for this literature is a distinction made in Philosophy between the politics of Aristotle and the anti-politics of Plato (see Weiler 1997). For Aristotle, governing describes an art involving laws and complex questions of morality, all of which require interpretation, discussion, and the consideration of multiple perspectives (i.e. politics). For Plato, by contrast, governing describes an exact science involving rulers who possess knowledge (and rule over the ignorant). This latter position was developed further by Hobbes who directed governing towards the ultimate end of security and dismissed public discussion as both useless (given the ignorance of ordinary people) and dangerous (given the risk of rebellion) (ibid).

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A related starting point for political philosophers and some political scientists is the classical polis, the Aristotelian affairs of which provide a definition of politics, along with definitions of the political or public sphere (i.e. the polis), and the non-political or private sphere (Hindess 1997). They also provide another definition of politics as that discussion and struggle which takes place over what counts as the public and private sphere, and where the boundary should be drawn between the political and non-political domains (ibid). For such a debate to proceed – i.e. for politics to proceed – certain conditions and assumptions are required. About these, however, there is little agreement in the literature. Schedler (1997) holds that people must think of themselves as members of an interdependent community, as different from each other but not in a fundamental and irreconcilable way, and as subject to authoritative decisions made on behalf of the community as a whole. Only then can discussion take place and lead to government. For others, however, an additional condition is that people (or parties) must disagree, be free to disagree and, if necessary, come into conflict with one another over questions of value, priority, choice, resources and so forth (see Barry 2002, Berger 1979, Ferguson 1994).

This is where some of the anti-politics literature overlaps with the post-politics literature – a smaller and more recent body of work associated with Jacques Rancière, Slavoj Zizek, and Chantal Mouffe. Curiously, these 'continental' philosophers do not refer to the (primarily Anglo-American) anti-politics literature, but they do share some of its concerns including an association between politics and disagreement – which they seek to develop further. For example, Rancière (2004) defines politics as the meeting point of three processes or achievements. Firstly, everyone must get to speak – including those without self-discipline. Secondly, a quarrel must be forced between the traditionally entitled and the traditionally excluded. Finally, this quarrel must be over the very nature of the situation itself. It must involve dissensus – a dispute over the assumed arrangement of things ('the police' – Rancière 1998).

So politics in the post-politics literature is a rare, local, contingent phenomenon that produces conflict, interruption, fragmentation, instability, disorder – and is always on the verge of disappearing and reappearing (Rancière 2004). This distinguishes the post-politics literature from parts of the anti-politics literature which focus on modern politics defined as a collection of specific and specialist items arranged to facilitate discussion and including organized parties, manifestos, elections, parliaments, press conferences and so forth (see

Barry 2002, Mulgan 1994). Still, where both literatures agree is that politics is not found everywhere (despite the claims of Cultural Studies). This position makes possible talk of anti-politics or post-politics.

What, then, is anti-politics or post-politics? While there is some disagreement between the two literatures about what constitutes politics, there is little disagreement about what constitutes its negative form. For this reason, and for reasons of convenience and narrative flow, in the rest of this paper I will collapse the two terms (anti-politics and post-politics) into one: anti-politics – the one that best acknowledges four decades of scholarship in this general area, and the one that avoids periodizing history into coherent eras of politics and its other. Reading across both literatures, anti-politics appears to describe at least three things. Firstly, those activities which seek to abolish the political domain and vacate the public sphere (Schedler 1997). This is done by replacing collective problems with a self-regulating order (e.g. the market); or replacing plurality and difference (that need coordination) with uniformity (e.g. the people of populism, the nation of nationalism, the faithful of religious fundamentalism); or replacing contingency and the idea that life could be different if only we chose another path, with necessity and the idea of irresistible, unquestionable, external forces (e.g. nature, God, the market) (ibid).

A second component of anti-politics consists of those activities which seek to replace the communicative rationality of the political domain with another rationality (Schedler 1997). This may be a private rationality adopted by 'politicians' who make decisions to maximize their own personal utility. Or it may be a moral rationality adopted by moral absolutists who resist disagreement by characterizing it as immorality. Or it may be a theatrical rationality adopted by charismatic performers who place the image over the word, beauty over truth, character over evidence, and emotion over argument. Or, most importantly for the purposes of this paper, it may be a scientific rationality adopted by technocrats who resist disagreement by characterizing it as ignorance. In all of these cases, Habermas's notion of the system colonizing the lifeworld is turned on its head: the lifeworld colonizes the system (ibid).

Finally, anti-politics consists of all those activities which seek to replace disagreement and dissensus (among all the people) with consensus among self-disciplined stakeholders – while those who refuse to discipline themselves (about what can possibly be seen and said in particular situations) get labelled as 'extremists' (Swyngedouw 2009, Walters 2004). At the

present time, these activities are associated with governance: negotiation and compromise which takes place inside parameters set by discourses of neoliberal capitalism, humanitarianism, and cosmopolitanism (Swyngedouw 2009).

Most contributors to these literatures, observing the so-called West and countries like the United Kingdom, argue that anti-politics has been on the rise in recent decades. This provides an important context for contemporary urban policy mobility. For those who associate politics with modern institutions such as parliaments and parties, this change is evident in declining levels of voter turnout, party membership, and positive campaigning (Mulgan 1994). For those who associate politics with disagreement, it is evident in the apparent triumph of governance (Jayasuriya and Hewison 2004, Walters 2004). Reasons given for this growth in anti-politics can be divided into at least two categories. Firstly, there are the linear sociological narratives (e.g. Mulgan 1994). National solutions are thought to be in decline. National states created justice and education systems, built roads and railways etc. but are now encountering a law of diminishing returns such that each new problem they address is more difficult and costly to solve while benefitting fewer members of society (ibid). Also, life politics are thought to be on the rise. As people have become more comfortable in a material sense, they have turned their attention towards macrocosmic issues (e.g. climate change) and microcosmic issues (e.g. sexuality), none of which are best addressed by national states that are left stranded between the macro and micro levels. In addition, politics is thought to have become gradually more professionalized. The media and politicians now form a closed world – 'the media-politics complex' (ibid) – in which opinions are formed and legitimized with little genuine participation by 'the people'. Finally, information and objective reality are thought to have become gradually divorced. Information has been industrialized, manufactured, twisted, multiplied, and disseminated in a way that leaves fewer grounds for judgement, and more dependence on the authority of charismatic politicians and their media allies (ibid).

These linear sociological narratives exhibit some of the problems Saunier identifies in globalization theory (see Section 2). They lean towards the grand, the normative, the deterministic, and the conflation of correlation with causation. But other reasons are found in the literature – in less linear accounts – for the prevalence of anti-politics at this particular historical conjuncture. These include how the Old Left failed to reconstruct itself after Stalin (and again after 1989), while the New Left attacked rationality and bureaucracy in the name

of spontaneity and imagination (Berger 1979). Meanwhile, finance and trade were deregulated with effects including a perception that Keynesian national economic management was no longer possible, and a related perception that national government was no longer worthy of faith (Hindess 1997). Connected to this, regulatory state rescaling – that was also a response to fiscal crises at the national level along with Europeanization at the regional level (Swyngedouw 1996) – produced a form of local governance informed by liberalism and oriented towards consensus, accommodation, inclusion, participation, partnership, stakeholders and so forth (Walters 2004). The alternative here would be a discourse informed by Marxism, feminism, or anticolonialism – all of which emphasize irreducible perspectives, fundamental oppositions, and struggle or contestation (ibid).

So, for commentators like Swyngedouw, contemporary governance is characterized by elite coalitions beyond democratic control, and a technocratic-managerial-entrepreneurial state that, in turn, becomes an authoritarian state (Swyngedouw 1996, 2005). In addition, this anti-political condition derives from numerous political acts and conjunctures. It may well be that local government has become technical and managerial in order to sustain diverse networks of urban policy professionals. This would fit with Saunier's description of an Urban International composed of diverse interest groups and held together by a collective pretence that local government administers a common good informed by science and freed from contestation (over questions of value and priority). But local government has also become anti-political over the last few decades in a broader context of New Left thinking and liberal governance. The result is that anti-politics and urban policy mobility now come together in a mutually reinforcing system. Transnational policy circulation has always demanded that policy be technical – has always *produced* policy as technical – so that policy exists independently of local political context. Now, anti-politics is produced in other domains too before feeding back into urban policy mobility. Indeed, anti-politics describes one reason why urban policy mobility is so prevalent in the current situation; just as urban policy mobility helps to explain the contemporary prominence of anti-politics.

A final point to make here is that anti-political urban policy mobility represents a problem for anyone who cares about city development and city life. This is not because liberalism and its repertoire of inclusion, participation, compromise etc. is distinguishable from 'proper' or 'genuine' or 'true' politics, as some would have it (e.g. Swyngedouw 2009). Indeed, liberalism constitutes a serious engagement with the crucial political question of how to live

freely in societies divided by conflicts of value, interest, and faith (Barnett 2005). But too often contemporary urban policy is reduced to the 'small things' that everyone can agree on – with those who focus on areas of disagreement being excluded. The point here is not that small things in themselves are ineffective. We can learn this from Saunier's connections approach to globalization. But sometimes the changes we demand of cities – more decent jobs, more affordable housing, more environmental sustainability – cannot be achieved without vested interests being challenged and disagreement taking place.

## 6) Conclusion

Contemporary urban policy mobility both produces and is produced by anti-politics. This is one characteristic of the field, with others being a tension between organization and disorganization, its extensive geographical scope, and the fast speed of policy circulation. This concluding section summarises the main contributions made in this paper towards researching urban policy mobility – of which there have been three.

Firstly, histories of the transnational municipal movement have been critically reviewed with a particular focus on the research of Pierre-Yves Saunier. It has been argued that much of this research is exemplary for human geographers. The historical gaze makes clear that urban policy mobility is not new and cannot simply be confined to particular historical moments, such as the medieval and early modern period or the last three to four decades. The historical method begins with organizations of various kinds, from municipalities to philanthropic foundations, and from municipal associations to international institutions. It does this for practical reasons, because historical research depends on archived documents. But such a starting point brings into focus the full breadth of attempts to mobilize urban policy, some of which succeed while others fail. This breadth of view is lacking in studies of contemporary urban policy mobility which 'follow the [successfully mobilized] policy' using 'flow methodologies' (Peck and Theodore 2010a). Saunier's connections approach to globalization is also exemplary. Theoretically, it is consistent with network approaches to globalization derived from Actor Network Theory and related bodies of work. But it wears any theoretical clothing just lightly enough to leave room for elements of induction and empiricism too. The result is an approach to urban policy mobility which sees more of this rich field than has been seen by those with views filtered through heavily theoretical lenses (e.g. neoliberalization) – which are heavily normative too in many cases.

The second contribution describes a set of claims and questions derived from a comparison between policy mobility within the Urban International of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and policy mobility in the contemporary period. This comparison was constructed to produce new positions and lines of enquiry for research in this area. It brought into focus the salient characteristics of contemporary urban policy mobility, including those which make it historically distinctive, and those which derive their significance from relative historical permanence or depth. In view of experiences around the turn of the twentieth century, transnational policy circulation at the present moment looks to be notably disorganized, with power in the field distributed to relationships between cities, local governments and their partners, journalists, think tanks, consultancies, and technologies such as 'quality of life' rankings and 'competitiveness' league tables. For some cities, especially those in the so-called Global South, it also looks to be notably organized with power concentrated between certain cities and a set of international organisations which either frame urban policy in particular ways or else make and enforce rules in this field, setting 'hard' parameters for urban policy activity. Compared in this way, contemporary urban policy mobility also appears to be extensive in geographical scope, and fast such that policies come and go as they fail to turn cities around within short political timeframes. It also seems to be anti-political, both in a way that is historically common – because urban policy mobility requires that diverse networks be held together, and this requires in turn a pretence that local government is a technical and managerial achievement (and not an outcome of local interests and struggle over values and priorities) – but also in a way that is historically specific, because anti-politics is generated in society more broadly in the present period, providing a supportive background for urban policy mobility.

From this comparative exercise follow elements of a research agenda for studies of urban policy mobility – a third and final contribution. These elements are distinctive because of the paper's original starting points: an engagement with historical research on the transnational municipal movement; a comparative exercise derived from this engagement; and a further engagement, stimulated by this comparative exercise, with writings on anti-politics and post-politics. One set of questions to emerge concerns the tension between organization and disorganization in the field. Do experiences of organization and disorganization map neatly onto categories such as Northern and Southern cities? Robinson (2011) argues that power relations cannot be so easily assumed in this era of post-conditionality (when Structural

Adjustment Policies are not so confidently pursued). So what is the experience of organized and disorganized policy mobility among different and particular cities? Another set of questions concerns the extensive geographical scope of contemporary urban policy mobility and especially the phenomenon of transfer and co-production across the so-called North-South divide – which dates back at least to (formal) colonial times, but characterizes the present moment in a way that invites serious post-colonial engagement (see Clarke Forthcoming). A third set of questions concerns the speed of current policy circulation between cities. If it is fast, as some claim, is it also touristic – involving quick, superficial, spectacularized engagements? Is there a necessary relationship between speed of policy circulation and breadth or depth of policymaker engagement? The relationship between urban policy mobility and local democracy describes a final area demanding further research. What role do twenty-first century media and the discipline of public relations play in accelerating local political cycles? What is the relationship between these cycles, policy turnover, and policy circulation? The association in this paper between urban policy mobility and anti-politics also deserves further consideration. Must the former produce the latter (and vice versa)? Can interest groups use urban policy mobility to generate discussion, to locate alternatives, to achieve disagreement? Some recent scholarship is suggestive in this regard (e.g. McCann 2008, McFarlane 2009). This possible tension between politics and anti-politics in the field provides a final area for additional study.

## Acknowledgements

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