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Kefford, A.

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# Actually existing managerialism: Planning, politics and property development in post-1945 Britain

Alistair Kefford 

Leiden University, the Netherlands

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## Abstract

This article engages a long-established paradigm within urban studies: that of the transition from managerialism to entrepreneurialism in late 20th-century urban governance and the associated process of neoliberalisation. It begins from a fundamental intellectual problem; although we are well served with studies of urban entrepreneurialism and neoliberalism, we know surprisingly little of the detailed workings of the ‘pre-neoliberal’, managerial era from the 1940s to the 1970s. In the absence of sustained investigation of this period, many chronologies and critiques of urban transformation rest upon a set of assumptions which – as this article shows – are not always accurate. The article focuses upon Britain, tracing the installation of a modern planning regime in the 1940s and surveying some key features of the UK urban redevelopment regime as it evolved over the ensuing decades. It shows that much of what is held to be paradigmatic of neoliberal urbanism (public–private partnerships, urban entrepreneurialism, financialisation) was already powerfully present within British urbanism in the earlier, managerial era. I highlight in particular the dramatic post-war rise of the UK property development industry, and the new urban forms and norms it generated, as a key product of the era of urban managerialism in Britain. I relate these surprising findings to Britain’s distinctive history and political economy but I also advance arguments that are of wider relevance; around the nature and aims of governance from the 1940s to the 1970s, and how we should best conceptualise and explain processes of neoliberalisation.

## Keywords

built environment, development, finance, financialisation, heritage, history, memory, neoliberalisation, planning, urban managerialism

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### Corresponding author:

Alistair Kefford, Economic and Social History,  
Institute for History, Leiden University, Leiden,  
2300 RA, the Netherlands.

Email: [a.kefford@hum.leidenuniv.nl](mailto:a.kefford@hum.leidenuniv.nl)

## 摘要

本文探讨城市研究中的一个确立已久的范式：即20世纪末城市治理中从管理主义向创业主义的过渡、以及相关的新自由主义化进程。本文首先提出了一个基本的知识问题：虽然我们对城市创业主义和新自由主义的研究很有帮助，但对1940年代到1970年代的“前新自由主义”的管理主义时代的详细运作情况，我们却知之甚少。由于缺乏对这一时期的持续研究，许多关于城市转型的历史记载和评论都建立在一系列假设之上。正如本文所表明的，这些假设并不总是准确的。本文聚焦于英国，追溯了20世纪40年代现代规划制度的建立，并考察了英国城市再开发制度在随后几十年的发展中的关键特征。本文表明，在早期的管理主义时代，被认为是新自由主义城市化典范的许多东西（公私合作、城市创业、金融化）早已在英国的城市化中得到了有力体现。我特别强调了战后英国房地产开发行业的戏剧性崛起，以及由此产生的新的城市形式和规范，这是英国城市管理主义时代的一个重要产物。我将这些惊人的发现与英国独特的历史和政治经济联系起来，但我也提出例如具有更广泛相关性的论点。我的论点围绕20世纪40年代到70年代的治理的性质和目标，以及我们应该如何最好地概念化和解释新自由主义进程。

## 关键词

建筑环境、开发、金融、金融化、遗产、历史、记忆、新自由主义、规划、城市管理主义

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## Introduction

In 1989, David Harvey's seminal article 'From managerialism to entrepreneurialism' established a powerful research agenda within urban studies. Harvey's account of 'the transformation in urban governance in late capitalism' – in which a post-war, welfare-oriented urban managerialism was superseded in the last quarter of the century by a new urban entrepreneurialism, centred around an embrace of market ideologies, public-private partnership and the competitive pursuit of local economic growth – has become an organising paradigm for entire subfields of study. We now enjoy rich literatures on the nature, operation and consequences of urban entrepreneurialism, developed and refined through innumerable case studies and applied treatments (e.g. Hall and Hubbard, 1998; Peck and Ward, 2002). Since around the turn of the 21st century, we have also seen the emergence of a sophisticated, theoretically and empirically rich body of scholarship centred around the

rise of neoliberalism, and an ongoing process of urban *neoliberalisation*, which is similarly informed by and indebted to Harvey's 1989 thesis, along with other works (e.g. Brenner and Theodore, 2002; Harvey, 2005; Leitner et al., 2007; Peck, 2010). Both of these (closely related) bodies of work moved quickly to eschew theoretical ideal-types of 'the neoliberal city' or 'the entrepreneurial city', instead testing ideas of a changing urban political economy against developments 'on the ground' in cities all over the world.

The imperative to study urban socio-political dynamics in their concrete, 'actually existing' forms has been hugely productive, offering increasingly nuanced and multifaceted understandings of urban neoliberalism(s) and entrepreneurialism(s). Such sensitive intellectual approaches have also yielded a subtle conceptualisation of the *process* of urban transformation, in which the broad currents of structural and ideological change are always channelled and inflected

by the contingencies and messy diversity of local circumstance. We might describe this concern with the nature and the process of urban socio-political change as a particularly historical frame of analysis – certainly, it echoes the way historians proceed when seeking to explain transformations in society and space. Notions such as contingency and ‘path dependency’ – which rest upon an idea of the past as always a structuring force on the present – are themselves deeply historical ones. Such modes of analysis incline us to raise questions about the underlying logic and chronology of the now orthodox narrative of a late-20th-century ‘transformation of urban governance’ (questions one suspects that Harvey would sympathise with, given his own historical sensitivities). There is an inherently epochal character to the story of a shift ‘from managerialism to entrepreneurialism’, which implies two opposed political models, and a break point, rupture and reorientation. Yet, as the investigations of ‘actually existing’ neoliberalism make clear, such monolithic models of urban political forms are usually misleading and the process of socio-historical change is rarely so neat, linear and clear-cut (Pinson and Journal, 2016).

This article sets out what we might call a history of ‘actually existing managerialism’, focusing on the governance and redevelopment of British cities from the mid-1940s to the mid-1970s. It does so because, whilst urban scholarship has been admirably assiduous in testing and nuancing its analyses of ‘actually existing’ neoliberalism and entrepreneurialism, we continue to work with models of the ‘pre-neoliberal’ city which have been subjected to far less scrutiny and critical reflection. Too often, it is simply assumed that the management of cities in the post-war decades stood in marked contrast to what came afterward. We are sometimes asked to take as read that post-war urban management was intrinsically more

progressive, welfarist and democratic, and that local authorities governed urban space and society in a ‘collective’ mode (Ward, 2003: 203), eschewing market liberalism and private-sector growth to focus upon ‘the local provision of services, facilities and benefits to urban populations’ (Harvey, 1989: 3). This article will demonstrate that – in the British case at least – this was emphatically not the case. Indeed, it will show that many of the features that are assumed to be paradigmatic of ‘the new urban entrepreneurialism’ were already powerfully present in the post-war city. Municipal entrepreneurship and local developmentalism, public–private partnerships, financialisation, property-led programmes of regeneration, competitive place-marketing and public-sector risk-bearing were all fundamental to the management of British cities in the decades after 1945. Indeed, the discussion will go further and show that – in Britain at least – the pathways to late-century neoliberal urbanism were laid down clearly and decisively during the post-war era of business-friendly, state-aided urban capitalist development.

Methodologically and evidentially, this piece draws upon a decade of historical research into British urbanism across the post-1945 period, utilising central and local government archives, professional planning literatures, legislation and government policy directives, business and newspaper archives. I also present the development of critical urban scholarship itself as part of this history, showing that, in the 1960s and 1970s, early neo-Marxist urban scholars such as Manuel Castells and Henri Lefebvre – along with some of their lesser-known British sympathisers – were themselves writing in reaction to what they saw as the political failings and capitalistic thrust of the regimes of urban planning and management that had grown up since the Second World War. The first part of the article revisits the moment of post-war reconstruction in Britain, showing

how a continued faith in broadly liberal ideas of political economy shaped an unusually business- and developer-friendly post-war planning regime. The second part highlights the critical importance of public-private partnerships in post-war planning, which long pre-dates the late-century rise of entrepreneurial urbanism. A third part considers the impact that Britain's marketised, developer-driven planning regime had upon the spaces and places of post-war Britain, drawing attention to the impact of widespread speculative commercial development upon urban central areas, and the criticisms this began to draw by the later 1960s. A final part of the article considers the intellectual and political history of the growing chorus of criticism of post-war urbanism by the 1970s, which fuelled both New Left and New Right attacks on the course of urban transformation since the Second World War. The conclusion offers some synthesising reflection on the significance of the material presented, both for our understanding of Britain's recent urban past and present-day trajectories, and for our wider conceptualisation of neoliberalisation processes and urban socio-political change.

### **Recasting the state and the city after 1945**

Any conception of urban managerialism, and its contrast with later political formations, begins with the Keynesian welfare state. Indeed, managerialism is understood as the urban, spatial dimension of the expanded social state which emerged in Britain, as in many other wealthy capitalist nations, in the aftermath of the Second World War. In this formulation, the rise of urban managerialism – based upon an empowered and proactive system of public planning and collective provision – mirrored the transformation in national political economy, as a remodelled post-war state

assumed much greater responsibility for the management of the economy and the welfare of individuals. In order to comprehend managerialism as it actually existed in Britain, however, it is necessary to understand more precisely the nature and the course of state transformation which took place in the mid-20th century. One-dimensional characterisations of this 'New Jerusalem' moment as one of straightforward collectivist advance can be misleading. The foundations for a firmly statist political project in Britain were actually relatively weak, while the pre-war intellectual inheritance of liberalism, with its celebration of markets, private enterprise and individualism, continued to exercise a powerful hold over the political and administrative elites who designed and oversaw the new social state. The two principal architects of Britain's own version of 'the Keynesian welfare state' – John Maynard Keynes and William Beveridge – were dyed-in-the-wool liberals who would have recoiled in horror from ideas of excessive statism.

The new regime of planning and urban management which was installed in Britain after the war reflected these uncertainties about extending the role of the state, along with a continued faith in the freedoms of business and the market. The 1940 Barlow Report (Royal Commission on the Distribution of the Industrial Population, 1940), widely cited as one of the foundations of the entire post-war planning system (Cullingworth and Nadin, 2006; Hall and Tewdwr-Jones, 2011), in fact stopped well short of recommending a compulsory, nationwide regime of public planning (like most government commissions of this era, Barlow's committee enjoyed strong representation from various titans of British industry and enterprise). In Whitehall, many of the senior civil servants tasked with implementing the new planning system in the 1940s and 1950s were decidedly uneasy about empowering local authorities to act

independently of commercial interests and market forces (Sharp, 1948). They sought instead to constrain public planning ambitions and to steer overzealous local authorities towards a more minimalist and business-friendly model of urban management. These conflicts were settled decisively in the early 1950s, when the new Conservative administration rolled back the more statist elements of Labour's post-war planning legislation and set a clear course towards a firmly marketised, pro-enterprise regime of urban redevelopment (Weiler, 2000). In 1961 the American planning jurist Charles M Haar conducted a forensic survey of the evolution of British planning legislation since the war and was clear about the 'general shift in philosophy' which had taken place since 1950. There had been 'a decontrol of direct Government planning to a large degree' and a distinct 'soft-peddalling of public enterprise'. 'Initiative [was] now lodged with private developers', Haar noted, in a system which favoured 'property owners and advocates of land development'. Politically, this shift had been overseen by 'a Conservative party which has discovered the market with a vengeance'. In an indication of the engrained liberalism of the state administrative apparatus, Haar suggested the shift had also been aided by 'the civil servant's rediscovery of private sovereignty and the market mechanism' (1961: 114–117).

The new planning powers of the local state were to be used, not for collectivist projects of state-led social provision but as levers for the encouragement and support of private redevelopment activity. Many local authorities would certainly have preferred stronger powers to act independently of private commercial interests but many also saw the value in a system which could be used to stimulate local economic growth and facilitate private-sector development on a bold new scale. Towns and cities up and down the country embarked upon programmes of

redevelopment which aimed at enticing private investors and developers to their locales, and local authorities deployed their new planning powers in support of large-scale commercial development projects. To take one example, the small city of Wakefield in West Yorkshire had been committed to the public-private redevelopment of its central commercial district since before the Second World War. In the mid-1930s, Wakefield Corporation hired a London-based property consultancy, Goddard & Smith, to assist it in drawing up plans for the retail- and property-led reinvention of the town centre. Before the war was over, the Corporation had published its plans for widespread demolition and remodelling in the central area, opening up the narrow streets into wide shopping thoroughfares and offering large new blocks to private interests for commercial retail development.

Wakefield's intention was to promote the development of 'good shopping premises' which would 'become popular for shops of a more exclusive character', and thereby secure an 'appreciation of site values' in the town centre (Wardley, 1943). The Corporation also hoped to capitalise financially on this development programme, by unlocking new public borrowing capacity secured against the 'increase in rateable value due to redevelopment'. The city's explanation of this scheme for retail- and culture-led regeneration could have been lifted straight from a 21st century urban regeneration prospectus:

Since Wakefield draws a considerable population from outside its boundaries, an attractive City Centre with good shops, hotel, cafes, cinemas and theatres cannot surely fail to improve its popularity in this respect, and the capital expenditure needed should earn an adequate return with a general appreciation of the site value of the areas. (Wardley, 1943)

By 1955, the commercial remodelling of Wakefield was complete, and an expensive,

privately developed retail landscape had driven up site values and property rents across the town centre (Goddard & Smith, 1958). The city's redevelopment had also provided plenty of work and investment opportunities for the nascent British property sector. Goddard & Smith showcased its early work in Wakefield as it advertised its services as 'Specialist Advisers to Municipal Corporations in Shopping and Commercial Development' across the 1960s, while a number of other property firms which would go on to become major, nationwide operators also worked in the city in the early 1950s. The development company Ravenseft, which went on to build shops and shopping centres all over the country, got some of its earliest work putting up retail blocks in Wakefield. Also present in the city was the Arndale Property Trust, a development company which would go on to build dozens of shopping malls and commercial precincts in Britain and beyond. Arndale's first office was in Wakefield, where its directors got their start in the business dealing in lucrative shop property.

### **Public-private partnership in post-war Britain**

Far from being antithetical to market logics and private-sector development, the urban planning regime which operated in Britain in the post-war decades furnished the development industry with precisely the conditions in which it flourished. The expansion of the private property sector in this period was remarkable and unprecedented. Scores of new property companies were formed in the decade or so after the war, and the most successful among them experienced staggering, exponential growth in the value of their business and the scope of their operations. The number of property companies quoted on the London Stock Exchange went from just 35 in 1939 to nearly 200 by the mid-

1960s. The value of these companies' shares increased more than eightfold in real terms across the same period (Marriott, 1967). The physical evidence of the property boom was there for all to see in the towering new office blocks, the vast new stores and the elaborate shopping centres which came to dominate urban central areas up and down the country, all built by private enterprise with the support of an enabling planning regime. In an age of self-conscious 'modernisation', many urban authorities were desperately keen to promote this type of commercial redevelopment activity in their locales (Shapely, 2011, 2013). Councils looked to retail and office development as a means of reorienting local economies away from flagging basic industries and towards new sources of growth in the dynamic service sectors. As a result, the speculative redevelopment projects of Britain's rapidly expanding property sector were generally welcomed with open arms by councillors and local officials.

'Partnership' between the public and the private sectors became the watchword of British urban renewal long before we are taught to look for it within the conventional chronologies of late-century neoliberalisation. Already by the early 1960s, both the practice and the discourse of 'partnership' were firmly installed at the heart of the urban redevelopment regime. In 1962 central government issued its key policy directive on town centre renewal, *Planning Bulletin 1*, which stated unequivocally that 'successful redevelopment calls for both skilful planning and much expertise including commercial experience. These can best be achieved by a partnership of public and private enterprise' (Ministry of Housing and Local Government (MHLG), 1962: 5). This directive contained an entire chapter on 'Partnership' which instructed local authorities to use their powers of compulsory purchase to assemble large plots of land and deliver them to commercial

developers 'for profitable redevelopment' (MHLG, 1962: 6). Such activities opened up hitherto undreamed-of commercial opportunities for the development industry, which was provided with large, centrally located sites on generous and secure long-term leases by local authorities. The principal products of this era were the mammoth new retail, leisure and office complexes which were planted in the centres of many of Britain's cities: Leeds's Merrion Centre (1964); Birmingham's Bull Ring (1965); Liverpool's St. John's Precinct (1969); Luton Arndale Centre (1972); Nottingham's Victoria Centre (1973) and Broadmarsh Centre (1975); Newcastle's Eldon Square (1976); the Croydon Whitgift Centre (1968), Wandsworth Arndale (1971), and Brent Cross Shopping Centre (1976) in London; and Manchester's Arndale Centre (1976). Outside of the major cities, hundreds of more modest commercial complexes were developed in suburban centres and second-order towns all over the country using the same partnership-based approach.

These major redevelopment schemes were effectively state-aided, publicly subsidised commercial development projects. Public planning powers were deployed to acquire the necessary land from private owners and deliver it to the development sector on cheap and secure leases. The public sector financed many essential parts of these schemes themselves; such was the enthusiasm to attract redevelopment that local authorities were happy to pay for car parks, toilets, bus stations and other facilities which were built on contract for them by developers. The new roadways needed to service and access these commercial complexes were paid for through grants from central government. In addition, many local authorities also began to provide funds directly to developers, investing municipal funds in commercial projects in return for equity or, more often, for a claim upon a portion of the development's operating profits. At its extreme, this could involve

public-sector borrowing to shore up the finances of commercial development schemes. This happened in Manchester in the early 1970s, where the city council formed a special purpose company, the Manchester Mortgage Corporation, to take advantage of preferential public-sector borrowing rates and plug a multi-million-pound hole in the financing of the Manchester Arndale Centre development. This experiment in public risk-bearing for private capital was put together in 1971, before the oil price shock and global economic downturn of 1973, and long before any Thatcherite strictures were being handed down to local authorities by central government. In 1971, similar public-private development companies were also incorporated by councils in Norwich and Buckingham (Ambrose and Colenutt, 1975: 69). These practices were part of a long pattern stretching right across the post-1945 period of state aid and public subsidy for the private redevelopment sector.

All of this publicly supported development activity was a huge boon to the British property industry and in the 1960s and 1970s many of the largest property developers in the world were British companies. The vast majority of these firms were post-war creations, with the most successful amongst them experiencing explosive growth over remarkably short timescales. To take an example, one of the most prolific commercial developers in this era was the company Town & City. This company came into existence only in 1956 but by the early 1970s, less than 20 years after it was founded, Town & City had already completed around 50 public-private redevelopment schemes in the UK, was pursuing a global programme of development which was worth £330 million (or £4.4bn in 2019 values) and was 'substantially larger than that of any other property company in the world' (Town & City Properties Ltd, 1973: 41). Town & City was responsible for the ubiquitous Arndale

Centres and for dozens of other town-centre redevelopment schemes. It also had wide-ranging interests in industrial development – building warehouses, factories and industrial estates in Britain and beyond – and was known in particular for its activities in high-end office development, which stretched out from the company's headquarters in London's lucrative West End to towns and cities right across Great Britain, Northern Ireland and the Republic; to Paris, Brussels, Amsterdam, Copenhagen and other continental cities; on to the booming central business districts of Australian cities such as Sydney and Melbourne; and finally to North America, where the firm was active in the financial districts of East Coast cities such as Boston and New York (Town & City Properties Ltd, 1974). Town & City's remarkable growth and global reach were directly attributable to the developer-friendly UK planning regime in which it had been weaned.

The British development industry thus profited enormously from its partnerships with local authorities; it also thrived as a result of its links with the UK financial sector centred on the City. The financialisation of urban property and redevelopment in Britain also took place far outside the conventional chronologies of neoliberalisation. Already in the 1940s and 1950s, when blitzed town centres were being rebuilt – again, by private developers working on contract for the state – development companies were pioneering new forms of commercial relationship with insurance companies and other investing institutions in order to finance their activities. By the 1960s, relations between the leading development companies and financial institutions such as insurers, banks and pension funds had been firmly established (Scott, 1996). Town & City's explosive growth, for example, rested upon the 'open-ended finance' which its long-standing relationship with Prudential Assurance provided (*The Economist*, 1968). In one particularly spectacular period of heavy

financial investment in property in the early 1970s, the value of shares in British property companies almost doubled in one year. *The Economist* reported on this 'feverish' growth and financialisation in a 1972 special supplement on the property sector:

More millionaires have been thrown up by the property business in Britain since the war than by any other industry. Office rents are higher in London than in New York, Paris, Brussels and just about anywhere else. Rents have risen much faster than inflation ... Today, the property world is in a state of high excitement. It has always been excited, to a greater or lesser degree, since the war. But, now, the excitement is feverish ... everyone with capital to invest now wants something to do with it ... The growth of the property illusion – that what goes up, keeps on rising – is now part of the subconscious of financiers, insurance companies, pension funds, banks, and now, through property bonds, of the man in the street. (*The Economist*, 1972)

In short, the British variant of post-war urban managerialism had unleashed an astonishing boom in speculative commercial development and given rise to a powerful, lightly regulated and heavily financialised UK property sector. Partnership with this freewheeling and expansionary sector was at the very heart of British urban planning and redevelopment right across the post-war decades.

### **The city transformed**

This type of speculative redevelopment activity had a transformative effect upon the urban centres of post-war Britain. Perhaps most importantly, commercial redevelopment projects invariably replaced cheaper urban property with much more expensive new development, and thus fuelled dramatic increases in central area land values. Shopkeepers reported being asked to pay

rents at somewhere between two and eight times what they were accustomed to paying in order to secure new sites in the redeveloped urban landscape (Darley and Saunders, 1976). The consequences of this radical change in the costs of doing business in the town centre were predictable; swathes of lower-value, often independent, commercial activity were uprooted and expelled from central areas, to be replaced by only the most profitable and organised business tenants who could stand the increase in their operating costs. The disruption to local economies and business practices was very considerable indeed (Kefford, 2017). Many non-commercial activities – civic, social and residential uses – disappeared from town centres altogether. Already by the 1960s, commentators were complaining of the ‘death by development’ which had been visited upon many towns as much of their former bustle and vitality seemed to have been banished from a sterile and homogenous redeveloped landscape (Allan, 1971). By such means both the economic geography and the social experience of central areas was reshaped, with mixed-use and mixed-value districts replaced by expensively redeveloped new districts, often under single ownership and geared strongly towards the higher-end of the consumer economy or the high-spec office market. Rapidly inflating urban land values also made property redevelopment ever-more attractive in commercial terms, so that the expansion of the development sector was self-perpetuating.

The valuable new real estate which had been planted in Britain’s cities also had to be secured, defended and policed. New shopping and leisure complexes in particular were key sites in which many new technologies of security and surveillance in the urban landscape were first introduced and tested. Closed circuit television surveillance, sophisticated alarm systems and new defensive architectures for retail property entered the

urban environment in this period. So, too, did an expanded private security apparatus of well-equipped guards, coordinated through radio command centres, in order to police the new privately owned spaces of the city. Debates were already raging in the 1960s between local authorities, developers and police forces about who would be responsible for policing the new commercial landscapes of the city and how it would be done (Bowley, 1973; Clark, 1968). The elaborate enclosed shopping complexes of this era were also early experiments in the production of spectacular, totalising and ‘hyper-real’ consumer landscapes, in which the sensations, experience and circulation of the individual in space were ever-more tightly managed in the interests of maximising efficiency and seduction in the retail environment (Goss, 1993). The post-war privileging of commercial development in the town centre thus set in train a series of economic and regulatory logics which would only gather force as the century wore on.

Above the scale of individual development projects, the relatively free rein which the commercial property sector was granted in the post-war decades also reshaped the overall morphology of cities and the types of development which were carried out. High-end retail and office development was consistently favoured because this was the most commercially attractive proposition for investors, but it was often unclear whether the focus on these types of development was justified by local demand and market conditions or rather a product of the internal logics of the development business. Complaints and protests about these developmental priorities and incentives became commonplace, particularly in larger cities where there were often significant shortages of housing. In Nottingham, at a 1971 planning inquiry into the building of the city’s second major shopping complex, protestors voiced precisely these concerns. Objectors

complained that the ‘provision for shops and offices was excessive’ and called instead for new civic and cultural amenities in the city. Another individual ‘deplored’ the building of yet more “‘glass boxes” which dominated but did not enhance the centre [of the city]’. Yet another suggested that ‘the corporation seemed to have only one idea in mind – shops and offices – and more and more shops and offices which were and would remain empty’ (Department of the Environment, 1970).

In London, where commercial development was most valuable and housing shortages particularly acute, these issues were especially contentious. The Centre Point building in central London – a slim, towering, 34-storey office block, which was one of the city’s tallest buildings when it was completed in 1966 – became a particular focus of public disquiet about the paths which post-war urbanism had taken. The building’s developer, Harry Hyams, was publicly vilified for leaving the building empty for almost a decade after its completion; there was no flagship tenant willing to pay the rent which Hyams was insisting upon, and soaring rental levels for modern office buildings meant there was an economic logic in simply leaving the building empty while its value increased dramatically. One report at the time described this as a ‘a symbol of the bizarre economics of the property business’, while the Environment Secretary Peter Walker described such practices as an ‘incredible scandal’ (Marks et al., 1972). Walker had a very public dispute with Hyams over Centre Point in which the developer sent two open letters to the Minister defending his position but, despite these efforts, for much of the public Hyams emerged as an archetype of the shady and disreputable property developer. Centre Point itself was occupied by housing protesters for a brief period in early 1974 and the affair seemed to crystallise in the public

mind a set of concerns about the whole post-war course of urban planning and redevelopment in Britain, in which public aims and collective interests seemed to have fallen by the wayside whilst a slick and avaricious property development industry had become inordinately wealthy extremely quickly. Such sentiments were compounded by the high-profile corruption scandal which was unfolding at the same time in the early 1970s, centred around the architect John Poulson and his corrupt dealings with numerous politicians and public officials in the field of urban development (Jones, 2012).

The Poulson scandal forced the resignation of the serving Home Secretary, Reginald Maudling, in July 1972, and underlined just how deeply entwined public planning and private development had become. The British property sector and the post-war planning apparatus were mutually dependent entities, having grown together in a state of symbiosis from the 1940s to the 1970s. While the press fixated upon sensational cases of corruption, and the public could recoil from the fiendish caricatures of high-profile developers, others were developing more rigorous and systematic critiques.

### **Contesting the post-war urban regime**

By the 1970s a clearly defined corpus of critical urban studies had emerged which was coruscating in its evaluation of the managerial urban regime which had been in place since the mid-century. Internationally, this was reflected in the rise of the ‘neo-Marxist’ school of urban sociology, which lambasted the public planning regimes then in place across the Western world as mere handmaidens of capital. Manuel Castells was the most prominent voice in this field, but much of this body of work did not appear in English until the later 1970s. Harvey’s *Social*

*Justice and the City* (1973) was an influential exception, while Christopher Pickvance's *Urban Sociology: Critical Essays* (1976) introduced English readers to the work of Castells and other French-language urban political economists in translation. Marxian urban political economy began to gain some traction amongst British urban scholars, although for many in urban planning, geography and policy studies (who were often straddling the divide between scholarship, practice and policy-making) such critiques remained anathema to the still-dominant liberal, positivist and empiricist intellectual traditions.

Where they were picked up and developed in the British context, Marxian critiques tended to be refracted through a heavy dose of empiricism, and this led scholars naturally to turn their attention to conditions on the ground in urban Britain and to the workings of what one notable text dubbed *The Property Machine*. Peter Ambrose and Bob Colenutt's 1975 work of this title started from some Marxian first principles around distributional justice, aiming 'to relate redevelopment to the general debate about wealth inequality by asking *who gains and who loses* from this process' (13). Their work was a dissection of the property development system as it had grown up since the war, dealing with the astonishing post-war growth of the British development industry; the boom in speculative development; the thoroughgoing financialisation of property development and its absorption into the UK financial system; and the support which the sector received from the state via the public planning system and various tax advantages. For the authors, the costs and benefits of Britain's post-war urban redevelopment, as managed by the public planning regime, had been intensely uneven in their distribution. Indeed, Ambrose and Colenutt foreshadowed the critique (recently revived by

Thomas Piketty) of real property as an engine of inequality when they pointed out that Britain in 1972 had 'the doubtful distinction' of being one of the most unequal amongst the advanced capitalist countries, and suggested that 'the way in which the property system benefits almost exclusively the wealthiest sections of our society' was an underappreciated factor in this. 'Several hundred people have become property millionaires since the last war', the authors noted dryly, 'so far as we know, none have been building workers' (Ambrose and Colenutt, 1975: 15; Piketty, 2013).

For all its empiricist grounding, *The Property Machine* remained a polemical tract and many British urban scholars continued to reject such sweeping critiques as naïve and unproductive. Peter Hall, for example, confronted the charge that planning was merely 'the handmaiden of the capitalist system' by asking (with some justification): 'What other system should planning be the handmaiden of?' (Hall, 1988: 425). Yet, whilst they may have rejected the explicitly Marxian framework, many scholars did come to recognise the peculiarities of the British post-war urban system, which had given rise to a sophisticated and well-capitalised property development industry that, in turn, had been granted a remarkably free rein to steer the course of urban transformation. And, although *The Property Machine* may not have found too much favour amongst the academy, the work was also aimed at other audiences. Published as a cheap Penguin paperback for a popular readership, the book spoke directly to the popular anti-development sentiments which were being articulated at protests and public inquiries up and down the country in the 1960s and 1970s, and which also manifested themselves in the growth of various conservationist and communitarian interest groups, often organised in opposition to the marketised,

capitalistic thrust of British urban redevelopment (Amery and Cruickshank, 1975; Darley and Saunders, 1976).

The conservationist connection was an ambiguous one, however, which bled easily into the New Right critiques of post-war urbanism which were gathering steam in the 1970s. These voices, somewhat perversely, managed to lay the blame for the country's urban ills upon an excessively statist approach to urban planning which had supposedly reigned in Britain from the 1940s to the 1970s. It became commonplace within public discourse to pour scorn upon 'the planners' – those megalomaniac, left-leaning authoritarians – whose wrong-headed schemes represented all that was worst about post-war, welfare state Britain (Hall, 1988). Such criticisms would have surprised anyone with a detailed knowledge of the operation of the planning system across the post-war decades, which had been dominated by the meteoric rise of a lucrative private development industry, supported and subsidised by a generous and permissive public planning regime. Indeed, some of those who were now leading the intellectual charge of the New Right project (notably, Keith Joseph) were amongst the more successful scions of the post-war redevelopment regime (Harrison, 2011). The connections between the powerful property sector and British neoconservatism were deep and sustained. Many property developers enjoyed close personal and political connections with the Conservative Party and many Ministers and MPs had ties or directorships within the property business. Some developers, such as Jeffrey (later Lord) Sterling, served as government advisors in the 1980s and many more espoused the kind of anti-state, free-market rhetoric which became a hallmark of neoliberal thinking (e.g. Erdman, 1982). Yet public pronouncements of this sort masked the reality that the British development sector had profited extremely handsomely from

its favoured status within the post-war planning regime and had long enjoyed privileged access to the corridors of power.

## Conclusion

It is clear that in Britain much of what would later come to be deemed 'neoliberal' in urban planning and redevelopment was abundantly in evidence across the post-war decades. Ideologically, there was a commitment to private-sector-led growth, market logics and a commercially defined vision of the urban future which found physical expression in the towering office blocks and mammoth shopping complexes that came to dominate the post-war city. Institutionally, such tendencies were manifested in a vigorous local developmentalism; intensely 'entrepreneurial', growth-promoting municipal activity; and the formation of close (but generally unequal) public-private partnerships, which were ubiquitous in post-war urban Britain. Such experiments in state-aided urban capitalist development unfolded within a national planning regime and regulatory culture which remained fairly liberal in the classical sense – intensely pro-business and distrustful of 'excessive' state interference in the workings of society and the market – in spite of the reconfigurations of the 1940s. Many of the governing rationalities of neoliberal urbanism were thus firmly in place in Britain long before the rise of an explicitly neoconservative political project in the later 1970s. Indeed, it was Britain's liberal and lightly regulated version of 'urban managerialism' which produced some of the essential building blocks with which this later governmental project would be assembled. Crucially, as I have stressed here, the post-war planning and redevelopment regime gave rise to an energetic and sophisticated property development industry in Britain, whose scale and influence far outstripped that of comparable countries

(Marriott, 1967). Before it was handed the keys to the city in the waves of 'property-led urban regeneration' which overtook British urban policy from the 1980s (Fainstein, 1994; Healey et al., 1992), the UK property sector had first to grow into a powerful and competent economic force, and it did so under the supportive husbandry of post-war, 'managerial' governance. Ideologically, too, the sector's growth fed into the neoconservative project, as the property masters and their allies in government came to believe that their remarkable post-war achievements had been the result of their pioneering entrepreneurship, rather than a generous and enabling institutional framework.

Such findings force us to reconsider some of the ways in which 'urban managerialism' has traditionally been understood. In its actually existing form, managerialism in post-war Britain turns out to have been far more entrepreneurial, developmental and market-oriented than is conventionally imagined. Collectivist impulses and welfarist sensibilities were by no means absent from post-war urban governance but they were balanced against a continued faith in the freedoms of business and the market, and a widely held belief in the superiority of private enterprise. Often, too, state interventions and public subsidies were used to boost commercial forces and private interests, in a political economy which was more 'growthist' than welfarist. British public-sector developmentalism often proceeded hand-in-hand with corporate profitability (Edgerton, 2018). This raises the question of whether the British path through the second half of the 20th century was unique – 'proto-neoliberal' perhaps – and unusually receptive to the ideologies and institutions of 'politically assisted market rule' (Peck, 2010: xii). In a sense it was, as a result of various contingencies and accidents of history. The country's deep-rooted liberal political traditions were important in determining the specific form

of Keynesian welfare state which took shape in the mid-century and they played a particularly significant role in framing the post-war regime of planning, property and redevelopment which has reigned with minimal adjustments from the 1940s to the present day. Equally important and influential were Britain's long-standing traditions of commercial enterprise, business and finance. In addition to being favoured by the planning system and by public subsidies, the UK development sector benefited enormously from its rapid incorporation into the financial system centred on the City of London, such that property development in Britain was already thoroughly financialised by the end of the 1950s. The property sector gained further advantages internationally by trading on the remnants of imperial Britain's global commercial networks, building extensively in former colonies and Commonwealth countries, as well as in the many continental cities with which the country had long had commercial ties.

Yet, aside from these peculiarities of the British experience, the history presented here of the transformation of urban governance under state-managed capitalism holds wider relevance. The British post-war urban experience forces us to confront the historicity and path dependency of socio-political change more generally, and to accept that processes of neoliberalisation may at times be driven as much by continuities as by periodic ruptures. Certainly, the pathways to a neoliberal mode of urban governance in Britain were laid out clearly and decisively by earlier, post-war forms of urban management, and the remarkably smooth transition between the two raises questions about the process of socio-political change itself and the forces which drive it. For all the contemporary nuances of neoliberalism literatures – the sensitivities to uneven, variegated geographies of urban neoliberalisation and the local contingencies of individual case studies

– such scholarship often remains locked within an ideas-driven model of historical transformation, in which it is neoliberalism as ideological project which takes centre stage. The historical narrative which flows from this understanding is familiar and well-rehearsed; in which the crucial, generative ideas are born with Hayek in the 1940s, nurtured through the post-war decades by various shadowy cabals of business leaders and think tanks, until they are finally brought to power following the conversion of a small number of game-changing political leaders (a Joseph, a Thatcher) to this powerful ideological system. These are important stories but they do risk attributing rather too much force and coherence to systems of ideas, as well as overstating the importance (and ideological commitment) of individual politicians. As any good historical materialist could confirm, ideas tend to find their acceptance once conditions are already ripe, following, rather than forming, underlying structural and material transformations. As the material presented here makes clear, there were many equally important genealogies of late-century urban neoliberalism – public–private developmentalism, financialised urban property markets, state-aided corporate enterprise – which were not being fomented in the shadowy meeting rooms of the Mont Pelerin Society but rather took shape in plain sight, as integral parts of the post-war liberal capitalist political economy.

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### ORCID iD

Alistair Kefford  <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-4347-4623>

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