PLACING LABOUR IN THE NEW URBAN ECONOMY

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The Urbanization of Labour

- Unions as ‘urban entrepreneurs’
- Importance of Rent and Urban Regulation and Policy – ‘urban accumulation strategies’
- Relationships between unions, communities, the local state and developers
- Contradictions for unions as working class institutions
Hotel Trades Council New York

• Leads the sector in wages, benefits
• High rate of union density
• Industry-wide bargaining
• Membership resides in city
• Political clout
• Business unionism
Urban Strategy

Challenges

Testing of the Industry-wide agreement

Loss of luxury hotel rooms to condo conversion

New limited-service and ‘boutique’ formats

Rapid increase in hotel room supply (19% in the period 2005-2010)

Opportunities

- Rezoning
- ULURP
Manhattan Hotel Supply by Segment

Source: HVS (2009)
Source: NYC Department of City Planning
Rent Gap

Source: Smith (1996)
Implications for Union Representation and Renewal

• Increase in political capacities at the city and sub-national scales
• Increase prominence of labour-community coalitions at the local scale
• Mobilization of union members as urban residents
• Divergent implications for the representation of class
  • a) Broadening union representation to ‘class in full’
  • b) Embedding of neoliberal politics in working class
Questions for Further Research:

• How may unions reconcile the interests of their members as urban producers with the plural and potentially conflicting interests and identities they hold as urban residents?
• How do unions advance public policies designed to further the collective workplace interests of their members through urban regulation in ways that converge with those of non-unionized workers and members of working class communities?
• And how do local unions promote place-based strategies in alliance with local firms and growth-oriented urban regimes without confronting ‘geographical dilemmas’ that pit workers in one place or scale against those in another, often with zero-sum outcomes?
Case selection

- Toronto/New York City
  - “Creative City”
    - film industry unions
  - “Tourist City”
    - hospitality unions
- “Sustainable City”
  - building trades
- “Caring City”
  - child care unions
- “Transit City”
  - transit unions
Six-part investigation

1) identify the impetus towards urban strategies;

2) model these strategies and the economic paradigms to which they are associated;

3) evaluate their effectiveness
Cont’d

• 4) understand how steering investment towards high road trajectories meets broader social policy objectives;

• 5) evaluate the limitations and explore the contradictions of these strategies;

• 6) establish a basis for learning and strategy/policy adoption across sectors and places.
Team members

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• Amanda Coles – Brock Labour Studies
• James Nugent – University of Toronto Geography
• Susanna Schaller – City College, CUNY
Contributions

• Post-renewal labour studies
• Role of labour in urban studies
• Labour geography

• Double political intervention:
  Critique of neoliberal common sense, and critique of a trade union instrumentalization of the ‘right to the city’