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Citation for final published version:

Fuller, Crispian 2022. Austerity, teleological 'ends' and the timespace practices of the state organisation. *Environment and Planning C: Politics and Space* 40 (1) , pp. 298-317. 10.1177/23996544211021415

Publishers page: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/23996544211021415>

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AUSTERITY, TELEOLOGICAL 'ENDS' AND THE TIMESPACE PRACTICES OF THE
STATE ORGANISATION

Dr Crispian Fuller

School of Geography and Planning

Cardiff University

Glamorgan Building

King Edward VII Avenue

Cardiff

Wales. CF10 3WA

ABSTRACT

The impact of austerity on urban governance has become a key area of academic concern, but many studies tend to interpret the effect on individual urban state bodies through analysis of broader governance relations, whilst also framing austerity as an overarching and homogeneous set of ideas, values and practices. In response, this paper examines a city government's economic development department as a means in which to understand how the heterogeneous agency of the organisation mitigates austerity. In examining the adaptation to austerity, the paper deploys the practice theory of Schatzki (2002, 2010). This involves utilising his conceptualisation of the construction of practices through various elements in producing the organisation, and their related 'timespaces'. In conclusion, examining practices are important in understanding the intricacies of the 'agency' of the organisation, with the paper elucidating the uneven reconfiguration of the case study towards forms of timespace governing based on entrepreneurial pro-growth practices.

AUSTERITY URBAN ORGANISATION PRACTICE THEORY
SCHATZKI

INTRODUCTION

Austerity has had a wide-ranging impact on the governance of the urban in recent times (Peak, 2012). This has led to the decreasing budgets and resources of various state and non-state organisations involved in the provision of public services, as well as the substantial reconfiguration of their role in urban governance arrangements (Warner and Clifton, 2014; Gray and Barford, 2018). Various accounts have considered both of these elements, but with a greater onus on the impact of their participation in urban governance. This follows a much broader trend in the analysis of neoliberal urban governance where organisations are examined in relation to their role in these networks. What is common within many urban austerity and neoliberalism studies is an empirical consideration of the ‘organisation’ as part of everyday urban governance and broader political economies, but with the potential for greater theoretical exploration of the multi-dimensional organisational nature of the state ‘agent’ as a site of urban governance. This paper seeks to contribute to these accounts of ‘austerity urbanism’, and urban neoliberalism more broadly, by expanding the conceptual scope and empirical analysis to include the uneven and heterogeneous agency of the urban state ‘organisation’.

Utilising a practice-based approach, this paper examines how the organisation produces itself through practices, and the influence of these organisationally produced (spatial) practices on the governance of the urban. It focuses on the urban state as it remains a key urban governing actor, with democratic responsibility for the strategies and practices of governing urban areas (Ward et al, 2015). As McCann (2016) argues, ‘an ongoing attention to theorising the state must be central to analyses of urban governance.... the state has been and continues to be central to governance’ (323). The paper deploys Schatzki’s (2002, 2005, 2010) practice theory, with its focus on the various elements that come to constitute ‘timespace’ practices within particular

social 'sites'. The approach is used to examine the impact of austerity on the economic development/regeneration department of Coventry City Council in the West Midlands of England, during a period in which it is having to substantially adapt to austerity measures. In conclusion, the paper argues that examination of the practices working through and constituting state organisations is critical in understanding urban governing tendencies such as austerity. This is illustrated in the case study by way of the Council's reconfiguration towards forms of timespace governance that are based on entrepreneurial pro-growth practices.

ADVANCING AN AGENCY APPROACH TO AUSTERITY URBANISM: A PRACTICE-BASED PERSPECTIVE

Agency, urban governance and the political economies of austerity

There has developed a considerable literature examining the rolling out, governance and political, social, economic and environmental effects of austerity in urban areas. These literatures emphasise the heterogeneous impacts, mediation and resistance to austerity, set within the particularities of governing arrangements that diverge across space (Kim and Warner, 2018). Political economy accounts of 'austerity urbanism' have been particularly important in examining the interaction between nation state-led austerity and urban governance arrangements (e.g. Peck, 2012). However, for Aldag et al. (2019), the approach fails to fully appreciate the divergent responses to austerity within particular spatial contexts, which go beyond simple acquiescence. Yet, political economy perspectives are important in taking account of both broader tendencies, and instances of austerity within certain governing spaces, and thus context is critical (Peck, 2016). The purpose of this paper to contribute to this

perspective by extending the focus on agency and practices within a UK context of austerity, and which is explored in this section.

Political economy accounts of ‘austerity urbanism’ explicate the broader urban governance of austerity and the coercive role of the nation state in dictating the nature and extent of austerity and its governance, and their embeddedness within historically constituted state strategies and accumulation regimes (e.g. Donald et al., 2014; Clayton et al., 2016; Davies and Thompson, 2016; Pike et al., 2016; Davies and Branco, 2017; González et al., 2017; Penny, 2017; Chorianopoulos and Tselepi, 2020; Davies et al., 2020; Gaynor, 2020; Jupp, 2020). Within this literature, there has developed a substantial knowledge base on how agents perform and mediate austerity through collaborative and coercive governance relations, the incorporation of non-state actors into such realms, and urban governance as a site of acquiescence and contestation of political programmes (Davies and Bianco, 2017; Chorianopoulos and Tselepi, 2020). However, as argued within metagovernance perspectives, there is a need to guard against the belief that the intentions and actions of austerity mediation by actors can be explained by way of their external actions through governance networks (Torfing, 2016).

This is not to suggest that such accounts and broader political economy perspectives are specious, since they demonstrate the importance of actors and their practices in governance relations, but that this needs to be accompanied by a greater concern with the intricacies of actors and how they constitute, enact and work through multi-scalar urban austerity governance (see, for example, Penny, 2017). Intentions, actions and contestation/acquiescence within urban governance arrangements, firstly stem from their genesis and situatedness (i.e. antecedents) within agency, rather than simply being generated and existing within urban governance (Egeberg et al., 2016). Indeed, the impact of urban austerity has had the biggest

impact on the agency of city governments, illustrating the importance of understanding how this is mediated through organisational practices (see Hastings et al., 2017; Gray and Barford, 2018). Given the heterogeneous and porous nature of the agency of the organisation, which is constituted by disparate processes, actors and objects, a practice based view can advance existing political economy austerity urbanism accounts by opening-up the black box of the organisation in ways that provide routes for understanding relational governance arrangements.

These particular ‘austerity urbanism’ studies follow political economy perspectives of neoliberalism, conceptually framing austerity within the latter’s overarching hegemonic ‘ideational-ideological project’ and an ‘operational logic’ of ideas, values and beliefs (Brenner et al, 2010; Peck, 2012; Jessop, 2016; Whiteside, 2016). This informs the production and rolling-out of austerity measures that are devolved downwards, interacting with urban governance actors through ideological strategies and disciplinary processes of state rescaling (e.g. Armondi, 2017; González et al., 2017; Fuller, 2018). While the language can at times suggest a conceptualisation of urban austerity as an overarching disciplinary ‘project’ and ‘operational logic’, these accounts explicate how divergence and complexities arise across urban sites. Capitalism is actualised within particular territorialised spaces by urban actors, producing variation (Jessop and Sum, 2010). Correspondingly, austerity is simply not rolled-out in a uniform manner within the ‘austerity state’ and urban governance sites, because actors disparately interpret, enact and mediate such programmes at different scales (González et al., 2017; Pike et al., 2016). Such approaches are concurrent with recent ‘conjunctural’ thinking, which recognises the commonalities and connections across space characterising particular structural conditions, such as neoliberalism, and with this the ‘variegated’ ‘specific consideration of cases, conjunctures, and contexts’ (Peck, 2016).

In effect, political economy accounts illustrate the critical ‘messy actualities’, diversity and unevenness characterising urban austerity governance relations that are both produced by and come to generate the meso structural conditions of broader neoliberal and austerity logics, strategies and practices (Dean, 2010; Peck, 2012; Davidson and Kutz, 2015). They explicate the need to, firstly, take actors seriously since these have disparate forms of agency in producing, influencing, constituting and being the effect of broader neoliberal tendencies (Gonzalez and Oosterlynck, 2014; Fuller, 2018). City governments are significant as they are the actors where different aspects of the state instigate austerity programmes (Armondi, 2017; Davies and Blanco, 2017). They are also the agents involved in contesting, circumventing or pushing back against measures through more progressive actions. This includes the pursuit of ‘pragmatic municipalism’ measures involving new revenue raising activities (Fuller, 2018; Aldag et al., 2019). Ultimately, there is a need for a greater onus on the practices constituting organisations that are mediating austerity.

Secondly, and building upon the understanding within political economy approaches of the variegated nature of austerity, it is important to recognise that austerity is produced and performed through particular spatially configured politico-economic institutional arrangements, practices and actors (Davies and Blanco, 2017; Kim and Warner, 2018). So that while the perspective alludes to certain austerity tendencies, there is recognition of the particularities of austerity practices within different political jurisdictions. Here, different countries and urban areas having experienced austerity disparately, as set out within ‘conjunctural’ thinking. However, there must also be recognition of the role of disparate practices, such as the role of emotions, in acquiescing or contesting particular austerity governance arrangements. Given these processes, it is important to note the particularities

through which austerity has developed in the UK, which is the subject of this paper, and which demonstrates the necessity to focus on the heterogeneous nature of agency and practices.

The implementation of austerity in the UK has been devolved down to local government and other subnational state organisations (Gray and Barford, 2018). This takes place through a historically constituted highly centralised nation state apparatus (Pike et al., 2016). The centralised nature of the UK has resulted in very little resistance to austerity, but where there is variation in terms of the delivery of austerity, suggesting the need to examine the heterogeneous nature of agents (Davies et al., 2020). Local government is significantly dependent on financial transfers from central government, with recent devolved powers on the retention of business rates yet to have a full impact. The scope for forms of ‘pragmatic municipalism’ outlined by Aldag et al. (2019), where local government use a variety of funding sources to mitigate austerity, is far more limited than in countries such as the USA where decentralisation is notable. Similarly, actions to mediate austerity through other forms of municipalism, such as ‘entrepreneurial municipalism’ (re-embedding the market in society) (Thompson et al., 2020), have become important but remain limited in scope and scale. Ultimately, the intricacies of these processes alludes to the examination of agents and practices.

A ‘Schatzkian’ practice-based perspective

Practice-based perspectives understand organisations to be unstable ensembles of social relations, encompassing human and non-human elements, and situated within an overlapping and emergent contextual environment (Tsoukas and Chia, 2002). What is critical are the efforts by actors to produce some degree of internal coherence through a temporary fix (King et al., 2009). It is here that an organisational perspective is important, since it can elucidate the intricacies and heterogeneity of the agents of urban austerity governance, and their efforts to

generate and perform ‘organising’. Schatzki (2006; 2010) provides such a conceptual framework by emphasising the everyday practices and ‘messy actualities’ of organisational and governance ‘sites’. He has advanced a site ontologies account where the social world is “a field of embodied materially interwoven practices, centrally organised around shared practical understandings” (Schatzki, 2002: 12). Actors exist and act in response to and concurrent with the various objects, actors, and events they encounter in social ‘settings’, with ‘site’ defined as ‘arenas or broader sets of phenomena as part of which something — a building, an institution, an event — exists or occurs’ (Schatzki, 2005: 467-468).

Such an approach contributes to recent urban political accounts, inspired by practice theories such as those of Deleuze, which recognise the indeterminate and emergent assembling of urban (neoliberal) governance, involving both relationality and territoriality, and questions around the ‘how’ and ‘where’ of urban politics (see Rodgers et al., 2014). This is particularly evident within the recent perspectives inspired by actor-network and assemblage perspectives, such as that of Massey’s (2005) critical take on the ‘throwntogetherness’ of the urban. In such accounts, urban governance is understood as constantly emergent, produced by actors, processes and objects that have particular socio-spatial paths and networks within and beyond an urban site, but which come to co-constitute such sites through particular temporalities.

While such approaches significantly advance our understanding of the dynamic and spatially heterogeneous assembling of urban governance, the causality, disposition and actions of human agency is substituted for an explanation of urban politics by way of governing relations and networks (Storper and Scott, 2016). Schatzki (2002) importantly makes a distinction between ‘practice’ and ‘arrangement’ theories, with the latter including Deleuzian, Foucauldian and Latourian actor-network theories, all of which have had a substantial effect on urban politics

accounts in human geography and beyond. These approaches are generally concerned with how the configuration of entities and the nature of relations (potentially) constitute social situations and practices, and are the medium of human actions and interactions (Schatzki, 2002). Yet, for Schatzki (2002, 2005) and those critiquing various post-structuralist and ‘flat ontologies’ perspectives within urban studies, these perspectives elevate the causal agency of relations (between entities within arrangements) and non-human entities, producing a conceptual landscape where it is difficult to identify causality in relation to social life and urban governance (Brenner et al, 2010; and Scott and Storper, 2016) (Table 1). Correspondingly, the (uneven and dynamic) nature and causal role of human actors in constituting, influencing and mediating social life and urban governance is subsumed by a concern with the nature of relational arrangements (Schatzki, 2005; Fuller, 2014) (Table 1). Such perspectives consequently lack a conceptual framework in which to ‘tease out significant relationships or to distinguish between the trivial and the important’, lacking consideration of human actors, and their intentionality (Storper and Scott, 2016: 14).

[TABLE ONE]

In contrast, what is critical for Schatzki (2002) is how human actors understand and act towards the nature of arrangements, and the actual actors, practices and objects constituting social networks and apparatus. The social processes of organising the disparate elements of the agency of the organisation within urban governance are therefore of central importance. But, it is critical to recognise that these stem from and are interwoven with spatially broader processes (e.g. formal state ‘rules’), actors and objects, and that it is the nature of the coming together of these within an urban governing site which is critical. Schatzki (2002) defines social practices in terms of constantly performed, open-ended and holistic ‘doings’ and ‘sayings’. The

main element of this is the nexus between “[material] arranged things and organized activities”, which constitute practices in particular spatial-temporal settings (Schatzki, 2010). Material arrangements are characterised by human and non-human entities, while practices are ‘organized, open-ended, spatial-temporal’ nexus of human activities based on bodily doings and sayings (Schatzki, 2002). For Schatzki (2002), practices are constituted by a set of organised actions deriving from four main organising principles characterising social life, and it is these four main actions which form the basis of the paper’s conceptual framework.

First, ‘practical understandings’ relate to the understanding and abilities of actors with regards to specific practices. In contrast to Bourdieu’s ‘practical sense’ and Giddens’ ‘practical consciousness’, these practicalities do not explicitly govern practices, rather they execute ‘practical intelligibility’. For Schatzki (2010), human actions are governed by what makes sense for them to do based on previous actions and understanding of what is possible, not necessarily rational but being ‘performed for the sake of a way of being or state of affairs (for an end)’ (112). So that rather than reducing practices and human agency to the milieu of social interactions within particular spatial relations, such as a ‘place’ of urban governance, practical intelligibility places human thinking and action as of paramount importance within such arenas.

Secondly, there are ‘rules’ which are “explicit formulations, principles, precepts, and instructions that enjoin, direct, or remonstrate people to perform specific actions” (Schatzki, 2002: 79). Rules work through both the formal institutional arrangements and ‘technologies’ of the state, encompassing various spatial relations, and which are imbricated with informal institutions seeking to guide behaviours and produce subjects (Storper and Scott, 2016). A Schatzkian perspective understands these rules to influence organisational practices and human actors, but that they cannot be reduced to them (Jones, 2012). Human actors have the ability to

convey creative agency in which they can manipulate, resist and contest rules, and create alternatives (Williams et al., 2014). In this sense, a Schatzkian perspective is congruent with political economy accounts emphasising the unevenness of austerity governance across space.

Third, ‘teleoaffective structures’ are dynamic and recurrent effects of actors’ interactions and practices with others. They represent the shared legitimacy and everyday normativity of particular actions to be undertaken with others for certain means and ‘ends’ (Everts et al, 2011). This forms a critical component of creative agency, as individuals act with the intention of addressing particular aims, but not reducing human actors to simply being rational and predisposed to goal-orientated behaviours. For Schatzki (2005), means and ends are socially constructed, and interwoven with everyday practices that are involved with various desires and intentions. The teleological forms the basis of consensus and routine behaviours within urban governance, but where these are performative in nature, leading to the possibility of creative actions that generate change in routines, such as through political contestation (Bridge, 2020). The ‘affective’ governs by enacting, underpinning or potentially disrupting the teleological, highlighting the role of emotions in making things matter or not. Finally, there are ‘general understandings’ of practices that organise the doings and sayings of practices within the site, but which are configured to more general understandings, concerns and appropriateness (Everts et al, 2011). Here, we can see the importance of conventions and institutionalised values, norms and beliefs working through broader spatial processes but which are assembled within social sites, rather than being restricted to an individual ‘habitus’ or routines of place within the urban.

For Schatzki (2005; 2006), these four elements underpin ‘practice-material bundles’ that constitute the organisation as it is ‘happens’, a site where practices are performed with the aim of ‘ordering’ material arrangements. The conceptual framework is focused on the explication

of these four elements in the construction and performativity of the organisation in the enactment of austerity measures. A Schatzkian approach can contribute to existing urban austerity approaches by examining actual organisational practices in far greater depth within the ‘sites’ in which they are produced and performed. This includes greater account of the constitution of everyday austerity practices, such as the active exclusion of particular social groups from austerity discussions (see, for example, Fuller, 2017), as well as those major decisions and events implementing, mediating or revisiting austerity, such as bureaucratic ‘rules’ guiding the contracting out of public services (Penny, 2017). There is also recognition of a variety of influences on actors and the production of austerity practices, such as where formal rules directing actor behaviours are accompanied by emotional responses or other teleological aims. As previous studies have demonstrated, emotions influence the nature of austerity implementation, including producing practices of distortion and circumvention that come to constitute the heterogeneous landscape of austerity governance (see, for example, Clayton et al., 2016; Fuller and West, 2016).

Following assemblage thinking, a Schatzkian (2010) perspective recognises that there is no macro, meso or micro as is the case in urban governance theories and conjunctural analysis, and that the boundaries between actors and causal ‘context’ is porous and unbounded. Human activity and social phenomena are situated within social sites of intertwined practices and materialities through which they are constantly performed (Schatzki, 2002; 2010). The organisation as such is not an entity, but rather a constellation of practices and materialities, which is linked to broader ‘webs’ of interconnected ‘practice-arrangement bundles’ (Schatzki, 2016). In effect, the approach focuses on the crystallisation of broader political economy processes and local variation across space through the site of the unbounded organisation. This takes place by way of the practices and materialities through which organisation are created,

enacted and released in these particular sites (Schatzki, 2002). Such broader organising principles therefore come to organise the practices characterising the organisation, and they are only produced and realised within the sites in which they are enacted as practices (Schatzki, 2010). Such thinking does require, however, an elucidation of the importance of geographical relations in such practices.

Austerity urbanism studies take account of relationality, but typically view city governments as working through pre-existing scalar and territorial relations. In contrast, Schatzki (2010) argues that the bundling of practices and material arrangements produces a ‘timespace’ configuration of the ‘site’, rather than a spatial and temporal relation pre-existing the practices which produce it. Timespaces practices are constituted through the co-existence of the non-sequential past, present and future of human activity (Heidegger, 1962). These are dependent on the operation of actual human activities, with actors enacting timespaces through ‘ends’ and the activities that will be performed in places. Human actors can act towards the *past* (acting from somewhere/something through motivation) (normativity), *present* (acting for itself, being-amid) (intelligibility), or *future* (acting to an end through teleological means). What makes this approach different to assemblage/relational thinking is the specific onus on the temporal dimension, and the ‘how’ of human intelligibility in defining and producing particular assembled governing arrangements (see Rogers et al., 2014). Through such an approach the timespace arrangements characterising the organisational practices of urban state actors can be examined during this period of austerity.

RESEARCH DESIGN

For Schatzki (2006) and Nicolini (2017), practice theory delivers theoretical concepts and a ‘conceptual grammar’ for producing accounts of the ontologies of social sites that are always more complex than theory and models can fully explain. As such, Schatzki’s four main elements that produce the timespace social practices of the site provide the guiding conceptual categories deployed in the analysis of the case study, but the meaning of practices is only understood within the ‘context’ in which they occur within a site (Schatzki 2002). Following such thinking, the account does not therefore ‘theorise an ideal type of practice and then test its distance in the real world’, rather, elucidation emerges through engagement with the phenomena (Nicolini, 2017: 8). Understanding the world is therefore a critical element of practice theory, requiring particular modes of enquiry that are concerned with asking the ‘right questions’ (Nicolini, 2017).

To this end, semi-structured interviews are utilised in the analysis of organisational practices, following Hitchings’ (2012) suggestion that such an approach allows subjects to understand, express and reflect upon the practices they adopt and perform. This works on the basis that actors are not simply everyday carriers of practices because they have to be generated and performed, and they possess the causal abilities in which to transform practices (Reckwitz 2002). The methodology therefore focuses on the ‘practical intelligibility’ of respondents. The purpose of this is to examine the actors’ interpretations of the impact of austerity measures on practices within the site of the organisation as they are implemented, and why they undertook particular actions in relation to austerity and organisational practices. In essence, they are being asked to reflect on the different everyday organising principles (e.g. practical understandings) producing and constituting practices in the present of the ‘site’ of the organisation, based on

their reflection of these practices in terms of the influence they have on actors, and their responses to them.

A total of sixteen interviews were undertaken with actors directly involved in the economic development/regeneration department. This included three senior managers and seven officers, along with one ex-senior and middle manager. A further four interviews were conducted with governing and opposition local politicians. Data was analysed through NVIVO software, with various themes emerging as critical areas constituting the organisation during austerity urbanism. Following the theoretical basis of practice theory, it is these emergent themes, rather than a strict conceptual framework dictating themes, which produces the empirical analysis undertaken in the next section (Hitchings, 2012).

THE PRACTICES OF THE URBAN STATE ORGANISATION: A CASE STUDY ANALYSIS

The contemporary approach of the Council

Coventry City Council is situated within the English West Midlands, with a population of around c.350,000, and substantial inequalities. A total of 18.5% of residents live in neighbourhoods that are within the top 10% of most deprived in England, while 15% of the population have no qualifications, compared with an English average of 8%. At the same time there has been substantial job growth in the city, with an unemployment rate (4.7%) that is slightly larger than the English average (3.8%) in 2019. The Council has experienced substantial organisational restructuring during the recent period of austerity (Hastings et al, 2017; Fuller, 2018). It has an annual net budget of £232,482 million in 2017/18, with reductions

of £107 million occurring in the period 2011/12 to 2017/18 (Coventry City Council, 2017). The analysis is principally concerned with the economic development department as this is a discretionary service that has been subject to much change under an austerity regime. The economic development team has significantly declined in size since the 2000s as central government funding has been dramatically reduced, from a high of 33 staff members before 2010/11, to 16 FTE members of staff in 2017. The case study epitomises the negative impact of substantial austerity measures as the Council only funds 30% of the budget for economic development, with the Department possessing the responsibility for generating its own resources for undertaking economic development activities, principally by acquiring European ERDF and Growth Fund (UK central government) funding.

In the pre-austerity period before 2010 there was considerable central government and Council funding for social regeneration in deprived neighbourhoods, which operated through neighbourhood-based services from 2001 until 2011. The Council is now focusing on pro-growth economic development and city centre redevelopment (Coventry City Council, 2016). This follows the central government-led transition away from community regeneration, to pro-growth economic development programmes geared towards capital projects (e.g. infrastructure) and business support for high growth sectors, as embedded within the 'Industrial Strategy' (see Pugalis, 2016). It is within this landscape that the organisational teleological priorities of the Council are based on aggressively pursuing nation state and EU 'capital' project and business support funding, and facilitating private capital investment in the city centre.

Regarding the latter, there is a £300m masterplan that proposes new offices, hotels, and retail units but which is yet to begin. This has been accompanied by central government funded infrastructure and built environment improvements, and the Council facilitating substantial

investment in new private sector student accommodation in the city centre. A number of new student accommodation developments are being constructed, representing the only major property redevelopment taking place in the city. Secondly, the Council concentrates on business support programmes for particular hi-growth economic sectors, such as through a ERDF programme, but also more general provision through the Government-funded ‘growth hub’. Critical to the construction of this pro-growth agenda are timespace ‘ends’ that senior managers consider to be a common sense response to potential ‘future’ economic crisis, and which produce particular doings and sayings in the present as they guide behaviours (Schatzki, 2010). Here, pro-growth practices are legitimised as a response to the possibility of future crisis events, which have to be mitigated by adopting the very pro-market based activities that produce crisis tendencies, principally in relation to the built environment (González et al, 2017). As one senior manager notes: “You have two choices, batten-down the hatches, or you go out aggressively for funding and investment”, leading to efforts at fostering organisational practices that are “far more business focused, far more focused on change” but based on high growth sectors in suburban business parks and a city centre-first approach (Senior Council Manager interview, 2017). This is therefore action that is guided by what makes sense in the present context of a pro-growth nation state agenda, and the need to mitigate future economic crisis tendencies.

Entrepreneurial and bureaucratic organisational practices

The need to generate external funding and the pro-growth aims of the Council have led to senior managers placing a strong emphasis on entrepreneurial organisational practices, characterised by a substantial transition in the nature of state personnel at the Council. For Peck (2014), entrepreneurialism has been routinized as part of the everyday of urban governing, but such aims and practices have to be produced and performed, and this requires greater sensitivity

towards actual practices. What is critical at the Council is the discursive framing and ‘sayings’ of ‘past’ practices as redundant in the contemporary austerity landscape. This represents the subordination of the past-orientated ‘normativity’ of governing through the ‘site’ of the local government office, by future teleological ends that require new ways of working, and where past timespaces are important in defining new organisational practices as the present and future (Schatzki, 2010).

Practitioners that have been made redundant or voluntarily left the unit are discursively framed as the “old guard”, and who worked to ‘past’ overly bureaucratic practices and normativities. These local government ‘rules’ accompanied the intentions and desires (teleoaffective) of actors in producing a particular workplace site of organisational practices, defined as having been “less productive, where I spent a long time on tasks that were process driven and not output driven, and entrenched in the old ways of working” (Council Manager interview, 2017). For senior managers, these practices were underpinned by the practical intelligibilities of officers, and fostered by endemic local government ‘rules’ (as embedded values and norms), based on their willingness to perform one task at a time, and involving the checking of whether such actions were congruent with the correct local government ways of working by managers.

Timescales based on ‘traditional’ public sector bureaucratic principles of project management rather than project outcomes were the norm. These involved timespaces of ensuring correct ‘present’ project delivery and not ‘future’ ends in terms of actual impacts. Correspondingly, officers believe that the 1997-2010 New Labour Government’s onus on holistic outcomes and measures, and the beliefs and sayings of the complexities of deprivation in neighbourhoods, produced teleological ends and practical understandings based on the need for long term interventions, community engagement and holistic partnership working, where officers were

either in the Council city centre building or visiting neighbourhoods. This produced a decision-making environment that was more contemplative and deliberative than the contemporary landscape of grant generation and fast project outputs. Notable examples include the Neighbourhood Renewal Fund which worked through a ‘Community Strategy’ proposing long term action, and involved intensive deliberation between a large number of stakeholders within a Local Strategic Partnership (Fuller and Geddes, 2008).

The contemporary approach, which senior management seek to develop by creating particular teleoaffective structures in opposition to this framed ‘old guard’, is one of employing public servants embedded within private sector conceptions of what makes sense to do (i.e. practical intelligibility) and ways of doing tasks (i.e. practical understandings), and with far less time spent in the public sector, typically around 4 to 5 years. As one officer notes with regards to their role:

“The Council wanted my private sector background rather than taking another lifelong council worker. It was about them wanting someone with a very entrepreneurial background. They wanted that history of development, they wanted that history of dealing with things from the other side. The issue is that the two worlds are very different.” (Council officer interview, 2017)

What is critical in such a statement is the understanding that the public and private are ‘two different worlds’, yet within the area of economic development there is a concerted effort to further adopt practices from the private sector, with the aim of producing entrepreneurial organisational practices, places and actors. The new pro-market state personnel ‘subject’ that senior management are attempting to foster through organisational practices, is characterised

by practical intelligibilities of a “go getter in its culture”, “agile and flexible”, “generating funding” and “driven by the income target or providing excellent services to firms” (Senior Council Manager interview, 2017). As with the construction of the societal neoliberal subject, here we can see efforts at the formation of entrepreneurial self-sufficient state personnel, who internalises both the austerity state and responsibility for state survival (Clarke and Newman, 2012).

Project outputs as teleological ends

Of importance is the development of organisational practices that are strongly determined by teleological ends and future timespaces based on values of efficiency, effectiveness and project completion and outputs, and which are embedded within annual performance targets which state personnel are working towards. The most important instance is that of the planning service, considered to be a critical element in attracting and supporting inward investors, and thus interwoven with market values. Organisational practices have been focused on becoming the fastest planning decision-maker in the UK, which it has held since 2012, as a key tool for attracting inward investment. During the early phase of austerity, the city government was ranked around 288 out of 300 local authorities in the UK for the speed of planning approval. Senior managers characterise a workplace of ‘slow’ organisational practices, which detrimentally effected economic expansion and reduced the attractiveness of the city to inward investors, with this ‘past’ providing the timespace future motivation for change. The Director of the Place Directorate made this a key task when he was appointed, largely on the basis of explicitly improving inter-urban competition with other regional cities:

“If you had an opportunity to come to Coventry and invest we could make that work easier than if you were going to invest in Birmingham. The cost could be the

same but you get your decision and process quicker than in Birmingham.” (Senior Council Manager interview, 2017).

This works on the basis of a management belief that the city is a marginal investment location, lacking many suitable sites for large investors compared with other cities. Such disadvantages can be overcome through process efficiencies, principally by way of teleological aims and ‘practical understandings’ in completing mandatory planning tasks quickly based on producing a fast planning decision. As the Director notes: “our aim was to make sure everything we do runs smoothly... balancing quality with speed”, which is a “big sales asset” (Senior Council Manager interview, 2017). As stated above, this has meant teleological ends around being output focused, rather than project delivery based, with practical understandings around being able to quickly undertake tasks. At the same time, the planning league table was transformed into informal ‘rules’ (Schatzki, 2005), guiding the teleological aims of officers around being the fastest planning authority in England, and that working in such a way feels like the right thing to do, and thus a practical intelligibility.

More generally, the Council’s approach has been to take an individual project output-based stance when seeking funding from the Conservative government:

“The other thing that we don’t do, which a lot of local authorities do, is just stick your hand out and say put a big bag of cash in my hand and we’re be fine. You can’t do that these days, they will say its austerity, there is no money available, and even worse than that the inclination is not there.” (Senior Council Manager interview, 2017)

For senior management there is a need to ensure the organisation, and state personnel, perform entrepreneurial and market-based ends and practices. This works on the basis that the funding available has to be acquired through competitive behaviour, but that city government and its strategy has to adhere to the economic priorities ('rules') of central government and the EU. The strategy has been one of "working with government to understand what they need and what they want, and then offering them solutions" (Senior Council Manager interview, 2017). In this case, central government has funding available for capital projects, but because of complicated rules there is a lack of interest and ideas from other cities for this EU and government funding, or they are not able to spend all the allocated money. This has resulted in a great deal of underspend and with central government seeking projects from other councils. The city council has sought to demonstrate to central government, by way of the adherence to and successful delivery of past capital projects within the city centre and business support services for particular sectors, that it is able to deliver projects and outputs. This has resulted in the further acquisition of funding, as one manager notes:

"We're solving Government's problems by saying give us the money and we'll get the outputs you need. Whereas the others are so tangled-up that they can't, we made the capacity in which to get the money and spend it. So we spent a big chunk of Birmingham's, Wolverhampton's and Walsall's money on the stuff we wanted to spend it on." (Senior Council Manager interview, 2017)

The essence of this Council approach has been to create organisational practices around the 'deal' and firm-like behaviour when conducting negotiations with central government, as one senior manager remarks: "Best time ever in terms of the local authority. It's not boring, you're wheeling and dealing, it's good. It's the age of the deal" (Senior Council Manager interview,

2017). The basis of this is the understanding by Council managers that you cannot “go to them [central government] and say I need £45m for two bridges. They’d say ‘on your way mate” (Senior Council Manager interview, 2017). The impact on the organisation is one in which the Government’s strategic priorities and funding ‘rules’, produce teleological ends and the importance of practical understandings geared towards pro-growth project outputs and their successful delivery, and through strong bi-lateral relations that have developed with central government departments. This also demonstrates the importance of ‘present’ timespaces as the Council acts with the current ‘state of affairs’ of the Government, namely to ensure project spending.

These ends and rules are critical as they strongly influence the practices of state personnel, as one senior manager notes with regards to central government and EU funding avenues: “The team has had to morph as well to the requirements of what knowledge is needed” (Senior Council Manager interview, 2017). For officers and managers, a workplace geared towards project management and outputs are now the dominant practical intelligibilities of what makes sense to do. These work through spatially networked relations with various contractors beyond the city and over short term periods of projects, and which are essentially market-based customer-supplier contractual relations. In contrast to the New Labour years, completing full spend within the life of the project and project outputs, based on short term priorities, now dominate organisational practices and their timespaces.

Devolved responsibility and organisational practices

One key aspect of this is the importance of devolved responsibility, as both a normativised end and set of practical understandings, for state personnel in maintaining their jobs and the unit. More horizontal forms of management are now in place, with only two tiers, and with devolved

responsibility to officers for fulfilling many tasks. As one senior manager notes: “My view is that everyone owns the work first and foremost along with their responsibilities” (Senior Council Manager interview, 2017). Control through workplace ‘rules’ takes place via the need for state personnel to meet project targets, such as the delivery of an infrastructure project, or ensure that a firm has been provided with the correct business support service. For senior management, setting and achieving project outputs is an important ‘rule’ in a competitive landscape: “I have to be ruthless with the team that I’ve got in terms of do I think they are up to the job that I think needs doing. I think this isn’t a time for the fainthearted. You achieve or you suddenly get left behind” (Senior Council Manager interview, 2017).

Individual responsibility for fulfilling tasks means that officers increasingly adopt Council aims, most notably in terms of aligning their own success with that of fulfilling Council tasks, and where less hierarchical management is required since they are now subjects of this devolved responsibility. What is critical here is that it is not officers being subjects, such as in the case of ‘technologies of agency’, but that they align their own desires and ends with that of the organisation (Dean, 2010). Their own teleological basis moves away from past-orientated normativity geared towards team working in deprived areas based on broader outcomes. This has been replaced by future aims of economic growth in the city centre and supporting firms through individual project completion, since they now view this as the main route in which to be successful, in the sense of fulfilling this devolved responsibility.

The nature of transition towards this pro-growth agenda and devolved responsibility is important, with one example being that of ‘business advice’ officers. A significant part of their daily activities involves talking with firms about their needs and supporting them in various ways, such as in assisting in bids for grants. In order to legitimise such aims, and ensure there

has been no organisational disruption in the transition to pro-growth interventions, such practical understandings are framed as relatively ubiquitous by senior management, with one manager stating that “there’s not that much difference between talking with a community group or business”, and thus timespaces of these past approaches are combined with those present and future need (Council Officer interview, 2017). However, such comments have to be situated within the context of officers needing to demonstrate they have the correct market-based expertise and skills (i.e. practical understandings). For these officers such activities involve being able to understand many different aspects of the firm, or at least pretending to if they do not know (Council Officer interview, 2017). There is a need to build a one to one relationship and trust with firms, essentially treating them as a ‘customer’ rather than a local stakeholder. For officers this has meant moving away from listening to communities and building relations of trust with community leaders within a ‘place’ and addressing issues through long term efforts. It is replaced by organisational practices geared towards being a ‘firm carer’, addressing short term issues in the present, and based on individual state personnel efforts.

Past ‘normativity’, post-bureaucratic working and managerial power

Despite these changes, local state bureaucratic practices remain evident, characterised by “sometimes slow and slapdash decision making” (Council Manager interview, 2017). This includes information having to be passed up to more senior managers for consultation and actual decisions-making, largely by way of email but also through face to face interaction. The former has become increasingly important as officers are away from their desks more often than in the past because of the need for face-to-face interaction with developers, contractors (e.g. infrastructure provision) and firms. It is here that we see particular tensions between efforts at fostering market and pro-growth organisational practices, and historically configured ‘traditional’ local government bureaucratic practices. The latter’s decision-making is framed

as slow, cumbersome and in the ‘past’ by senior managements, but for many officers it is embedded within continuing values around public service and civic responsibility towards social equalities. That while teleological ends and practical understandings around market values and practices are seeking to be developed by senior management, there is still a normativised desire to reflect on the implications of decisions for citizens, and ensure accountability to local politicians through decision-making that is based on consensus with the ruling Party, but taking account of the views of opposition parties (Council Officer interview, 2017).

There are timespace elements interwoven with these tendencies as the latter are tied into a desire to serve all citizens across the city through present representative democracy, but taking greater account of the spaces of marginal communities in both the present and future. This is embedded within a ‘normativity’ around civic values stemming from the past, but where interaction with pro-growth/market values is very much in the present (in terms of working through existing funding issues) and future, largely in relation to particular spatial interventions and relations with property developers and firms. As one officer notes regarding their role in generating external funding:

“I constantly ask myself what does this project mean for our residents. How does supporting these businesses directly impact on them? Those that get a job in these businesses [which are predominantly located in suburban business parks in the city], yes there is an impact, but what of those communities that we used to serve through neighbourhood management.” (Council Officer interview, 2017)

Everyday practical intelligibility is thus critical as officers negotiate between timespaces of the past and that of the future in relation to what, for them, are at times conflicting ends. Such thought processes and deliberations take place within the present, where they are heavily imbricated with officers and managers essentially judging this normativity in terms of ultimately needing a personal and thus Departmental income. This takes place in a context where central government priorities and funding (as ‘rules’) are largely pro-growth and city centre focused, and therefore “wherever I go I will face the same issues” (Council Officer interview, 2017).

This develops into efforts geared towards particular sectors and thus economic geographies, Efforts are focused on high growth economic sectors, such as automotive production, and city centre property redevelopment that are likely to result in the successful acquisition of funding from central government and the EU. Correspondingly, this is very much driven by the ‘present’ need to acquire funding and visible manifestations of economic growth, rather than longer term strategic thinking where outcomes may not be seen immediately. Public servants are expected to have practical understandings of pursuing opportunities: “go and pursue the opportunities, work in multiple places that don’t even need to be within the county to be honest”, in contrast to “ten years ago you worked in an office, you went to a meeting and then you came back to the office” (Council Manager interview, 2017). These ‘rules’ have thus been defined by senior managers as part of a competition-based landscape of pro-growth economic development working through various networks (e.g. with global developers), rather than solely as bureaucratic accountability relying upon everyday face-to-face contact with managers within the physical ‘site’ of the office.

The culmination of these entrepreneurial organisational practices within the social site of the city government, is the development of post-bureaucratic multi-tasking as a ‘practical understanding’ (Schatzki, 2005). Senior management have sought to foster organisational practices where public servants believe in and deploy practical understandings around working in a ‘flexible’ manner. Such practices involve the public servant’s day to day working environment requiring them to undertake many different tasks at once, necessitating a breadth of skills and expertise with “people that can put their hands to multiple things” (Council Manager interview, 2017). Such practices are justified as making sense by senior management in terms of a fluctuating economic environment, where “the work is unpredictable so our culture has to deal with that, and not be afraid of that, or not be resentful of that unpredictability” (Senior Council Manager interview, 2017). These are timespaces embedded within the present, as a site of flux and constant change as tasks have to be fulfilled quickly so that officers can move on to other priorities, and involving various deadlines and spatial relations. This is considered to be in contrast to pre-2010/11 public servants that had practical understandings relating to specialist knowledge and skills, such as only being able to write project bids, and where “we had the luxury or resource to be very specific in our appointments” (Senior Council Manager interview, 2017).

The lack of personnel and resources means that future ‘ends’ are often subsumed by the need to address present day priorities, and that there is far less organisational capability in which to ensure future economic priorities are being addressed, or that desired economic sectors are being encouraged to develop. For instance, the organisation is largely reactive to market actors, such as student accommodation property developers, rather than being able to influence the types of economic development that have a longer term and broader impact on the city. While senior managers believe the development of student accommodation will have positive

multiplier effects on the city, such as developing the retail offering for residents through student demand, middle managers are far more pragmatic. The former suggest that with few resources, and many tasks to be filled by state personnel in limited amounts of time, it is very difficult for the Council to promote other forms of development that would have a broader impact, such as linking new employment opportunities with low skilled residents. This results in a ‘present’ of reacting to market dynamics and the distortion of ‘future’ teleological ends through the senior management belief that any type of regeneration has positive impacts on the city.

Such practices are embedded within new managerial power relations of control in which a critical impetus is to legitimise particular teleological ends. Austerity means there is far less funding available for an extensive number of middle managers, leaving a flatter organisational structure as a default position. This has produced new forms of control, requiring the development of particular teleoaffective structures which guide the actions of officers, most notably in terms of a workplace of autonomy and flexibility. Yet, while this autonomy is defined in terms of being “business like” and based on “change” and “responsibility”, in reality projects and tasks have to adhere to the Department’s aims and rules around project delivery, principally in relation to central government and EU funding ‘rules’. It is a case of believing they have autonomy but they recognise in reality they are working within rules that they have “simply become used to working within”, since “when I think about it, doing business liaisons suggests I have autonomy, but I have a strict set of tasks that require fulfilling and these are then electronically recorded for performance management purposes” (Council Officer interview, 2017).

Affect and organisational practices

This is not to suggest that pro-market, entrepreneurial and post-bureaucratic teleological practices are hegemonic, since they are interwoven, mediated and influenced by everyday emotions within the workplace, both as something emergently created within particular situations, as well as being embedded more broadly in practices (Horton, 2016). Similarly, organisational transition to new priorities and practices is never complete as something always remains, such as alternative ends and values (King et al, 2009). Indeed, for Schatzki (2010), emotions influence ways of making sense (i.e. practical intelligibilities) through understandings and responses to ‘ways of being’ and ‘states of affairs’. In the case of austerity, there are emotions of fear and despair in the workplace as cost-cutting measures continue to be a threat to officers’ jobs, at the same time as there is a constant need to generate funding and perform multiple tasks (see Fuller and West, 2016; Horton, 2016). Schatzki (2010) characterises this as an ‘emotional sense’ towards particular ends. There are fears of ‘burnout’ as officers navigate higher workloads with only 16 members of staff, and that multi-tasking has now become the norm. For certain state personnel this means having to excel at many tasks, rather than just one as was the case in the past. Pro-market entrepreneurial teleological ends, and their growing influence on practical intelligibilities, are therefore interdependent with emotions around job insecurity and workload pressures.

For officers that previously undertook social regeneration tasks within ‘places’ of deprivation, being economic development practitioners concerned more with business support and pro-growth across the city, has also meant heightened levels of apprehension and anxiety, since they have not traditionally been employed in such tasks. This is not a case of them failing to fulfil their responsibilities, rather it has meant there is an emotional impetus, based on angst, in underlying their working towards pro-growth ends. This is based on what makes ‘emotional sense’ for them to do (Schatzki, 2010). Many regeneration and community engagement officers

left during this period of transition as they did not want to adhere to such organisational priorities and practices, but for senior management it was also a case of those not having the “grit to survive in this new local government world” leaving, thus alluding to the importance of particular emotional dispositions which senior managers seek to normalise (Senior Council Manager interview, 2017).

Officers and managers who are undertaking this transition argue they stayed because they enjoy their new roles, since it fulfils both their career and emotional needs. This includes one public servant who notes that constantly writing bids for funding that keeps them in a job, adheres to a sense of “excitement and rush”, rather than complete anxiety and fear (Council Officer interview, 2017). A further officer argues that he gets far more satisfaction under a devolved entrepreneurial regime because it requires greater creativity and personnel input, compared with the pre-2010/11 state regime where money was allocated to the city based on social need in particular neighbourhoods. One manager notes they are happy with having the devolved responsibility for finding the capital in which to support the Department, since it gives them a level of control and autonomy in the workplace:

“I don’t find it worrying having to operate like that. I’m happy taking the £300k [from the Council to support the Department] and then dealing and being entrepreneurial in finding the money [to make-up the rest of the Department’s budget], than having £700k off the Council and anxiously waiting each year to see if we’d get the same amount” (Council Manager interview, 2017).

Here, we can see the construction of particular ‘teleoaffective structures’, combining ends and emotional dispositions (Schatzki, 2005), which come to constitute the organisational practices

of the site of the Department. There are important future timespaces in these emotional dispositions, since the recruitment of new officers is based on adherence to these personality traits, and thus there is the potential for such market-based ways of guiding action (through practical intelligibilities) to become dominant organisational practices within the workplace.

CONCLUSION

This paper contributes to an increasing body of literature on ‘austerity urbanism’ (Peck, 2010), and the broader development of urban geographical approaches, by examining the practices producing and constituting the ‘agency’ of the state organisation. A practice-based case study analysis of the economic development department of a city government, focusing on organisational practices and related timespaces, finds that it is characterised by pro-growth and entrepreneurial ends, rules and practical understandings. These are based on present and future timespaces of short term pro-market project delivery and outputs, with what ‘making sense to do’ (i.e. practical intelligibilities) being fostered by the nation state’s pro-growth agenda (as ‘rules’), and the short term profit of private sector actors who are imbricated in the former. This is producing particular organisational practices that are guiding state personnel, and encompassing a transition away from a ‘normativity’ of civic service through community working and actions in deprived areas. Emotions around job insecurity can potentially disrupt such ends, but at the same time there is evidence to suggest emotions are also supporting these ends and thus organisational practices.

A Schatzkian practice perspective has been utilised in this paper. The value of the approach is in terms of placing human agency, practices and timespaces at the centre of analysis, where

human actors emerge and co-exist within an intricate, constantly changing social site of material arrangements and practices. Focusing on the causality and intricacies of human actors means moving away from Deleuzian, Latourian and Foucauldian ‘theories of arrangements’ that emphasise relations within social networks. In Schatzkian (2005; 2010) terms, the social ‘site’ is constituted by human actions of past, present and future temporality, and the spaces that these involve (spatiality), defined as timespace. What this adds to urban political geography is the scope in which to examine how the ‘where’ of urban politics comes about through human actions as practices within emergent social sites, and thus moving beyond preordained concepts such as ‘territory’ and ‘place’. Essentially, the ‘organisation’ is viewed as a heterogeneous, emergent and unbounded entity that is constituted by various actors, practices and material arrangements. It is this site which is critical in further understanding the multi-dimensional agents and timespaces of urban politics, and moving beyond treating the organisation as a bounded and homogenous entity.

The implications of this paper, and a Schatzkian approach, are to demonstrate that a practice-based approach makes it possible to examine the spatial elements and practices of austerity urbanism and social action more broadly in complex situations involving the organisation. This facilitates the generation of a framework in which to examine how geographical relations constitute and work through the organisation, as well as how organisational practices produce and act via particular geographical relations. This requires new research strategies but will importantly explicate the intricacies and complexities of the organisation, as argued by Müller (2012): “Opening the black box of the organization thus is much like unpacking your moving boxes: it is time-consuming, tedious and requires much patience but in their new arrangement the same things end up looking very different from the way they did before” (386).

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Table 1: Practice theories in urban studies

Main practice concept	Main theorists	Main proposition	Key areas of critique
Assemblages	Deleuze and Guattari DeLanda	Assemblages constituted by materialities and various enunciations such as language, seeking to create temporary stability through territorialisation	Overarching concern with explaining social life by focusing on relations and arrangements between entities; Human agency viewed through the conceptual lenses of arrangements; Explicit concern with the causality of non-human actors
Governmentality, biopolitics	Foucault Hardt and Negri, Agamben	Discursive construction of 'subjects' and 'regimes of truth'; Dispersed nature of power within social relations, leading to the creation of 'subjects' that adopt particular behaviours	Human agents viewed as acted upon, rather than possessing critical causal powers; Reduces the spatio-temporal 'institutional detail' and dimensions associated with governing, instead relying upon a landscape "where the production of new subjectivities is assumed to take its shape from the simple act of living" (Allen (2004: 24)).
Actor-networks	Latour, Callon	Material and social entities and processes configure into networks involving knowledge construction; importance actants	Explanation based of social organisation and control through networks and intermediaries; Human agency viewed through the conceptual lenses of networks; Explicit concern with the causality of networks and non-human entities