

The City, the Country, and the New Politics of Place

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Abstract

Much of the current discussion of the present populist moment in politics has explored issues of social values and economic inequality. In their different ways, these are relevant, but I argue here that they are symptoms of a wider set of changes in society. The prevailing political divisions identified in the Brexit referendum in the UK, the US 2016 Presidential election, and the Austrian 2016 presidential election, suggest a sharper divide between core cities and the rest than previously, which is creating a new politics of place. The roots of this lie in the economic transformations that have occurred as a result of the so-called 'third wave' of industrialisation, and the transition to economies based on services and knowledge. However, these are transformations that are incomplete. The changing nature of work, reward, and consumption that the third wave has engendered is opening up new arguments about the purpose of work. Some of these arguments would have been regarded as utopian a generation ago, but are now entering mainstream discourse. The article also proposes a schematic to understand the political changes this is creating, following the work of Ian Christie, and identifies some implications for the short-term.

Keywords: Cities, Values, Place, Work, Labour Markets, Knowledge Economy, Populism, Post-materialism, Brexit, Trump

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Those who voted to 'remain' in the Britain's 2016 Brexit referendum, and for Clinton in the US Presidential election, are marked by three social factors. They are younger, better educated, and more urban. This is not just true of the UK and the USA; similar splits are seen across Europe, for example in the Austrian Presidential election in which the independent candidate Alexander Van der Bellen, a Green Party member, beat the right-wing Freedom Party's candidate Norbert Hofer.

This combination of age, education and geography represents a deep realignment of politics. As with all such deep shifts, there are several overlapping systems at play.

The first layer is about culture, and the long arrival of post-materialist values as a dominant set of social views, first heralded in the counter-cultural movements of the 1960s. The second, related, layer is about the economic dislocation caused by the reintegration of Asia, notably China, into the global economic system. Below these is a third layer, of the revitalisation of the city, in north America and Europe, over a 40-year period. And finally, there is a fourth layer, about the reconstruction of higher value economies around the production of knowledge instead of things, and the evolution of a new kind of service sector to support it.

These are all long-run changes. Most of them reach back two generations or more, to the cultural shifts of the 1960s and the economic dislocations of the 1970s. It is also complex territory, for these are complex systems. There is interplay between all four layers, and each has the potential to reinforce changes in the other layers. Through exploring these layers, some to more depth than others, this article will propose that the world of post-Trump politics is a world of a new type of political geography, and that we are on the cusp of the transition to it. My starting point in this work was looking at the electoral maps and data that showed this increasing split between the successful cities and the areas around them, and asking what social and political changes had created this world. The political maps of a half a century ago were less distinctive. The focus on economic or cultural causes in the immediate academic analysis, reviewed shortly, seemed to offer only part of the story; something more, with deeper roots, appeared to be happening.

While much of the focus of the article is on the United Kingdom and the United States, this is because each had elections in 2016 that generated data; these elections were binary (Yes or No) in the first case, and all but binary in the second (Clinton and Trump combined commanded 94% of votes cast). The available research, however, suggests that there are similar trends elsewhere (Inglehart & Norris, 2016, p. 4). The votes in the UK and the US for Brexit and for Trump, respectively, can be seen as a backlash, but they also have the nature of a last stand. Like all such deep transitions, this one will be messy, even ugly.

The Cultural and Economic Layers

The cultural and economic layers have been widely discussed elsewhere, although they are not completely understood. Space precludes a full review here. The most credible analyses of the available data suggest the best predictors of political attitudes on the Brexit vote and the US Presidential election are cultural attitudes. For example, an exit poll published by Lord Ashcroft (2016) immediately after the Brexit vote found that 71% of Remain voters believed that “multiculturalism was a force for good”, compared to 19% of Leave voters, with similar differences on “social liberalism,” Greens and feminism.

In the US, even before the Primary season, Matthew MacWilliams (2016) noted that Trump supporters were more likely to hold authoritarian attitudes, on the basis of a battery of poll questions.

Using data from 31 European countries and the USA, Ronald Inglehart and Pippa Norris (2016) set out to test theories about the reasons for the increase in support for populist parties. Such parties, following Cas Mudde, were characterised as being anti-establishment, authoritarian, and nativist.

They argue that our current “culture wars” (their phrase) are the product of the long values shift towards post-materialist values that Inglehart has tracked for close to thirty years. In the 2016 paper, they note that “these changes are particularly alarming to the less educated and older groups in these countries” (Inglehart & Norris, 2016, p.30).

They found that explanations based on cultural values were a much better fit with the data than explanations based on economic inequality, while acknowledging that the two were likely interconnected.

“[P]opulist support was strengthened by anti-immigrant attitudes, mistrust of global and national governance, support for authoritarian values, and left-right ideological self-placement” (Inglehart & Norris, 2016, p.27).

The evidence, they say, “indicates that post-war birth cohorts actually did bring an intergenerational shift from Materialist to Post-materialist values, as younger cohorts gradually replaced older ones in the adult population... As post-materialists gradually became more numerous in the population, they brought new issues into politics, leading to a declining emphasis on social class and economic redistribution, and growing party polarization based around cultural issues and social identities” (Inglehart & Norris, 2016, p.14).

Tibbs (2011, p.26) has argued that it “appears from the available data that the cultural turning point has been or is now being reached in most of the richer countries”. However, drawing on the systems work of Fritjof Capra (1982), Tibbs also noted (p.26) that the “declining culture is likely to resist relinquishing its dominance... rather than a smooth transition, a period of turbulence may be a reasonable expectation.”

The Economic Layer

The values analysis suggests that the economic interpretation of the rise of populism needs to be nuanced.

Certainly, the share by voting district of the Leave vote in the Brexit referendum correlated inversely with earnings (Bell, 2016), although there are always issues of causality; areas of lower earnings also tend to have fewer graduates in the population.

A richer story connects fearfulness with voting outcomes. The Ashcroft (2016) data referenced above also found that Leave voters were much more likely to believe that “for most children growing up in Britain today, life will be worse than it was for their parents.” They had lost faith in the idea of economic progress (Davies, 2016; Curry & Ballantyne, 2016).

In the United States, this is much bleaker. It was summarised concisely by Edward Luce (2016) in the Financial Times after the ‘Super Tuesday’ primaries in March 2016:

Millions of Americans are anchored to blighted neighbourhoods by negative equity, or other ties that bind. Their life expectancy is falling. Their participation in the labour market is dropping. The numbers signing up to disability benefits is rising. Opioid prescription drugs are rife. Those that are white tend to vote for Mr Trump.

The squeeze on American wages has produced a startling shrinking of the American middle class, noted recently by the International Monetary Fund (Alichi, 2016), and on the wage-earning class, as the blogger John Michael Greer (2016) has discussed: “The catastrophic impoverishment and immiseration of the American wage class is one of the most massive political facts of our time—and it’s also one of the most unmentionable.”

Its political effects have already been felt, however. Research by Autor, Dorn, Hanson and Majlesi (2016) found a causal relationship between the levels of exposure of local labor markets to increased foreign competition and increased partisan divisions in the U.S. Congress, on both left and right.

Social position also appears to matter. John Judis (2016), following Donald Warren’s analysis 40 years ago of George Wallace supporters, positioned Trump supporters as “MARS” or “Middle American radicals,” who were “distinct in the depth of their feeling that the middle class has been seriously neglected, [seeing] government as favoring both the rich and the poor simultaneously.” Similarly, Inglehart and Norris (2016) say that much of the populist vote is associated with the traditional “petty bourgeois”; those who feel they had a stake and a status in society that is now being taken away from them.

The New Economic Geography

Although “the death of distance” (Cairncross, 1997) was widely anticipated as an outcome of the digital/ICT revolution, we are in a world in which place is as important as ever. The reason, as Edward Glaeser (2011) argues, is that wealth is generated by knowledge and innovation, and these are spurred by proximity, interaction and scale. The cities that are most successful in this create thick labour markets which are geographically dense and also have the highest proportion of

graduates. (A thick labour market has more employers and more jobs, in more sectors, more densely located.) The economics of this are articulated by Enrico Moretti (2013) in his *New Geography of Jobs*. His research is specific to the American economy, but his argument is driven by economic characteristics that are not particular to the USA, and are likely to translate to other countries.

In summary, Moretti argues that larger cities that have built their value out from pools of research and innovation of multiple kinds have captured the largest share of new value since the 1970s. “Good jobs and salaries increasingly come from the production of new ideas, new knowledge and new technologies,” (Moretti, 2013, p.15) he notes.

Scale matters: “In the United States, the average wage in labour markets with more than a million workers is one-third higher than the average wage in markets of 250,000 or less. This differential has grown substantially since the 1970s” (2013, p.128).

What’s striking, though, is that these higher wages spread well beyond the knowledge workers and symbolic analysts who drive the productive value. High school leavers (leaving education at 18) working in the leading cities earn more than graduates in the others. Service workers are also better paid. Local human capital has strong external effects: it drives salary levels for everyone, for good or bad. Indeed, as Moretti observes, “the lower the skill level, the larger the salary gains from other people’s education” (2013, p.100).

There are two points worth adding.

The benefits of economic leadership extend into non-economic gains, including public health, family stability and social participation outcomes; and the knowledge industries at the heart of these metropolitan areas are much harder to delocalise or export, precisely because of their dependence on certain types of human capital. The workforce attracted to the larger cities is more female and more diverse, and this diversity translates into greater innovation, whether social, cultural or economic.

It turns out that urban density is one of the best predictors of voting attitudes. Brookings Institution analysis (Muro and Liu, 2016) caught this divide in a sharp way: The 472 counties that Clinton won in November 2016 accounted for 64% of American GDP, while the 2,584 won by Trump accounted for just 36%. To put this another way, each of the Clinton counties was almost ten times as productive as each of the Trump counties. (When Al Gore lost to Bush in 2000, the counties he won were four times as productive as those won by Bush.) They comment, “With the exceptions of the Phoenix and Fort Worth areas and a big chunk of Long Island Clinton won every large-sized county economy in the country... it appears to be “unprecedented”... for a losing presidential candidate to have represented so large a share of nation’s economic base.”

As Chris Arnade (2016) wrote of his journey across America to talk to voters, “It became simple: if I wanted to talk to a community overwhelmingly supporting Trump, I would go to a white town or neighborhood nearest the rusting factory surrounded by razor fence. If I wanted to find Clinton, or Jeb Bush, or even Rubio voters, I would go near a university, or go to the wealthier neighborhoods near tech companies, or near headquarters of global corporations.”

So what’s happening here?

The best explanation is that we are watching the mainstreaming of the knowledge economy once promised by Bell’s (1973/1999) post-industrial society and by Toffler’s (1980) Third Wave, and that its effects are profound, in ways not anticipated by digital theorists. There have, however, been plenty of clues. Thirty years ago, Scott Lash and John Urry (1987, pp.85-86) characterised the coming world of work as being shaped by three factors, which they suggest are interconnected and contradictory. The first was the migratory behaviour of capital, looking for locational advantage, the second that capital would become “spatially indifferent,” reducing its dependence on place. Both of these have been seen in the long globalising wave. The losers from this are Justin Gest’s (2016, p.7) “post traumatic” cities, “exurbs and urban communities that lost signature industries in the mid-to late-twentieth century and never really recovered.” Behind 21st century populism sits a longer economic history of ’80s deindustrialisation, as Will Davies (2016b) observed. “It is easy to focus

on the recent history of Tory-led austerity when analysing this... [b]ut consider the longer history of these regions as well. They are well-recognised as Labour's historic heartlands, sitting on coalfields and/or around ship-building cities... Thatcherism gutted them with pit-closures and monetarism, but generated no private sector jobs to fill the space. The entrepreneurial investment that neoliberals always believe is just around the corner never materialised."

The third factor Lash and Urry (1987, p.86) identified is the one that has made the difference between the cities that have succeeded and those places that have not. "[C]ertain characteristics of labour-power [would] become of heightened importance, because labour-power, unlike the physical means of production, cannot be produced capitalistically."

This is the critical distinction: while we have been looking attentively at the way in which the globalisation of the late 20th century has shifted production to Asia and Latin America, we have been blind to what's been happening on our doorsteps. As Doreen Massey (2005, p.95) notes, "While the end of cities through technology-led dispersal is confidently predicted by cyber-futurists, cities are growing as never before." Successful cities have reconstructed their local economies to become effective knowledge and service economies, precisely because the advent of ICT has freed work from its ties to specific places.

"The notion that IT will disperse work and production misses the mark completely," said Diane Coyle (1998). "If there are fewer obstacles to being in one place rather than another, economic activity will concentrate where it already is because the availability of pools of knowledge and skill is becoming more important in advanced economies. And in the most successful cities, these pools will be both wide and deep." The breadth and depth of the local labour markets becomes increasingly important in a world of working women and dual-income households, where dual jobs often limit the mobility of labour.

In his explanation of why wages are higher in innovative cities, Moretti (2013, pp.99-100) explains the dynamics of these labour markets and why they improve incomes across the board. First, when a less well-educated colleague works with a better-educated colleague, their productivity increases. Second, a better-educated workforce facilitates the adoption of new technologies. Third, when the level of human capital increases in a city, it creates "externalities": "when people interact, they learn from each other." Each of these three elements requires social exchange, even proximity.

There is an additional element to this. One of the features of the so-called knowledge economy is a shift not just from manufacturing to services, but from products to experiences. Human attributes, such as the ability to understand symbolic knowledge or complex flows, design, service, and the construction of meaning, are at the heart of high value work (Curry, Kiss, Wood, Passmore & Cook, 2014). This is true even in apparently routine sectors such as retailing and food services. What's true of businesses and cities is also true of individual workplaces. This is the Google paradox; Google, a business with all of the technological capabilities to work virtually, builds luxurious offices instead that are designed to bring its employees face to face as much as possible.

The Future of Work and Workers

Each of the last major financial crises (in the 1870s/80s and the 1930s) has produced a restructuring of the relationship between labour and capital. It seems likely that this one will too.

After the first large-scale crisis, limits were imposed on the working day, safety was improved, and restrictions were placed on the freedoms of employers to hire children, among other measures, although these disputes rolled on for decades. After the second, unions got a larger say in how plants were managed and more influence on policy. As for the third, timing helps. As the World Bank (2016) has observed, the global working age population peaked in 2012, and slowing rates of population growth mean that labour will become scarcer (Weldon, 2015).

In the new world of “third wave work,” where the social persona and the employee persona are constantly blurred, it seems at least possible that the line may be about the limits of work and its entailed emotional labour, and perhaps of rights not to work. This is worth a fuller discussion here.

Taking a long view, our contemporary relationship with work is still essentially a construct of the industrial revolution, and is no more than 200 years old, less in most countries. The disciplines of industrial labour had to be learned (Thompson, 1968; Wood, 2002), and were resisted (Mason, 2015, pp.181-185). In the 1940s and 1950s, the post-war settlement effectively constructed a new bargain with the workforce. Workers were afforded alienating work in the factory or the office that nonetheless paid well, and which also enabled them to buy consumer goods (cars and washing machines) that transformed their lives materially (Harvey, 2014, pp.270-276). Beynon’s (1973) masterly study of British Ford workers, which described the way workers managed these constraints, especially the power relationships in the workplace, was written at almost the last moment when it was possible to observe this world.

The deal fell apart with the industrial crisis of the 1970s, with declining growth from the late 1960s, and a squeeze on profits, alongside “a revolution of rising expectations” (Streeck, 2014, pp. 25-27). Some places—Gest’s post-traumatic cities—never recovered from this. The moment of failure, and of the marginalised workers it created, is captured well in the culture of the times, by, for example Bruce Springsteen’s (1980, 1982, 1984) records of the early ‘80s, or in the UK, Boys From The Blackstuff (Bleasdale, 1982). George Packer (2013) has described the world of those whose economies did not reinvent themselves.

In other places, economies were reconstructed around knowledge and service. In their later book, Lash and Urry (1994, pp.199-202) describe the main ways in which the labour characteristics of knowledge and services workers differ from those who worked in manufacturing, processing, or administration roles.

They identify a number of factors. Labour costs in these industries, they write, especially services, represents a high proportion of the total. They are design intensive, so supplies of adequate labour in the local area are critical. Labour is “implicated” (their phrase) in the services delivery, which is “the intended outcome of a necessarily social process” (p.200). Further, “the social composition of the producers... is often part of what is ‘sold’ to customers” (p. 200), and in turn this means that emotional labour, the ability to perform emotional work (Frayne, 2015, p.53), becomes an integral part of the product or service.

The crucial difference, as Hardt and Negri (Mason, 2015, p.210) argued in their book *Declaration*, is that “[t]he center of gravity of capitalist production no longer resides in the factory but has drifted outside its walls. Society has become a factory... With this shift, the primary engagement between capitalist and worker also changes.” Or, put more starkly by Cederström and Fleming (2012, p.14), “Life itself is now the most lucrative kind of capital being put to work, from the hipster marketing firm to the call center sweatshop.”

Lash and Urry’s observation that “this poses particular difficulties for management” is crystallised in the film *Office Space* (Judge, 1999), when the waitress, Joanna, is admonished by her manager for not wearing enough ‘flair’ on her uniform.

Stan: ... I’m counting and I only see fifteen pieces. Let me ask you a question, Joanna.

Joanna: Umm-hmm.

Stan: What do you think of a person who only does the bare minimum?

Joanna: Huh. What do I think? Um, you know what, Stan, if you want me to wear thirty-seven pieces of flair, like your uh, pretty boy over there, Brian, why don’t you just make the minimum thirty-seven pieces of flair?

As Mark Fisher (2009, p.35) noted, this scene is “a handy illustration of the way in which

‘creativity’ and ‘self-expression’ have become intrinsic to labor in Control societies; which... now makes affective, as well as productive demands, on workers.”

The employment expectation, then, is very different. Knowledge and service work involves bringing the social self to work (Frayne, 2015, pp.52-54; Myerscough, 2013). But the work is less well-paid, in real terms, than it was in the ‘50s and ‘60s, often more short-term or precarious, and there is little to buy that has the same transformative power for our lives. Perhaps it is not surprising that depression and poor mental health is one of the defining characteristics of the age (James, 2008). For these reasons, a new politics of work has the feel of an authentic Millennial politics. If the spirit of the 2000s was, “Why go on strike if you can wreck the firm with surly service?” (Henley Centre, 2001) that of the 2010s is “Work for free or for a full price but never cheap” (Curry et al., 2014, p.6).

It is a commonplace that capitalism resolves its contradictions by creating new ones. Nonetheless, it is hard to see a new form of capitalism emerging from the present configuration. This should not be regarded as a revolutionary assertion, in either sense of the phrase. Streeck (2016, p.65) suggests that it will instead decay slowly as a result of its five contemporary “disorders” (“stagnation, oligarchic redistribution, the plundering of the public domain, corruption, and global anarchy”). While this is not an attractive prospect, it does suggest is that projects that challenge the way in which our ideas of work are constructed are likely to fall on more welcoming terrain. These discussions are heightened by the widespread sense of technological dread surrounding the possibility that artificial intelligence, in particular, may create a permanent reduction in working numbers (Frey & Osborne, 2013; Brynjolffson & McAfee, 2014).

This may account for a wave of such ‘utopian’ ideas about work. The most developed proposals are by Srnicek and Williams (2015, pp.107-127), who advocate a set of “post-work imaginaries”, even demands, about future work. They propose four such imaginaries: full automation; a four-day week; universal basic income; and the erosion of the work ethic. Proposals to reduce the working week have a long heritage, going back at least to Keynes (1931), who anticipated that in 2031 his grandchildren would work 15-hour weeks, reflecting the received wisdom of the time. In practice, over recent years productivity gains have translated directly into a shortening working week in France, Germany and the UK. (In the UK, the correlation is exact: average hours stop falling at the time of the economic crisis, when productivity also stalls.) The New Economics Foundation, whose work often represents a sign that an emerging issue is reaching the edge of the mainstream, has also published on reducing working time (Coote and Franklin, eds, 2013). Frayne (2016, p.221-223), meanwhile, advocates a new “politics of time.”

The Universal Basic Income, similarly, is now in the mainstream discourse. Curry (2015) suggested that this might be a “predetermined element,” drawing on some indicative scenarios he created on the future of work.

If the “robots” hypothesis is right, we’ll need a basic income to make the economy work (markets need people who can afford to buy products). If the market power argument is right, then basic income keeps employers honest, by ensuring they have to pay good enough wages, in good enough conditions, to attract and keep their workers. One interesting side effect is that it would mean that our fundamental notions of the value of paid work could be about to shift, for the first time since the Industrial Revolution.

This runs deeper than a series of technical proposals. Holloway (2010, p.262) urged his readers to “stop making capitalism.” Frayne’s (2016, p.215) research involved talking to “idlers” and “anti-workers.” He concludes that “what they strove for was a more authentic sense of autonomy.” Aaron Bastani (2015) has articulated a demand for what he calls fully automated luxury communism.

If we embraced work-saving technologies rather than feared them, and organised our society around their potential, it could mean being able to live a good life with a ten-hour working week... robots and computers doing the hard graft could mean respite from the over-worked fatigue that's hijacked our world. You look after your nan a lot more, spend more time in bed with your partner and ride a driverless tesla motorcycle while listening to a music that you don't pay for and has no adverts.

Running through all of these discourses is the spirit of the French sociologist Andre Gorz, whose research challenged notions of work as wage labour.

In the meantime in actual labour markets, young people, especially those with some power in the labour market, look increasingly for work with “purpose,” often located in businesses with non-traditional governance structures, such as B-corps, social enterprises, community interest companies, and co-operatives and other non-profits.

If there is one group of workers for whom these new forms of labour are least satisfactory, it is the “precarariat,” characterised by Guy Standing (2011, pp.10-12) as experiencing job insecurity, insecure social income, and lacking a work-based identity. Mason (2015) makes a connection between precarious workers and their location in the city, “To the younger precarious workforce it is instead urban proximity that matters; they tend to cluster into city centres, accepting massively reduced living space as a trade-off for physical closeness to the network of contacts needed to find partners, sporadic work, and entertainment. Their struggles... tend to focus on physical space” (p.209).

Despite the pessimism that pervades much of the current writing on this new precarious urban working class, if urban success requires good quality local labour markets, such labour markets create the opportunity for labour to make demands of employers and of urban administrations. For lower paid workers with little direct labour market leverage, this is often framed around rights. Voting data from the Brexit referendum and the US Presidential election suggests that where the urban poor voted, they voted for Remain or Clinton. This urban working class has a very different composition in the 21st century; it is more likely to be female and of ethnic origin, and to have moved for work. Such people are less impressed by the use by populists of immigration as a placeholder for unwelcome cultural change.

As should be clear from the economic discussion earlier in the paper, their political interests lie in the policies that generate and keep value in the city. It is not coincidence that cities such as London and Seattle have been at the forefront of living wage campaigns, or that they have been centres for new forms of trade union organising.

One implication of this is that we will continue to see worker activism around platform businesses that are strongly place-dependent, such as Uber and Deliveroo, and that much of this will be driven by rights-based interpretations of proper employer practice. At the same time the idea of “the right to meaningful work” (Llorente, 2005, p.105) seems to travel in the same direction as “the right to the city” (Harvey, 2008, p.23). The first is about a commitment to self-development through work, and a say in decisions affecting one’s work; the second about “the freedom to make and remake our cities and ourselves” (Harvey, 2008, p.23).

Some Notes on the Future of Politics

All of this is re-shaping politics in a fundamental fashion, at least as long as the system dynamic of “success to the successful” continues to drive the process of accumulation in core cities, at the expense of suburbs, towns and countryside. One of the biggest problems is that the political systems that emerged in the first part of the 20th century, and which dominated the long post-war boom, have now cracked apart, but new systems have not yet taken their place. The process of adaptation, though, has evolved faster in places with more proportional electoral systems.

On the left, the traditional social democratic parties of the centre-left have been disabled by the collapse of the post-war boom and the steady decline of the labour movement. There are good reasons for this. As Hilary Wainwright (2015) summarised, “the world of a mixed economy, where the profits of a productive capitalist sector could be taxed and redistributed to provide universal welfare, social security and a public infrastructure for the benefit of all, no longer exists.” The collapse of that world shunted all of our mainstream parties towards neoliberal views of the world, some more whole-heartedly than others. While neoliberalism is a contested term, we can follow Will Davies’ (2014) work in characterising it as form of politics in which state actors follow a “modernising” agenda that broadens the scope of markets, using the rhetoric of “competition” to target institutions that lie outside of the market, and to marketise or abolish them. Both conservative and centre-left parties adopted versions of neoliberal policies in the 1990s and beyond, as seen in the rise of the concept of “New public management” (Larbi, 1999).

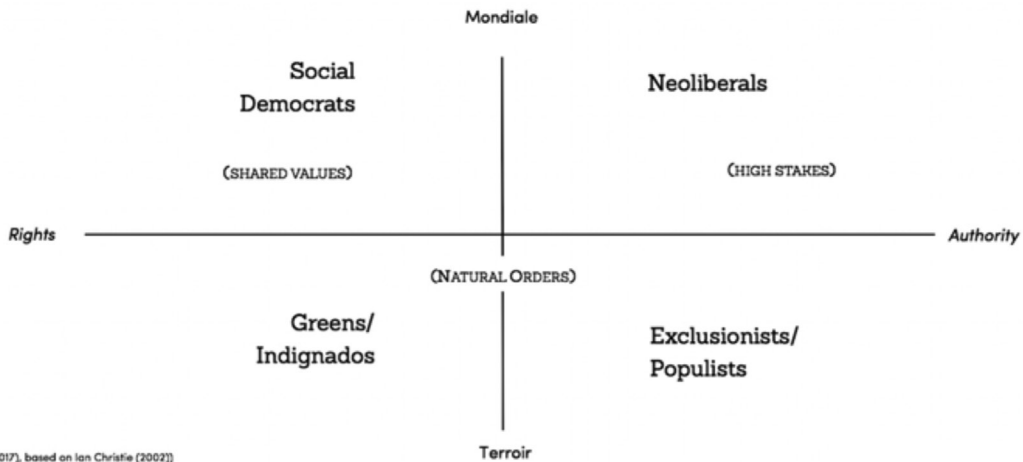


Figure 1. The changing political landscape

In a paper published in *Open Democracy*, Ian Christie (2002) described three political scenarios: a squeezed “shared values” world of social democracy; a “high stakes” neoliberal world which produced losers as well as winners; and the emergence, or perhaps re-emergence, of parties based on what he called “natural orders.” Christie characterised the natural orders groups as spanning “both left and right in the traditional classification of political alignments: it contains protests by local and national interests against the homogenising, top-down capitalist forces that are shaping the values, tempo, environments and organisation of modern societies. What links all of them is the non-Enlightenment view that there are natural limits or imperatives that science, progress and secular rational humanism cannot ignore.”

Building on this work a decade and a half later, it is necessary to pull apart the “natural orders” parties of right and left. Both are based on place, but while the populist versions are based on authority, the left versions (for example: Greens, Podemos, the Momentum element in the British Labour Party, the early Syriza, and so on) are constructed around notions of rights. This can even be thought of as a literal construction, of the right to the city, mentioned above, and of the occupations of public space that marked the *indignados*, *nuit debout* and the Occupy movement. It is worth noting that every political debate about migration has at its heart a person and a place, a place where they are either permitted or excluded.

In other words, the whole centre of political gravity is in the process of moving from the top of the chart, where labour (top left) contested with capital (top right) the share of an expanding global

economy, to the bottom of the chart, where the division is about differences in place and values. The current arguments in the British Labour Party, for example, are between those looking back to versions of the party above the line, and new activists who look at a “natural orders” version of the party. Some of the most successful parties in the bottom left quadrant have combined progressive politics with a nationalist agenda, such as the Scottish Nationalists or Together for Yes in Catalunya.

In short, then, we are moving to a new form of political alignment based on geography rather than social class. The expression of this political alignment is about forms of identity, but its base is in the realignment of the productive economy around the city. This is where the money is, and because of the strong age cohort effects associated with the emerging post-materialist values, this is also where the energy is.

Implications

What are the implications of this for a future politics? The transition from a crisis is always ugly: it’s become a crisis because previously accepted economic and political arrangements have broken down, and the social agreements that underpinned them are now contested. Nonetheless, it is possible to see some emerging themes.

1. Demographics coupled with a deep shift in values suggest that in the medium term politics will be fought out over identity issues. Sara Robinson (2016) made the case that the Sanders presidential campaign, which attracted disproportionate support from younger people, was probably four years too early. In the UK, given the age profiles of Remain and Leave voters, the 2016 referendum probably represented the last chance that Leavers had of winning such a referendum (Curry, 2016). While American and British politics currently feature radical campaigns staffed by young people and led by figures with their political roots in the 1970s it is only a matter of time before a Millennial political leader breaks through who is able to link this younger base with the language of a 21st century politics.
2. Existing political parties with an older base will continue to manipulate the electoral system, legally and less legally, to delay the moment when they are overtaken by demographics. In the UK, existing and proposed changes to voter registration have the effect of making it harder for younger and poorer people to vote (Thomas, 2015). In the U.S., gerrymandering of electoral boundaries will continue, along with anti-democratic practices designed to suppress voting (Berman, 2016). So will policies designed to benefit older citizens, who are more likely to vote, at the expense of younger ones. But how long for? As the Millennials and Centennials take their political moment, such studied inter-generational discrimination will be harder to maintain and harder to justify.
3. Some parts of some governments will try to shore up the neoliberal agenda, but they will have decreasing success. By “neoliberal agenda,” I mean political attempts to benefit corporations by the continuing marketisation and financialisation of public assets and public services. The evidence for this change is, for example, in the abandonment of TTIP and TPP by both mainstream American political candidates, including Clinton, who had served in an Administration that had promoted both. The activist/clicktivist campaigns against Monsanto and other corporate rule-making are also relevant. Indeed, the EU’s political survival might depend on it moving away from the Lisbon agenda, since its emphasis on “competitiveness” and growth, with related pro-business behaviour, is one of the features that drains political support and permits populist and nativist politicians within its borders to flourish.

4. What happens over time to the declining number of voters in the “cultural backlash” group? This is a political question. It is possible to think that the populist moment is likely to peak a decade after the crisis (Funke et al., 2016). Some policies supported by urban progressives should also appeal to younger voters outside of the urban core: obvious steps include improving the quality of labour markets, reducing financialisation, increasing mobility, and increasing trust in governance. Ageing will change the balance around cultural expectations as well. But without some acknowledgement by political actors and institutions of their interests, there is likely to be greater confrontation and political violence (Turchin, 2013).
5. Alliances of cities will bypass national governments to promote more progressive agendas that are more aligned with the values both of their citizens and their business leaders. The C40 group of cities is an early example of this. At the same time, these alliances are likely to broaden beyond the current group of “global cities,” and for this reason. There are many signs that the largest cities in the richer world have reached their peak; housing costs are too high for young people to settle, and rents discourage diversity and cultural experimentation and renewal. But the likely beneficiaries are cities with decent local labour markets that have not peaked; in the UK, for example, this might include Bristol, Manchester, or Leeds. Indeed, expect to see this become a standard urban development strategy. The effect, though, will be to make these urban alliances broader and deeper.

Conclusion

Much of the contemporary discourse on the future of politics and the future of work is dismal in its tone and its projections of social outcomes. I have argued in this paper that this is because it pays insufficient attention to the role of place in shaping value at a national, metropolitan and household level. The notion of the “death of distance,” in short, is over-represented in the literature, and the discussion of the nature of the way in which value is created, and the implications of this for both politics and political economy, is under-represented.

It ought to be a commonplace among futurists that the large structural shift towards knowledge- and service-led economies would have second order effects, yet there appears to have been relatively little analysis of this, and this is clearly an area that is in need of further research. In particular, we need to connect ideas of place to economic value, to the sociological consequences for work, and the political effects this is creating.

From a futures perspective, while crises are dangerous moments, they are dangerous precisely because they open up the possibility of a number of radically open futures. Since a financial crisis is a sign of a fundamental systemic failure, its aftermath permits the emergence of radical ideas, even utopian ones. To borrow a phrase: the cracks are where the light gets in.

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