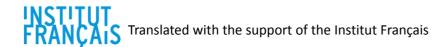# Post-industrial cities: towards a new approach

Max Rousseau

While anglophone urban studies have sought to critique the way capitalism has developed, the French social sciences have instead chosen to produce detailed monographs of urban spaces. However, both traditions can be combined to good advantage, as Max Rousseau shows here through a historical analysis of urban policies in (post-)industrial cities.

The Louvre-Lens, Pompidou-Metz, The Cité du Design in Saint-Etienne, Marseille as European Capital of Culture: in old industrial cities faced with large-scale material hardship (unemployment, run-down buildings, impoverishment of part of the population), the elites are increasingly choosing to devote significant resources to symbolic goods (by constructing prestigious buildings, for instance), which furthermore are often intangible (advertising campaigns, festivals), with the aim of improving the image of their city. However, the effectiveness of "reimaging" for those cities hardest hit by deindustrialisation seems altogether relative – some researchers have likened it to "lipstick on a gorilla" (Neill 1995). How, then, are we to interpret these investment choices?

To answer this question, we need to consider image policies, i.e. policies aimed at changing the way the city is perceived by the local local population or by target audiences outside the city. Broadly speaking, there are two dominant types of approach, which are usually presented as contradictory and mutually critical. On the one hand, the French disciplines related to the city (political science and geography) adopt a "micro" approach, emphasising social, spatial and political changes at local level. On the other hand, English-speaking urban studies adopt a "macro" approach, highlighting the role of changes in capitalism. And yet not only do these two research traditions prove to be complementary, but the combination of their respective contributions can also improve our understanding of the way urban power and urban policies have evolved over a long time frame. This is what one study has shown in the cases of Roubaix (near Lille in northern France) and Sheffield (in Yorkshire in northern England).[1] Despite significant differences in local and national contexts, combining the two research traditions highlights a similar change in register in terms of municipal action in both cities from the Second World War to the present.

French political science and anglophone urban studies: two theoretically contradictory approaches

In France, image policies have been the subject of sustained interest in the social sciences since the 1990s. Overall, these works are characterised by the method used, based on substantial monographs and with little focus on theory. Very generally, French studies highlight the strictly

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[1]   The study in question was conducted as part of my PhD thesis in political science (Rousseau 2011).

political stakes of the image policies. They strive in particular to show that such policies can bolster an urban power faced with the fragmentation of local society in cities at risk of becoming "ungovernable"; they can do this in two ways: by reinforcing the legitimacy of elected officials, and/or by promoting coalition-building (Le Bart 1999; Rosemberg 2000).

By contrast, English-speaking urban studies put the emphasis above all on the role of changes in capitalism in the rise of urban marketing in post-industrial cities at the turn of the 1980s. Overall, the researchers that subscribe to this movement consider image policies as policies with concrete aims, guided by pressing constraints linked to recent changes in capitalism. In the wake of the work of David Harvey, this critical current focuses its analyses on a "spatialised" version of regulation theory and shows how the post-Fordist shift in Western economies has led to a need for cities to establish niches in a context of increased capital mobility. Consequently, the work of these researchers seeks to consider image policies as exactly what they claim to be: attractiveness policies intended primarily to encourage urban development, the need for which has been "created" by growing competition between cities (Harvey 1989). While francophone research concentrates principally on the political dimension of image policies, the anglophone field of urban studies attaches greater importance to their economic dimension.

Overall, these two approaches are often presented as mutually exclusive. English-speaking urban studies are accused of being more interested in exploring major theories in greater depth than in validating these theories through field studies. Even within this movement, the recent trend for the almost total abandonment of monographs in favour of purely theoretical approaches is now seen as problematic. In sum, the best-case verdict is that urban studies gain in heuristic capacity what they lose in attention to local contexts, analytical precision and, in the end, scientificity. This criticism would seem to be particularly strong in France, where the obsession among urban researchers for monographs has perhaps led to a drift in the opposite direction: difficulties in making comparisons, in generalising findings and, ultimately, in understanding the key forces that help to build the city (Béal 2010).

Combining the two approaches : the image of the city as a tool for analysing changes in governance and urban policies

In the course of my thesis research, it became clear to me that analysing image policies in Roubaix and Sheffield – two cities that found themselves with an economic base that was no longer fit for purpose – required an exploration of these policies by combining the two schools of thought presented above. Image policies result, to varying degrees, from constraints imposed by both external factors (globalisation, competition between cities, reorganisation of national urban policies, etc.) and internal factors (social changes, changes in the local economy, restructuring of urban power, etc.). Furthermore, these image policies also incorporate, to varying degrees, both political and economic dimensions. By combining both approaches, therefore, it is possible to study the various dimensions of image policies on the one hand, and, on the other, to reveal more about these policies by simultaneously linking them to a broad economic and political context and placing them within the context of changes in societies and urban governments. Image policies then appear as particularly heuristic objects through which to analyse changes in urban governance over a long period of time.

I therefore tried to apply to these two industrial cities the analytical framework inspired by regulation theory ("Fordist City"/"post-Fordist city") and which forms one of the main analytical tools used in British and North American urban studies. To this end, I began my research by conducting in-depth interviews with many of the people involved in producing the key policies relating to the images of these two cities since the 1980s. It then occurred to me that this paradigm informs the analysis of urban change, including in the context of France, and that, furthermore, the tradition of detailed French social-science monographs could be used to improve upon this theory. The reality is that there have been marked changes in both cities' image policies over the last thirty

years – i.e. even during the post-Fordist era – revealing a change in urban governance: the economic and political players involved in the production of image policies during the 2000s were not the same as in the 1980s.

The long-term study of the production and targets of image policies in these two (post-)industrial cities in this way made it possible to qualify the idea of a clean break between the Fordist era and the post-Fordist era. After identifying a two-phase periodisation in the post-Fordist era, I went back to look at the Fordist period to see if it was possible to do the same. Detailed work based on monographs and local archives (grey literature, employers' publications, general and professional local press) concerning economic sectors and urban policies in this period again meant I was able to identify two sub-periods. Finally, if we are attentive to the economic, political, social and even cultural changes affecting these cities both during and in between these two periods, we see the emergence of a new periodisation of urban power and policies that enriches the regulationist analysis.

Changes in urban governance in industrial cities: a five-phase model

Below, I shall present the key paradigm identified during this research as a result of closely associating urban studies and the urban social sciences in the cases of Roubaix and Sheffield.

From early urban Fordism to late urban Fordism: the "Fordisation" of urban policies and the emergence of branding policies

The years from 1940 to 1970 should not be considered the decades of the "Fordist city", but rather the decades that saw a process of "Fordisation" of urban policies. It can be broken down into three processes. First, from the standpoint of the organisation of urban power, Fordisation meant the gradual distancing of the working class as a result of two factors: the reinforcement of political leadership (the mayor of Roubaix and the leader of Sheffield city council respectively) on the one hand, and a phenomenon of "managerialisation" of urban policy, characterised by increased staffing and the professionalisation of urban managers (in local government and, in Roubaix, in employer organisations) on the other. Second, in terms of the framework guiding urban policy at the time, Fordisation meant gradually attaching greater importance to the theme of the image of the city. This process is a direct consequence of the first: in both cities, such concern for image does not come from the working class but the middle class, the business community and an urban political and administrative environment that was no longer under the influence of the unions. Third, the production of urban policies was affected by these first two developments. Housing policy – a crucial issue in the Fordist city, as it forms an important part of the "social wage" essential to the stability of the regime of accumulation – is a particularly interesting angle from which to measure the impact of this process on the Fordisation of urban policies.

This process can be better understood if we make a distinction between early urban Fordism and late urban Fordism. In both cities, image policies only emerged during the second of these sub-periods, from the start of the 1960s onwards. One major factor is specific to the Fordisation of urban policies: an accelerated reinforcement of local administrative structures. In both cities, the local councils became more empowered, notably through the enhancement and professionalisation of their technical departments. Meanwhile, the influence of the working class on urban power was decreasing, for several reasons. In Roubaix, the working class – itself more and more divided as a result of employers' increasing use of migrant labour – faced competition in terms of determining the municipal agenda from the rise of new interests, especially those of local traders. In Sheffield, the trade unions that traditionally controlled the Labour local authority were increasingly hampered at national level because of the way the steel industry was organised in the Fordist era. In both cities, a gap opened up during the Fordist period, allowing different stakeholders to put the question

of the image of the city on the municipal agenda: traders and elected officers in Roubaix; municipal technicians and local councillors in Sheffield.

This consideration of image led to a change in housing policy. The development of large, modern, system-built housing estates in the centres of both cities at the start of the 1960s heralded their entry into the era of late urban Fordism: far from being a mere "output" of the all-powerful Keynesian central government, they met a new desire to "sell" the industrial city. In Sheffield, the construction of large housing estates directly by the local council was a response to electoral competition: the city became the showcase of a Labour Party able to bring happiness to "its" working class by building housing featuring bold architecture at lower production costs and in a shorter timescale than private housebuilders. This incorporation of an image-based approach in local housing policy represents an inversion of working-class control of the Labour city council: as workers' preferences in terms of public housing traditionally lay in houses rather than flats, these housing estates were not appreciated by their tenants and rapidly fell into a spiral of decline. Therefore, while influential sociologists (Crouch 2006) consider that the "peak of democracy" – during which consideration of the interests of the working classes was at its zenith in terms of public policy – occurred during the Fordist era, it would be more accurate to say it was reached only under *early* urban Fordism. Similarly, in Roubaix, while the production of housing by employers had taken place in close consultation with the trade unions since World War II, the city centre became the showcase of a "new" Roubaix in the early 1960s at the request, in particular, of local traders keen to attract new residents with higher purchasing power than the immigrant workers hitherto favoured by employers in the textile industry.

The period of "urban sacrifice": the importance of city branding in the face of the economic crisis

Image policies also appear, in both cities, as attempts by the urban powers that be to "resolve" the increasing contradictions of regulation throughout the Fordist era: in Roubaix, the growing dependence on attracting immigrant labour in textile factories; in Sheffield, an increasing dependence on Keynesian interventionism by central government as the steel industry began to collapse. This phenomenon gathered speed during the third phase of the temporal model, which I call "urban sacrifice" and which covers several years of rapid destruction of the industrial economic base of both cities. This "urban sacrifice" was a brief period of major divergences in long-term urban trajectories that, while different in each of the two cities, are broadly comparable. For instance, methods of urban regulation were cobbled together rather hurriedly in both cities, but were of different natures, in accordance with the different local and national policy contexts (the rise of the Chamber of Commerce in Roubaix; the reawakening of a tradition of political radicalism in Sheffield at the beginning of the Thatcher era). Image policies also took on very different dimensions in each city (efforts were made to open up Roubaix to the service sector, executives and engineers; in Sheffield, the city's working-class identity was reaffirmed, in particular through anti-Thatcherite political activism).

Moreover, this brief period is marked by the intrusion of urban society into the production of image policies: for example, the social movement in the Alma-Gare district of Roubaix partly based its strategy on a misappropriation of the new image for the city promoted by the coalition in charge of urban policy, and the movement produced abundant iconography depicting its vision of a future based on participation and conviviality in this neighbourhood threatened by urban renewal. In Sheffield, the urban renewal measures of the late urban Fordist period, intended to sell the image of a futuristic city, also led to the emergence of social movements. These were also very active in symbolic terms, destabilising the Labour management during late urban Fordism, and set the national policy of promoting a British economy based on the service sector against a municipal policy of consolidating heavy industry.

Overall, these urban social movements can be seen as the reactions of groups affected by the Fordisation of urban policies – that is to say, the working classes, who found a key resource in the

construction of a "counter-image" of the city in their opposition to urban policies. The legacy of this "counter-image" would affect the image policies promoted during the final sub-period.

From early urban entrepreneurialism to late urban entrepreneurialism: towards the construction of urban brands

The period from the early 1980s can also be divided into two phases, both corresponding to a certain urban "entrepreneurialism" in post-industrial cities. During the post-Fordist era, simple crisis management replaced the modes of urban regulation of the Fordist era. The influence of the former working class, now divided, continued to decline. Meanwhile, the entrepreneurial city was at the intersection of declining economic interests (manufacturing, the "old" middle class of merchants and craftspeople) and other, rising interests (post-Fordist employers, local real-estate players). Characterised by a "centrist" philosophy, the era of early urban entrepreneurialism appears in both cities as a sub-period during which a fragile compromise is found between urban society and a reinforced combination of municipal power and post-Fordist economic interests. This sub-period is marked by the search for short-term, "catch-all" solutions to the problem of rising unemployment, the number-one priority on the urban agenda at this time.

Image policies in the 1980s therefore took the form of "mega-projects": large urban marketing operations that sought, without great success, to make a clear break with the image of industrial cities, which was nonetheless borne with pride a decade earlier. In Roubaix, for example, this strategy took the form of the construction of a major telecommunications centre, the technology of which rapidly became obsolete. In Sheffield, the new image of a "sports city" was based on the construction in the late 1980s of many state-of-the-art facilities in the context of its role as host city for the 1991 Universiade (World University Games); here, too, this choice – dictated by symbolic considerations in a crisis situation – does not appear to have been a happy one, with the city council unable to repay loans and having to close many public facilities.

The break occurred at the start of the 1990s, in the form of a centrist "crisis of crisis management". A victim of its own contradictions, this crisis management model collapsed under the influence of various stakeholders. In Roubaix, against the backdrop of a rapid rise in support for the far right, the municipal strategy was challenged by small traders threatened by supermarkets and the impoverishment of the city, as well as by a network of players linked to the local real-estate market, sidelined by the strategy implemented during the period of early urban entrepreneurialism. In Sheffield, the city council's rising debt caused by sports-related mega-projects led to growing opposition to, and declining electoral support for, the Labour Party, while the Conservative central government was able to influence local redevelopment strategies by allocating funds on a competitive basis. From the mid-1990s onwards, late urban entrepreneurialism, characterised by a neoliberal framework, corresponds to the ideal-typical sub-period during which the stakeholders of urban governance fully internalised the logic of post-Fordist capitalism and managed to formulate a more coherent redevelopment strategy, giving priority to economic growth. The rise of economic interests related to new forms of commerce, to local real estate and, in the case of Sheffield, universities, caused a shift in urban policies. Image policies became more formalised and moved towards building true "urban brands" capitalising on the supposed advantages of cities, while the targets of redevelopment became more and more clearly identified: first, companies in the service sector, considered the most innovative and most in tune with the knowledge economy; and second, social groups with high purchasing power (such as tourists and the "new middle class"). Drawing its legitimacy from new theories of economic development emphasising the contribution of the urban growth of affluent social groups (the "creative class" or the "residential economy"), late urban entrepreneurialism is thus characterised by the prevalence of strategies targeting the higher end of the market with the aim of changing the profile of residents and urban consumers in order to revive growth (Rousseau (forthcoming)).

Towards greater openness!

Far from being antithetical, the approach and tools developed respectively by English-speaking urban studies and the French urban social sciences can, as we have seen, be usefully combined to analyse the processes at work in Western cities in the long term. Urban studies provide theoretical tools to inform the processes studied by the urban social sciences, which in turn can be used to refine the theories of the former. Interdisciplinary, as well as intercultural, openness therefore undeniably plays a role in advancing urban research.

However, it would be irresponsible not to warn any young researchers tempted by these approaches of the difficulties that they could face. Overall, as lamented recently (2009) by the now late Bernard Jouve, the interdisciplinary nature of anglophone urban studies, with its academic departments and journals in which the city is seen as a "total social fact", is in marked contrast with the more compartmentalised disciplines of the French social sciences, which prevent the city from being seen as a research object in and of itself. Moreover, the critical stance often adopted by these works is poorly received in France. This is why the French disciplines related to urban issues have largely rejected the critical approaches from the 1980s, at the very moment when the works of French Marxist urban sociologists of the 1960s and 1970s were the subject of a major reappropriation in the English-speaking academic world.

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