

New Research in
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Norma
Tiedemann

**Space and scale in materialist
state theory**

The urban dimension of *actually
existing neoliberalism*

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Author:

Norma Tiedemann: normat@posteo.de

Editors:

Professor Dr. Christoph Scherrer

Dr. Alexander Gallas

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Managing Editor: Nicole Magura magura@uni-kassel.de

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1. Introduction

From Syntagma in Athens to the Puerta del Sol in Madrid, to the Plaça de Catalunya in Barcelona, to the Tahrir Square in Cairo, Zuccoti Park in New York, the Rothschild Boulevard in Tel Aviv and Gezi Park in Istanbul, mass movements, not only in recent years, have frequently occurred as urban protests centred around specific places and problems in the cities of industrial and late-modern capitalism. Though it dates back to 1968, Henri Lefebvre's claim of a *right to the city* (Lefebvre 2009) is a popular point of reference for many city-based struggles today.

Urban spaces, especially when considering the increasing share of the world population¹ living in cities, seem to occupy a peculiar role within the development of a globalising, profoundly transforming economy. The urban appears to be the scale at which economic, political and social contradictions emerge in most obvious ways, spurring new movements no longer wrapped in the language of classic labour unionisation. Whereas urban planners of the problem-solving-type have argued that “not every local struggle against gentrification is also one against 'urban neoliberalisation'” (Bertram 2013: 172, own translation) and that local politics are only marginally constrained by “supralocal provisions and trends” (ibid.: 171), more critical scholars contend that power relations on broader levels are structuring cities and producing “the current urban problematic” (Castells 1978: 173).

Those overarching relations can be located at the scale of the global economy and the national state as the persistent prime-organiser of political consent. However, the relation between these two scales is in no way less contested than the one between the local and the global. Materialist state theory, trying to fill the gap left by Marx with regard to the state in the capitalist mode of production, has identified a transformation of the national state due to the internationalisation of capital. Though the internal complexity of the nation state has been acknowledged, the distinct place of the local within this transformation has not been extensively addressed. This is due to a certain neglect of how different scales, spaces and localities are produced, articulated and privileged by globalising capitalism, specifically in its contemporary neoliberal formation.

The overall aim of this paper is thus to inquire how space and scale can be integrated into materialist state theory in order to understand the processes of neoliberal urbanisation. And, moving beyond the abstract debate, to find out what specific results these transformations yield in a middle-sized city in Germany.

¹According to the UN, in 2014 more than half of the world population (54 per cent) were living in “urban areas”. The numbers are predicted to surpass six billion by 2045 and by 2050 the proportion is expected to increase to 66 per cent (UN 2014).

The paper attempts to show that state theoretical debates concerned with the transformation of the state benefit from taking into account the category of space or scale and from acknowledging the crucial role of the urban in these processes. On the other hand, it is suggested that investigations into the local manifestation of neoliberalism need to be embedded in the broader contexts of change in order to avoid an understanding of urban developments as free-floating particularities. Some exemplary glances at urban policy developments in Kassel shall serve to illustrate this point.

The first chapter will briefly review debates within materialist state theory dealing with the transformations of the national state in terms of internationalisation and *rescaling*. Subsequently, main arguments of *radical geography* with regard to the role of urban spaces within capitalism are presented as supplementary to this discussion. This will be followed by analysing the specific interlinked transformations of the national state and the city in times of neoliberalisation. The last chapter applies the theoretical considerations to the case of Kassel, arguing that even a city apart from the limelight of urban conflicts shows visible signs of neoliberalisation. The concluding chapter will summarise the findings and formulate open questions.

2. What About the State? From Internationalisation to Rescaling

Though the term *globalisation* was only born and widely circulated in the 1980s, the processes summarised under this label sparked attention much earlier. In the wake of the crisis of *Atlantic Fordism* (Jessop 2003) in the 1970s and the growing difficulties of the European integration project, a debate among left parties and theoreticians emerged over the interlinked transformation of the national state and capitalism (Kannankulam and Georgi 2012). Among those propounding a Marxist analysis of these changes was Nicos Poulantzas, one of whose important insights was that the capitalist mode of production is not an automatism smoothly reproducing itself. Instead, extra-economic factors, such as the political institutions of the state are necessary for the constant reproduction of a contradictory process (Poulantzas 2000: 123 ff.). Thus, the state and the economy are not two unalterable, independent structures but mutually constitutive: “It is rather the mode of production itself – that totality of economic, political and ideological determinations – which fixes the boundaries of these spaces, sketching out their fields and defining their respective elements” (ibid.: 17). With the changing ways of organising production and modifications within a certain mode, such as the development of competition towards monopolistic imperialist capitalism (Poulantzas 1978: 42 ff.), the state also changes. Poulantzas identified an internationalisation of the national state, where the state acts as a supporter of these processes and is not simply withering

away or replaced by supranational structures (ibid.: 70 ff.). More precisely, a process of *interiorisation* (Poulantzas 2008: 245) is taking place – the monopolistic, imperialist form of the capitalist mode of production, and nowadays accordingly a neoliberal form, is reproducing itself within those countries which are integrated to varying degrees and under varying conditions into the world market. Through mechanisms such as mutual consultations within international organisations, monitoring in the context of conditional IMF-loans or the global ascendancy of a monetarist dogma in various institutions, “international constraints [...] become integrated into the policy paradigms and cognitive models of domestic policy-makers” (Jessop 2014). The central lesson to learn here is that the internationalisation of capital goes along with an internal reorganisation of the state, taking on new functions in favour of internationalised (in Poulantzas' analysis: American) capital, hence these processes are not simply forced *upon* the unchanged entity of the national state.

Though emphasising that the state should not be seen as “a monolithic bloc without cracks” (Poulantzas 2000: 132), the internationalisation debate focused primarily on a supra-national, global level and did not inquire deeply into the subnational scale of transformation. This flaw continued to accompany Marxist state theory, at least Duncan et al. ten years later claimed that theoretical contributions trying to explain state behaviour still ignore the existence of local state institutions, thus remaining on a very abstract level (1987: 9).

The introduction of the category of scale and the concept of *rescaling* was better suited to understand the multiple modifications reconfiguring “the powers of the national state upwards, downwards, or outwards” (Jessop 2003: 30). Especially Bob Jessop dealt with this extensively in his ideal-typical analysis of the *Keynesian National Welfare State*, transforming towards a *Schumpeterian Postnational Workfare Regime* (ibid.). This occurred with increasing globalisation in response to the crisis of the Fordist, nationally-centred accumulation regime, but is equally to Poulantzas not understood as the fading of the national state, since “through the rescaling of state powers, it seeks to play a central role in interscalar articulation” (ibid.: 40).

Rescaling, however, should not be framed as a neutral process which simply re-arranges given scales or spaces in a pre-determined manner. It is part and consequence of the contested social production of space, which is notable for instance in disputes over the spatial (and associated: conceptual and institutional) separation of private/public and the proliferation of the first to the detriment of the latter when e.g. sites of education become privatised and students resist by occupying their universities, reclaiming them as public spaces; or questions concerning the scale on which processes of production are carried out, since decisions to outsource manufacturing facilities

and thereby internationalise the production chain are by no means purely technical and provoke protests of workers. Hence, power hierarchies in the making of such processes must be considered to understand their outcomes (Wissen 2008). The institutionalisation of decision-making at a certain spatial scale, be it national, global, European or local, can thus be understood referring to Poulantzas, as the material condensation of a certain relationship of forces (ibid.: 108). Moreover, each one of the varied scales through which the accumulation process as well as social cohesion are organised today as a consequence of Fordism's crisis (Jessop's upwards, downwards or outwards) can only be grasped when its relation to the other scales is taken into account (ibid.: 109).

Having briefly reconstructed these main lines of reasoning within materialist state theory, assuming that the national state's continued relevance was enabled through internal reconfigurations in line with changing forms of global capital accumulation, the actual forms of these modifications on a local level still remain untouched. Spatially uneven development as a characteristic feature of capitalism, not only globally among states but also subnationally among different localities, is thus not adequately integrated. However, it has to be inquired how certain accumulation regimes and relationships of social forces create what has been called *strategic selectivities* (Jessop 2007) with regard to the category of scale, i.e. how certain spatial formations are newly articulated as loci of capital accumulation, organisers of societal consent or managers of conflict within globalised capitalism since the crisis of nationally-organised Fordism.

Within contemporary neoliberal capitalism, I contend, a central scale for these rearrangements is urban space. However, most research regarding the transformations of national states is pre-occupied with processes like European integration (e.g. Bulmer and Radelli 2004; Jordan and Liefferink 2003; Kannankulam and Georgi 2012) or global governance regimes of institutions such as the World Bank or the IMF (e.g. Evans 1997; Robinson 2001; Yeates 2002). It is thus necessary to review the existing literature explicitly focusing on urban developments in order to comprehend the position of the local within current trends of globalising neoliberalism and the associated reconfiguration of the national state. This is the purpose of the following chapter.

3. Radical Geography and the City

“The brutal indifference [...] becomes the more repellent and offensive, the more these individuals are crowded together, within a limited space. And, however much one may be aware that this

isolation [...] is the fundamental principle of our society everywhere, it is nowhere so shamelessly barefaced [...] as just here in the crowding of the great city.” Friedrich Engels, 1845

Since industrialisation has fundamentally transformed the everyday routines of the masses in Western Europe by ripping apart sites of working and sites of living, of production and reproduction, the vastly growing urban conglomerations have caught the interest of writers, painters, civil servants, social scientists and political economists alike. Engels' comment is just one example of how people were fascinated and irritated by the social realities in the big cities of the time. However, a distinct urban, Marxist political economy developed only more than a century later with authors such as Henri Lefebvre, Manuel Castells and David Harvey². Triggered by the spread of urban riots in the 1960s, particularly in North America and Western Europe, debates emerged around problems specifically related to cities such as the dominance of standardised, anonymous housing, the privileging of cars, and environmental destruction (Wiegand 2013: 36).

Manuel Castells (1978), in his research of French and US-American urban struggles, laid emphasis on the modern city as a space of concentrated collective consumption. The urban system is thus first of all a dense network of publicly provided infrastructure such as housing, educational facilities or transport (ibid.: 32). The state's role in this resembles Poulantzas' interpretation of the need of extra-economic factors, since “the logic of capital cannot fulfill a diversity of fundamental demands. It is in an attempt to resolve this contradiction that the state decisively intervenes in the production, distribution and management of the means of collective consumption [...]. Collective equipment and the resulting urban system will therefore be decisively affected by the role of the state” (ibid.: 170). Though Castells is actually not considering the processes of producing the urban space as the centre of modern capitalism and the interests involved therein, he nevertheless asks who actually benefits from the way cities are organised. Thus he claims that the urban scale is the cradle of new social inequalities, crises and contradictions, which do not amount to a one-to-one translation of class antagonisms, since all social groups share in the consumption of collective goods and can only to a certain extent “escape from pollution and the noise of urban traffic” (Castells 1978: 35). It is thus “at the level of urban problems that one can see most easily how the logic of capital oppresses not only the working class but all the possibilities for human development” (ibid.).

Most important in his analysis for the sake of this argument is the acknowledgement that concrete developments at the urban scale have to be contextualised with the broader political, social and

² Who has by now reached the dubious status of the most cited geographer of our times (Wiegand 2013: 35)

economic environment. For Castells, this manifested as the contradictory logic of capital of which the miseries of urban life are a spatially specific expression.

Starting to work on a critical urban research programme in similar times, David Harvey approached the city from a slightly different angle or wider scale, perceiving urban agglomerations not just as the geographic condensation of capital, labour and associated conflicts, but as material and social nodal points of an overarching, dynamically changing capitalist economy of space (Wiegand 2013: 38). This strand of research has come to be known as *radical geography* (ibid.). Harvey claims that urbanisation and capitalism are in fact deeply intertwined: “Capitalism rests [...] upon the perpetual search for surplus value (profit). But to produce surplus value capitalists have to produce a surplus product. This means that capitalism is perpetually producing the surplus product that urbanization requires. The reverse relation also holds. Capitalism needs urbanization to absorb the surplus products it perpetually produces” (Harvey 2012: 5). It is especially the latter part of this relationship which provides the ground for his central thesis, that urbanisation is a driver and outcome of capitalist overaccumulation crises. Investments in the built environment with their long turnover times serve as spatio-temporal fixes for the problem of too much capital not finding profitable short-term investment opportunities (ibid.: 42 ff.). Coupled with an expansive state-supported credit-system and finance capital's dominance, this constellation leads to massive debt-financed, speculative investments in housing and related financial assets and eventually in a bursting bubble, of which the crash of the US-mortgage-market is the most recent example (ibid.: 54 ff.).

Harvey thus embeds his analysis of the role of urban space in a macroeconomic, Marxist theory of capital (over)accumulation. He suggests that a special role in anti-capitalist struggles should be granted to urban movements, thereby questioning the conviction of “many on the traditional left” that revolutionary power originates exclusively from the “exploitation and alienation of living labour in production”, i.e. from the factory (ibid.: 120).

Though both Harvey and Castells, “introduced space into the core of [...] Marxism's projects” (Katznelson 1993: 92) and ascribed a crucial role to the city in late-modern capitalism, they did and are doing so in a quite general manner, not investigating the specific transformations at the local scale which have come about with neoliberalisation and the state's rescaling since the 1970s. These developments are instead broadly summarised by Harvey as “brutally neoliberalizing international capitalism that has been intensifying its assault on the qualities of daily life” (2012: xii). Neoliberalism, however, as the currently prevalent mode of politico-economic relations, should not be treated as a comprehensively homogenising force, since it assumes specific forms on different scales: national, regional and, of main interest here, local “within cities and city-regions” (Brenner

et al. 2010: 329). Thus, *actually existing neoliberalism* should be studied, which according to Brenner and Theodore, occurs “with particular intensity at the urban scale” (Brenner and Theodore 2002: 367). It therefore has to be asked how neoliberal transformations mould rescaling processes and the local therein.

4. Neoliberal Urbanisation

Roughly defined, neoliberalisation can be understood as the ever-more expansive stretching-out of market-based mechanisms such as competition and commodification and their intrusion into increasing numbers of socio-political realms which have previously been organised in non-marketised ways.

What is then the relationship between these globally developing processes, the national state and the urban scale? According to Jessop's concept of the Keynesian National Welfare State's transformation into a regime of structural competitiveness oriented towards budget discipline and self-responsibility (Jessop 2003: 44), the central state's financial contributions to regional and local state institutions are also reduced, redesigned and channelled towards the most promising localities in terms of international competition. Since the 1980s in Germany, the federal and regional states have been transferring economic responsibilities for successful capital accumulation onto the subnational level. Cities' financial resources have been cut back while simultaneously socio-political tasks aimed at softening the vagaries of economic cycles have been offloaded on the local scale (Schipper 2013: 23). With competitiveness becoming the leading doctrine of politico-economic management, municipalities began to pursue a policy of place-marketing to compensate for the losses of the vaporising nationally-organised redistribution by generating own revenues (or taking out loans). Cities, characterised by relative autonomy vis-à-vis the central state due to the constitutionally guaranteed communal self-administration and simultaneously far-reaching fiscal dependency, have thus been re-articulated as enterprises in an intra-urban race for investments, wealthy tax-paying inhabitants, well-educated workers, tourists and the settlement of innovative, profitable businesses (Birke 2013: 100, Schipper 2013: 11). To a significant extent this competition was created by the central state in its dedication to propel rescaling processes (Belina and Schipper 2009) and can be framed as an instance of the social production of space within neoliberalism. However, such transformations are not the straightforward translation of the *competition state* (cf. e.g. Cerny and Evans 1999) into the local as if the phenomenon would occur in a simple top-down

fashion. Analogical to the internationalisation of the state, a process of interiorisation is taking place at the urban level, contested and mediated through social forces and institutions at different scales.

The now wide-spread guiding principle of the *entrepreneurial city* has specifically evoked interest from critical geographers (Belina and Schipper 2009, Heeg 2001, Schipper 2013, Vogelpohl 2012), for whom the phenomenon consists of cities no longer attempting to reach common well-being through redistributive welfare policies, but through the attraction of businesses, thereby creating jobs perceived as the basis and precondition for societal participation. Since competitiveness is a condition that can never be finally reached because others will always have improved this and that aspect more efficiently, the project of increasing cities' marketability will never come to an end, but rather will grow into an overarching, permanent task. Internally, it results in the "removal of the local welfare state, a retreat from public housing and a tightened control regime towards marginalised groups" (Belina and Schipper 2009, own translation). Public space is progressively being limited and private space exclusively reserved for profit-oriented consumption or elite housing is widening (Mayer 2013: 160).

Externally, within the expanding field of city-marketing, urban entrepreneurialism is expressed in a politics of *festivalisation* (Heeg 2001, Mayer 2013: 159). Through hosting all kinds of spectacular large-scale events and supposedly unique festivities, the entrepreneurial city managers, i.e. local administration and politicians, are trying to turn their city into a distinctive brand within the mass of competing urban localities. Part of entrepreneurial urbanism is also the *creative city* discourse, launched most prominently by Richard Florida, who suggests that cities should engage not only in attracting business but also members of the *creative class* by providing suitable living and working conditions and offering rich cultural opportunities. The underlying rationale is that these new *top performers* of the knowledge-driven, service-oriented economy will secure future growth and competitiveness within innovation-based sectors (Holm 2013: 43).

Across the German party-political spectrum and administrative staff, the concept of the *entrepreneurial city* is enjoying great popularity (Belina and Schipper 2009). Thus it is not simply an ideology imposed top-down, but has been pushed equally by local politicians, civil servants and enterprises who sense an opportunity to increase their competences or get easier access to support and subsidies.

The neoliberalisation of capitalism has produced urban spaces on the one hand as privileged localities for capital accumulation, but at the same time as scales where new responsibilities and new conflicts are solidifying. Local states have been left with less fiscal sovereignty through neoliberal rescaling and the pursuit of a competitiveness-regime which increased precarity and

thereby costs for basic social security. This has especially come to the fore with the recent crisis-management which has been continuously informed by neoliberal dogmas. Cities are massively affected by the crisis; in Germany it is expected that revenues from local business tax will diminish by 10-20 per cent and that social costs will rise by 2 billion Euro (Belina and Schipper 2013). Moreover, cities as centres of collective consumption bear the brunt of austerity policies which target social infrastructure such as health care, transport and housing. This has even resulted in a distinct research field of “austerity urbanism” (Donald et al. 2014; Tulke 2014: 2; Wiegand 2013: 47), aiming to grasp the specific urban dynamic of authoritative austerity regimes with its “disastrous social effects [...] and the production of a whole new class of urban poverty” (Tulke 2014: 2).

Struggles against the social exclusions produced in the neoliberal city and the severe hardships of urban austerity governance, as Harvey and Castells anticipated, do not conform anymore to orthodox conceptualisations of class struggles originating in the factory. Urban movements transcend these lines but can nevertheless be framed as being grounded in the resistance against capitalist relations of (re)production and exploitation (Wiegand 2013: 52).

Thus, besides the respective local content, the neoliberalisation of cities and protests against the closing down of public facilities, increased surveillance of marginalised groups or the skyrocketing of rent should be embedded both analytically and politico-strategically in the broader context of transformations at the global, national and regional scale. Urban neoliberalisation has to be understood as an outcome and driver of the nation state's rescaling gaining pace since the crisis of Fordist accumulation regimes and as part of the contested, contradictory social production of space. To illustrate this reasoning and move to the most concrete step of the argument, the subsequent chapter will present some exemplary evidence from neoliberal urbanisation in Kassel as a case of *actually existing neoliberalism*.

5. Kasselfornia-Boomtown?

In the differentiated German landscape of polarisation between economically faltering cities and those continuing to attract investments and inhabitants, Kassel's positioning is not evident at first glance. With its roughly 200,000 residents (Magistrat Kassel 2014) and considering large-scale contradictions of urban development, e.g. in Hamburg or Frankfurt, it might not be the most obvious choice to make the case for urban neoliberalisation in the context of the state's rescaling. However, if besides local specificities, cities are both affected by and central to broader processes

of economic, political and ideological transformations, it should be possible to study *actually existing urban neoliberalisation* anywhere.

Especially in recent years, Kassel has been marked by notable developments. The population size is increasing towards a scale not reached since 1996, labour market statistics are the best in 30 years and local business taxes are on a constantly high level (Stadt Kassel 2015). The local newspaper, the city's administration and politicians therefore engage in a discourse of remarkable enthusiasm, portraying Kassel as an economically dynamic, booming city (Ludwig 2014a) which has every right to be confident about its future (Stadt Kassel 2015). It is stated that after more than ten years of a “deep depression” characterised by high unemployment, low purchasing power, low levels of investment and construction activity, Kassel is now prospering again. Rising rents, namely 11 percent between 2013 and 2014 (Ludwig 2015), and real estate prices are cited as evidence (Pinto 2014). Concerns about the lack of affordable flats (HNA 2013, Kasseler Erklärung 2013, Ludwig 2014a) and reports about growing poverty and homelessness (Ludwig 2014b) are either not addressed or not perceived as real issues. Instead there are vague assurances that Kassel is appropriately prepared (Stadt Kassel 2015), that one should be happy about investors rescuing the city's building stock (Pinto 2014) and that construction sites represent an “expression of the economic power our city has gained” regardless of what is built (mayor Bertram Hilgen, cited in Thonicke 2014, own translation).

Public investments for urban development are targeting those aspects which are deemed important for the city's competitiveness, improving its hard and soft location factors, thus displaying a spirit of urban entrepreneurialism.

By tagging all its publications and the entire online presence from administration to tourist information with “documenta Stadt”, Kassel is attempting to create itself as a brand, a strategy which is based on the idea of the city as a unique product competing with other “city-products”. Since the documenta only happens every five years, a period clearly exceeding average attention spans, Kassel is moreover engaging in a politics of festivalisation. One example is hosting the “expensive, but prestigious” Hessentag in 2013 (Frankfurter Rundschau 2013, own translation), a huge ten-day festival most cities were afraid to stage due to the massive financial responsibilities connected to it (ibid.). For Kassel, however, it was a chance to present itself as “metropolitan and modern” (Stadt Kassel 2013a, own translation), contributing to its image production. Another more recent initiative is the mayor's suggestion to apply for the European Capital of Culture 2025, which would be the second time including a failed application process between 2002 and 2006 (Kassel

Stadtportal 2015). However, the mayor is confident that with Kassel's "creative potentials", an application which "thrills Europe" will be achievable (ibid., own translation).

Kassel's urban policies are thus focused on increasing its attractiveness for tourists and day-visitors, who bring along additional purchasing power. According to a comparison of the biggest 50 German cities, Kassel ranks only in the last third of per-capita disposable income (SPIEGELonline 2010), which makes visitors crucial, especially during major events such as the documenta or the Christmas Market, for guaranteeing the profits of the retail sector (Heise-Thonicke 2013). On the other hand, highly-skilled workers and innovative businesses are target groups. Overall, an "increased competition for consumers and workforce" (presse-service Kassel 2015, own translation) is the purported driving force behind Kassel's self-marketing and city development strategies.

With regard to the latter, it is specifically the attempt to turn Kassel into a technology and innovation hub with favourable conditions for start-ups and close public-private-cooperation, which stands out in its entrepreneurial activities. The newly built Science Park, the University of Kassel campus enlargement and the planned new buildings for the Fraunhofer Institute can be considered as part of the city's strategy to invest in economic sectors which seem to have a bright future in a "knowledge-driven" accumulation regime (Jessop 2000). The Science Park, as a "start-up and innovation center", provides 6,000 square-meters of space for offices and laboratories to be rented by start-ups originating in or looking for closer cooperation with the university (Science Park Kassel n.d.). The city of Kassel aims with this seven million Euro investment to keep highly educated, business-oriented graduates in the region and to contribute to the city's economic, social and ecological development (ibid.). The enlargement of the campus, of which the Science Park is one of the first accomplished pieces, is thus characterised by framing education as having a foremost profit- and innovation-generating function, serving urban competitiveness. A similar path is taken with Kassel's support for the Fraunhofer Institute for wind energy and energy system technology. The Institute, currently spread over the city, wants to build new facilities in the area of the Hauptbahnhof, and Kassel is ready to invest an estimated 100 million Euro in the construction site's development (Stadt Kassel 2013b). Kassel's mayor is convinced that as soon as the buildings are completed "the big research-related political challenges of the energy transition will be addressed in Kassel. Our city will be the first choice as a science location for energy system technology" (ibid., own translation).

All these investments³ are being made despite the fact that in 2012 Kassel decided to participate in the municipal “protective umbrella” of the Hessian government. This programme intended to help struggling municipalities to get rid of parts of their debts and support interest payments in order to restore their “financial capacity”, which worsened in the course of the crisis (Hessische Landesregierung 2012: 3). In return, these municipalities have to adopt harsh austerity measures to reach balanced budgets. In line with the hegemonic idea of the *entrepreneurial city*, the Hessian Association of Cities warned that these measures must in no way jeopardise the productive capacity and competitiveness of a community (Frankfurter Rundschau 2012b), and Kassel's mayor emphasised that fiscal consolidation shall be exercised in a manner which does not threaten the attractiveness and growth of the city (Frankfurter Rundschau 2012c). Translated into actual policies, for Kassel this meant the closing down of several public libraries, a ten percent increase of kindergarten fees and a tripling of revenues from parking taxes amongst others (Frankfurter Rundschau 2012d). Priority is still given to the attraction of investments, thus relying on market forces to achieve social balance, instead of redistributive welfare. Civil society groups criticised this one-sidedness and demanded a raise of the local business tax, which in Kassel is lower than in Frankfurt (Schwarz 2012a). However, the governing Social Democrats (SPD) with support from Greens, Liberals (FDP) and the “Free Association of Voters” (“Freie Wähler”) argued that this austerity package was “fiscally imperative”, echoing the neoliberal TINA-mantra (Schwarz 2012b, own translation).

These exemplary developments do not stand alone as local particularities, but have to be embedded in a broader context. Both the entrepreneurial self-marketing of Kassel, which praises competitiveness over social welfare and privileges the city as a product over the city as actual living space, as well as high indebtedness are deeply intertwined with the economic, political and ideological transformations on different scales: global, national and regional. Already in the late 1970s, Castells made the point very clear: “The urban fiscal crisis is, in reality, the crisis of the Welfare State, and appears as the most immediate expression of a fundamental transformation of the historical model of capitalist accumulation which had prevailed since the Second World War” (1978: 176). The need for a “protective umbrella” emerged due to different factors, one of them being the policy of the state of Hessen to cut its financial contributions to municipalities in the last years to an extent far beyond the amount granted under this programme, namely 345 Million Euros per annum since 2011 (Petzold 2015). The fate of being structurally underfinanced for years can be

³ The city of Kassel is also engaging for instance in the infrastructural development of areas to create industrial zones, such as the future industry park “Langes Feld” with 76 hectares (Stadt Kassel 2014) and is investing significantly in the “Museumslandschaft” with projects such as the new Grimmwelt and the renovated City Museum (Ludwig 2015).

considered one widely shared among German cities (Petzold 2014: 7). These developments in turn are embedded in a broader framework of neoliberal austerity regimes at the national level and with subsequently created instruments such as the Stability and Growth Pact, the Fiscal Compact or the Two-Pack (cf. European Commission 2013) also at the European level.

German elites' long-time obsession with balanced budgets, which included a constitutional amendment concerning the mandatory introduction of “debt breaks” at the federal and state level, led to a situation of high communal indebtedness and considerable investment bottlenecks in the area of public infrastructure (Petzold 2015). Admittedly in 2012, German municipalities were able to avoid taking up any new debts and thereby met the doctrine to break even (the famous “black zero”). However, this meant that urgently needed investments in schools, streets and public buildings had to be renounced, adding up to a sum of 100 billion Euro of foregone communal public expenditure (SPIEGELonline 2013). The additional re-ordering of federal-state-municipal relations, which has been ongoing at least since the 1970s crisis, meant an incremental shift of social responsibilities downwards from the national to the local level, such as expenses in the area of youth work, pre-school education or assistance for asylum seekers without providing the therefore required financial means. This severely impacts the quality of urban infrastructure, which the cities are called to deal with exclusively on their own without any recourse to a higher territorial unit (Petzold 2015). The Federal Office for Building and Regional Planning is thus claiming that municipalities should stop demanding from the federal and state levels and instead contribute to the regaining of fiscal leeway by cutting social benefits, increasing revenues, and promoting privatisations (quoted in Belina and Schipper 2009). It has to be acknowledged, however, that not many municipal voluntary services are left to be reduced further and that options for creating communal income are quite limited in the German federal system (Petzold 2015).

Nevertheless, the state of Hessen also stresses in the agreement over the umbrella programme that it is the sole responsibility of communes for their financial capacities while at the same time intervening in the local budget by conditioning their support-payments (Hessische Landesregierung 2012). The 'dirty work' of *actually existing neoliberalism* is thus supposed to be carried out locally.

On the other hand, the city's responsible managers have not been victims of neoliberal ideology from above, forcing on them certain kinds of conduct. They are eagerly contributing to urban development, where contradictions of less local state intervention in a market-regulating manner and more intervention in a market-forging manner (the creative destruction of “roll-back” and “roll-out”, Brenner et al. 2010: 335), seem to be growing and are more frequently addressed by critical

voices. Aspects such as the growing lack of affordable flats and housing⁴, the city's responsibility for rising rents instead of it being a natural phenomenon, the crowding out of non-commercial cultural and bottom-up political initiatives, and the disciplining of open spaces in the name of profit-oriented consumption are part of these contradictions in Kassel and are criticised as a neoliberalisation of urban space, thus integrating them into a bigger-picture analytical framework (e.g. *Recht auf Stadt Kassel* 2014).

In October 2014, an attempt was made to bring these criticisms visibly into the public discourse by organising a “night-dance demonstration” under the slogans “reclaim the city” and “dancing for a right to the city” (ebd.). Though 500 people participated, the protest was almost fully neglected by the local newspaper, which published an erroneous police-report stating that the demonstration was calling for the “right to a state” (*Recht auf Staat* instead of *Recht auf Stadt*) (HNA 2014). It thus left unmentioned the demands and concerns of the protesters and focused on the fact that one police officer was injured during the protest. The call to the demonstration, however, which was widely supported among political, cultural and civil society groups, criticised Kassel's self-portrayal as a cultural boomtown while remaining inactive about securing space for independent, subcultural initiatives; its urban development and housing policies which foster processes of gentrification and the crowding out of less wealthy inhabitants from central living areas; and its approach towards civic participation, which usually remains without any consequences for the city's administration (*Recht auf Stadt Kassel* 2014). Also the banners carried along the way expressed such sentiments with slogans like “you can't plan us”, “a city is not a brand”, “the right to the city knows no borders”, “freedom is more than the choice in the supermarket” or “free spaces instead of construction sites!” (own translation). According to the organisers, the aim of the demonstration was not to formulate concrete demands to any political institution, but “to motivate the people living in Kassel to think about what kind of a city they actually want to live in” (Kopiloten e.V. 2014, own translation). It was thus first of all an attempt to bring the previously described processes and mechanisms to mind as a starting point for further political activities.

Besides this rather campaign-oriented resistance, under the surface of public discourse there are quite a few initiatives in Kassel which are fighting for their right to the city by self-organising independent spaces of non-commercial cultural and independent political activities. Examples

⁴ Especially at the beginning of the winter semester when increasing numbers of students move to Kassel (in October 2014, almost 5000 people were simultaneously looking for a flat), the situation cannot be ignored and newspapers and politicians pick up the gap between demand and supply (e.g. Rudolph 2014; SPD Kassel 2014). This in turn is a significant driver for the rise of rent, particularly in the segment of small apartments, where Kassel is in the lead compared to other cities of comparable size (Ludwig 2015). This affects not only students, but everyone with small incomes or receivers of social transfer payments, since these groups are forced to look for small, cheap flats (Kasseler Erklärung 2013).

include the Autonomous Centre⁵, which after having to leave its previous location due to the privatisation of the property, has now found a new place in the Northern part of the city. Or the “Fachbeschäft für Interaktion – FBI”⁶, which regularly organises kitchens for all, repair cafés, urban gardening projects, a give-away shop, non-commercial workshops, concerts and film-screenings and is actively involved in a “food sharing” initiative.

Another project worth mentioning is the “Agathe”, part of the nationwide “Mietshäuser Syndikat”, a network which is trying to implement an alternative to housing as a commodity by applying the concept of a solidarity-based economy to the question of living space. The goal is to “withdraw real estate from market-mechanisms in order to promote collaborative dealing with home ownership” (Agathe n.d., own translation). It thus realises on a small-scale an alternative to neoliberal urbanisation and practices new forms of living-together.

Another form of activism which is connected to the struggle for a right to the city in Kassel is constituted by groups engaged in grassroots organising and basis work, where the empowerment and self-organisation of those directly affected by social problems created through neoliberal policies occupies centre stage. Community centres or “Stadtteilläden” such as the “Rothe Ecke”⁷ or the “Stadtteilzentrum Wesertor”⁸, fight for better working conditions, affordable housing and “a life with dignity”, as well as providing assistance regarding troubles with the job centre, the landlord or general issues emerging in the neighbourhood. These centres serve moreover as spaces of social interaction to overcome isolation and individualisation in areas which are marked by a particularly low-income structure and high unemployment⁹, and thus are often stigmatised as socially deprived and either neglected by the city or especially under pressure from district-improvement-strategies. A certain polarisation in the city is therefore also addressed. On the one hand, whole quarters are upgraded and reconstructed such as the area around Friedrich-Ebert-Street to promote “active core zones”¹⁰ and statistics report a generally decreasing level of unemployment. On the other, homelessness and poverty are growing with rising amounts of communal expenses (43 per cent between 2009 and 2014) for supplement payments to sustain a minimum income for those whose jobs do not provide for meeting this level, along with basic security and care for older people (Ludwig 2014b).

⁵ See <https://www.facebook.com/azkassel?fref=ts> (last access: 07.06.2015)

⁶ See <https://www.facebook.com/pages/FBI/169113883250800> (last access: 07.06.2015)

⁷ See <https://www.facebook.com/RotheEcke?fref=ts> (last access: 07.06.2015)

⁸ See <http://www.stadtteilzentrum-wesertor.de/> (last access: 07.06.2015)

⁹ In Rothenditmold where the Rothe Ecke is located, in 2010, 27 per cent of inhabitants were unemployed, 30 per cent received unemployment benefits and every third lived on a minimum subsistence level (CDU Rothenditmold, 2010).

¹⁰ See “Quartier im Wandel” (A quarter in transition) – support programme Friedrich-Ebert-Street: <http://www.friedrich-ebert-strasse.net/> (last access: 26.06.2015).

Overall, resistance against neoliberal urbanisation in Kassel exists in different forms, but remains on a small scale and rather dispersed, not yet able to sustainably politicise questions of living and housing conditions, public space, social reproduction and urban commons or to initiate a broader debate over the future developments of the city. Pressures linked to neoliberal urbanisation, however, are likely to increase further without changes in the European, national and state-level budget-consolidation regime or the “debt break” policies and with Kassel's population predicted to grow and affordable housing still declining. The high probability of a development in this direction, if not met with substantial resistance of progressive social forces, is also due to the fact that by 2025 another 4,000 flats in Hessen will drop from the social obligation clauses of previous public housing policies and the decision against compensating for these losses through sufficient new construction or conversion of existing buildings (F.A.Z. 2013).

6. Conclusion

The processes of neoliberal urbanisation, i.e. the manner in which cities are produced as enterprises and marketable products instead of living spaces, cannot be understood if not embedded in broader transformations of the global economy and the connected rescaling of the nation state. This means that space and scale must be integrated into materialist state theory to account for the concrete manifestations of these developments and to be able to study *actually existing neoliberalism* instead of an abstract doctrine. It has been shown that there are several entry points for this and much work has been done, though often remaining on a quite general level. The example of Kassel has illustrated that the guiding principle of the *entrepreneurial city* affects even middle-sized cities and includes severe social consequences. However, a real case study would be required to investigate how urban politics in Kassel have developed over the last decades, how the “neoliberal assault” has interacted with previously established structures, what struggles and power relationships between different actors on different levels are affecting the current urban entrepreneurialism, and whether nascent and dispersed resistance against the effects of neoliberal urbanism in Kassel will form a serious counter-movement based on a profound analysis of the underlying and multi-scalar mechanisms of local urban development.

Urban resistance against the neoliberal city should not be isolated from global, national and regional politics. Urban planning of the problem-solving type will not be able to realise a *right to the city* as it is demanded by many groups. However, a *right to the city* alone will equally not bring about the fundamental changes envisioned by radical geographers, since “in the absence of orchestrated

networks of counter-neoliberalizing policy transfer, they [local experiments] are likely to remain confined within particular places, scales, and territories” (Brenner et al. 2010: 342).

Consequently, it would need to be asked how progressive urban politics look, and how they can be fought for and upscaled to networks of policy transfer in light of strategic selectivities that might work against these initiatives on regional, national and global levels. A first step might be seen in the advancing cooperation and connection of different local right to the city groups on a federal level, reaching out to similar struggles in Austria, as was attempted with a first meeting of urban movements from different cities in April 2015 in Kassel (BUKO 2015). It brought together around 60 activists from Jena, Leipzig, Hamburg, Berlin, Kassel, Cologne, Frankfurt, the Ruhr area and Vienna. Another meeting is planned for 2016 in Cologne.

Besides the practical considerations to be drawn from the importance of space for state theory and of the urban within neoliberal capitalism, many issues could not be dealt with here. Starting from the specific transformation of the Keynesian Welfare State of Atlantic Fordism to Schumpeterian Workfare Regimes, the analysis is already significantly limited in geographic terms. Presenting the dense theoretical work of authors like Poulantzas, Jessop or Harvey in such briefness moreover necessarily leads to certain distortions of their arguments.

Nevertheless, approaching the urban dimension of *actually existing neoliberalism* by considering state theoretical as well as radical geographers' work as it has been attempted in outline, can potentially provide a fruitful framework to be further explored analytically and politically.

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