

Is class relevant to urban politics?

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Introduction

This chapter considers the salience of social class for the study of urban politics. It does so in a paradoxical context. On the one hand, today we find an absence of class politics; old ideological battles about class are seen as archaic (Clark and Lipset, 1991; Giddens, 1999). Yet, on the other hand, we find the word “class” saturating urban political discourse, including Richard Florida’s (2004) (in)famous creative class. Perhaps the simple conclusion to be drawn from this paradox is that we are actually talking about different things. The former referencing class in a Marxian antagonistic relationship and the latter viewing class as something much more banal and, even, something to be embraced (at least in its creative form). It is the contention of this chapter that we are not dealing with such a simple shift. Rather this paradox is explained by a post-industrial urban transformation that has complicated the ways in which we must understand social class in the urban context.

Since the 1990s there has been a general acknowledgement that urban politics have changed. Before this point in time, growth regime theory (e.g. Stone and Sanders, 1987) was commonly used to explain urban politics (see Ward in this collection). This theory saw urban politics as being dominated by various business interests that cooperated with the state to deliver economic growth and related public goods. Local business leaders were therefore viewed as being central in constructing urban political institutions and development agendas since they held the resources required by city government:

“...regime theory recognizes that any group is unlikely to be able to exercise comprehensive control in a complex world. Regime analysts, however, do not regard governments as likely to respond to groups on the basis of their electoral power or the intensity of their preferences as some pluralists do. Rather, governments are driven to cooperate with those who hold resources essential to achieving a range of policy goals” (Stoker, 1995, 59)

As a result the conflicting interests of business owners and workers were variously considered a significant feature of urban political conflicts (e.g. Castells, 1977; Harvey, 1989; Saunders, 1981). With the advent of globalization and consequent significant industrial restructuring in many cities across the Global North (see Logan and Molotch, 1987) this theoretical explanation has become less popular.

Globalization and related changes in economic geographies have brought about new urban political landscapes. An important element of this change has been the different role of both business and workers in urban politics. As Clark and Harvey (2010) have argued “[C]hanges related to globalization have [...] fostered the *declining explanatory power of race and class in urban politics*” (p424, *emphasis in original*). This globalized context is seen to have made city governments much more concerned with the need to compete with other cities in order to ensure existing businesses stay put and attract new capital to generate growth (Harvey, 1989). Importantly this was not a shift decided upon by city governments or city-based business interests themselves. Rather this has been brought about by wider economic and political changes (ibid.). Put simply, cities have appeared to have no choice but to compete with one another. The impacts of this shift have included the reduced influence of local political groups on urban government decision making (Brenner and Theodore, 2002), the decline of labour representation in urban politics (Boddy and Fudge, 1984) and the generation of new coercive, disciplining influences on local government decision making (Harvey, 1989).

This then is “New Urban Politics”. This form of urban politics is defined by “cities or communities competing for mobile capital” (Cox, 1995). Within this mode of urban politics, the issue of class conflict is often seen as becoming less and less of a central feature: “Class politics emerged with industrialization. Labor union and socialist parties who opposed the hierarchy of industrial management characterized this era. The globalization of production, the emergence of new political actors, the development of post-industrial economies, and other processes related to globalization, have altered the explanatory power of these variables” (Clark and Harvey, 2010, 426). In the entrepreneurial, post-industrial city, class antagonisms are therefore viewed by some as becoming less and less relevant.

This chapter critically examines this key premise of “New Urban Politics”. It draws upon two case studies to illustrate both the relevance of class to urban politics and, in tandem, highlight the necessity to rethink the way in which social class is related to urban politics. The first example in the paper draws upon recent climate change debates and related policy-making in London, UK. This example is used to illustrate how questions of territory and boundaries (Ward and McCann, 2011) are directly related to questions of social class. The second example again draws on London, but this time the city is used to show how the ways in which we previously understood class relations have become problematic. Together these examples are used to argue that social class remains a central component of urban politics, albeit in ways that differ significantly from the ways it was in the mid-twentieth century.

Post-Industrialism and Social Class

Post-industrialism brought with it a new urban landscape of social class. For some this represented a new epoch of social relations that were becoming largely devoid of class conflict (see Bell, 1973). Without a working class population fighting against an exploiting capitalist class, it seemed some

harmonious form of a liberal, democratic capitalist society might emerge (Fukuyama, 1992). Elements, if not full-blown expressions, of this imaginary have been evidence across the social sciences. Indeed critical philosopher Slavoj Žižek (2006) sees this idea of a society devoid of fundamental social class antagonisms (i.e. we are now left with merely technocratic issues to resolve) as a baseline assumption for many political theorists. But does this apply to the study of urban politics? Have we also assumed that, with the declining significance of political debate divided along class lines, the antagonistic relations between social classes have disappeared from the cityscape?

We can approach these questions by asking what the loss of the industrial city in many parts of the Global North has meant for urban politics. Numerous studies (for summary see Imrie and Raco, 2003; Ross and Levine, 2011) have shown that it has often meant local politics have become less defined by class divisions (i.e. political parties are less divided along class lines) and that people have come to associate themselves with other identity categories (i.e. people are less likely to hold a strong class identity). This shift was captured by the social theorist Andre Gorz where he attempted to narrate the sociological impact of early post-industrial changes:

“In contrast to the proletariat in Marx’s theory, the neo-proletariat does not define itself by reference to ‘its’ work and cannot be defined in terms of its position within the social process of production. The question of who does or does not belong to the class of productive workers – how to categorise a kinesiologist, a tourist guide, an airline employee, a systems analyst, a technician in a biological laboratory or a telecommunications engineer has no meaning or importance when set against a growing and more or less numerically dominant mass of people moving from one ‘job’ to another” (Gorz, 2001 [1980], 70)

Gorz’s main point here is that changes in occupational structures have meant it has become difficult to identify a particular working class group (i.e. proletariat) and, consequently, distinct class groupings and conflicts. But Gorz is not saying class relations have disappeared. He is arguing at

these relations still exist, but in different forms. Gorz sees the post-industrial city as bound up with class division and proletarian exploitation, but in distinct ways from industrial cities.

This interpretation of changes in social class contrasts to other more sanguine interpretations of post-industrialism (Bell, 1973; Fukuyama, 1992). Gorz rejects the idea that post-industrial societies are becoming devoid of class antagonisms whilst at the same time attempting to make sense of new economic and occupational structures. He certainly thought traditional working class politics – such as those organized around some industrial worker/masculine identity – were a thing of the past; much to the chagrin of many socialists who held on tightly to this model of politics. So, for Gorz, class politics was still in evidence but just now infused quite differently across the new occupations that collectively defined the socio-economic structure of the post-industrial city.

Gorz's (1980) interpretation of post-industrial class relations connects with more recent attempts in political philosophy to theorize class in the absence of distinct class divisions. This has involved a return to some foundational theoretical premises. Marx made it perfectly clear that capitalism, in its most simple abstraction, involved an antagonistic relationship between capital and labour. Through his use of the labour theory of value Marx argued that capital recreated itself (and capitalists became rich) by stealing labour time from labourers. This interpretation of implications of the labour theory of value, a theory which Marx borrowed from mainstream economic theory, would eventually push classical economists to abandon the theory. Although the labour theory of value and its associated reading of the relationship between labour and capital are theoretical abstractions, the industrial city would come close to reflecting them. Direct conflicts between large groups of workers (i.e. labour) and business owners (i.e. capital) defined many urban political landscapes in the early 20th century. However, a combination of the state management of economy – and the related provisioning of social welfare services – and later declines of heavy industrial manufacturing in places such as the US and UK removed much of this political landscape. With the

advent of Thatcherism/Reaganism in the 1980s and its subsequent reformulation under Tony Blair and Bill Clinton, it seemed that class divisions were irrelevant and absent from politics by governments who thought that little conflict existed between the interests of business and citizens (see Harvey, 2005).

This gap between appearance (i.e. how class relations look) and what exists (i.e. the theoretical understanding of a fundamental antagonism between capital and labour) has been of much interest to philosopher Slavoj Žižek (2001). He has argued that much is at stake with regards to how we understand this relationship. For elites, Žižek argues, it is in their interests to produce a social understanding – an ideology – that does not fully recognize or acknowledge what exists: “every hegemonic universality has to incorporate *at least two* particular contents: the ‘authentic’ popular content and its ‘distortion’ by the relations of domination and exploitation” (184). What Žižek is saying here is that capitalism has this antagonistic relation between capital and labour within it, but that this is rarely or never fully symbolized. Our view of it is always mediated, usually in a way that downplays its presence or even existence. If we accept the presence of an antagonistic relation between capital and labour we will therefore always have a politics that, in some way, reflects this. Furthermore, there will always be a requirement to obscure this relation for those who benefit from these social relations.

However, Žižek (2001) claims that the obscuring of class antagonisms is not just carried out by an elite of business interests. He has claimed that the class antagonism is also obscured by many other actors. These include the middle classes, those people who have been seen to now dominate the socio-economic structure of the post-industrial city (Butler et al., 2008; Florida, 2004). Žižek (2001) argues that the middle classes, or rather their particular self-identification as middle class, play a key role in the obscuring and denial of class antagonisms: “the only class, which, in its ‘subjective’ self-deception, explicitly conceives of and presents itself as a class is the notorious ‘middle-class’

which is precisely the ‘non-class’...” (186). Whilst the (non-)presence of certain social classes in the post-industrial context has led to many to diagnose a decline in its relevance to urban politics (Clark and Harvey, 2010), here Žižek points to the paradoxical prominence of the middle class as a sign of class politics. He is arguing that this group is, in a purely theoretical sense, incompatible with the ideas of capital and labour. When Žižek claims the middle classes present themselves as the social whole (i.e. the post-industrial utopia of an almost entirely middle class society), he sees this as “the denial of antagonism” (ibid. 187). Put differently, Žižek is saying that it is impossible to have a purely middle class society that is capitalist, since capitalism will require people who will (a) be the owners of capital and (b) be the labourers who are exploited. To present the idea that an entire capitalist society might become middle class denies this simple theoretical conclusion.

This line of thought is pushed further in Žižek’s (2001) analysis when he claims that we must understand class politics as bound up with processes of concealment. He argues:

“Leftists usually bemoan the fact that the line of division in the class struggle is a rule blurred, displaced, falsified... However, this constant displacement and ‘falsification’ of the line of (class) division is the ‘class struggle’: a class society in which the ideological perception of the class division was pure and direct would be a harmonious structure with not struggle...” (ibid. 187)

This argument forces us to think carefully about social class in urban politics. It challenges us to examine whether class struggle has purely disappeared/declined (i.e. the abstract antagonism between capital and labour is resolved) or ask whether it is merely “blurred, displaced, falsified” (ibid. 187). Furthermore, it pushes us to be concerned with class politics in the ideological domain; towards those various attempts to symbolize and explain class relations in ways that avoid the antagonism becoming visible.

We can therefore see Gorz and Zizek in agreement with respect to how class relations are not related to any particular type of party politics and/or occupational structure. What Gorz (1980) argues is that the changing presence of the stereotypical “working classes” (i.e. the workers of the industrial city) cannot be seen as evidence of the decline of class politics itself. His book *Farewell to the Working Class* is not an abandonment of class politics, but it rather is an attempt to articulate what the class antagonism means in post-industrial societies that do not have large traditional working class populations and associated political organizations. As class-based politics (i.e. voting patterns, political parties, labour movements) have declined in many countries, some commentators have been quick to read this as a declining importance of class analysis *per se*. Yet this change should not be read as a de facto loss of antagonistic class relations. What we therefore need is not a theory of urban politics that looks at social class as peripheral, but rather seeks to understand how class relations are now constituted, enacted and displaced.

In the following sections two examples of the mutated presence of social class in urban politics is illustrated. The first section outlines the ways in which current understandings of socio-spatial relations are important with respect to theorizing urban politics. This involves a questioning of the often foundational idea of cities as territorially bound. The second section turns to the question of class identities in the post-industrial city. The central concern here is the problem of reading a decline in working class occupations/identities as a decline of the class antagonism.

Out of bounds urban politics

In Doreen Massey’s *World City* (2007), a book that examines post-industrial London, she calls for the city to develop “a politics of place beyond place” (188), arguing that cities need an inverted form of localism. She argues “...‘place’ would seem to have real, and maybe ironically, in this age of globalisation, even increasing potential as a locus of political responsibility and an arena for political

engagement” (208). Massey’s point is that a city’s internal politics must become extroverted and, in doing so, connect internal political debates (e.g. local struggles of housing provision, transit planning etc) to more global concerns (e.g. poverty, climate change, uneven development etc). Here cities are “... meeting-places of multiple trajectories” (207) and therefore urban politics should extend through these trajectories. Whilst Massey recognizes the complexity any such analytical move, she argues this would “highlight the structural connections between inequality at a global level and the inequality within the city” (207). Urban politics therefore becomes about the city’s role in a global set of processes. The city is a staging post of incredibly complex and interweaving social relations.

This represents a significant shift in urban political theory. Whilst “urban politics” has never been a coherent concept, it has been continually reformulated around ideas of scale and spatial form. For example, John (2009, 17) recently offered the following starting point: “At its most straightforward, urban politics is about authoritative decision-making at a smaller scale than national units... the focus of interest is at the sub-national level with particular reference to the political actors and institutions operating there”. In this case, the territory of the city serves as the definition: urban politics are those politics that take place within the city¹. This premise of a smaller scale unit of politics operating within other sets of hierarchical/nested units has traditionally been a dominant one in the urban politics literature (Castells, 1977; Harvey, 1989; Saunders, 1981). Yet this schema is problematic in Massey’s framework since it reduces urban politics to a certain scale that does not necessarily connect to, or constitute, global processes (also see Allen and Cochrane, 2010; Ward and McCann, 2011).

An example of how Massey’s (2007) framework has a different analytical emphasis can be demonstrated by thinking about London’s urban regime, that set of business and political interests

¹ Other examples include Davies and Imbroscio’s (2009) defining of the themes of urban politics as “who wields urban political power, the nature of urban governance, and how urban citizens both affect and are affected by these dynamics of power and governance” (5). In this outlining, the spatial framing of urban politics remains consistent and we switch focus across actors.

that are pivotal to the city's successes and failures. Viewed with an extroverted sense of place, this set of actors must be seen as operating both within London *and* beyond the city's boundaries. In London's case this would see urban politics played out with reference to how the city's powerful financial interests within the City of London (see Figure 13.1) play a central role in producing and coordinating flows of capital across the globe. Where these flows go and what they generate would therefore be concerns for Londoners'. To restrict urban politics to local electoral boundaries denies urban politics the extrovert dimension Massey seeks to elevate.

Figure 13.1 – Image showing the offices where some of London's global relations are organized

The type of urban politics Massey (2007) theorizes is, to some degree, already present in urban policy debates. This can be illustrated by looking at policy debates around climate change in London. In the Greater London Authority's attempt to develop a sustainability agenda, London's mayoral government has had to think about local urban political changes in the context of a global environmental issue. In London's recent draft environmental strategy policy, *Delivering London's energy future* (GLA, 2010), the issue of climate change has required that urban political concerns be extroverted, even if the complete set of political relations that might come with such a perspective have not been examined (see Figure 13.REF).

Figure 13.REF – Text Box commentary on London's energy policy

London's climate change action plan (GLA, 2010) centres on perceiving climate change adaptation as an opportunity to grow the city's economy and maintain its world-city status.

However, there is a persistent requirement within the document to recognize the global dimension of climate change-related greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions: “Further action is therefore required, and although London’s relative contribution to global GHGs is small, as a world city, it has an important leadership role to play in reducing emissions and moving to new models of energy generation and consumption” (ibid. 9). London’s per capita emissions certainly rank lower than most other cities in the UK (Bicknell et al. 2009) and are similar to cities such as New York. However, an acknowledgement of the unsustainable level of these GHGs – 44.3m tons of CO₂ in 2006; some 8% of the UK total and 6.18tons per person (ibid) – also invokes two extroverted political dimensions: (a) the disparity in responsibility for carbon emissions at the global level and (b) the relations that London’s command and control functions (i.e. multi-national corporations and financial services) have with respect to the organization/facilitation of those industries that are overwhelmingly responsible for climate change.

An extroverted urban politics would embrace these geographically complex set of concerns by drawing attention away from local adaptation and towards the issues of global responsibility and global cooperation. It is perhaps therefore unsurprising then that Mayor Boris Johnson has downplayed issues such as London’s disproportionate responsibility for climate change. Not only would this extroverted politics complicate the city’s political landscape, it would also potentially politicize London’s past and current unsustainable per capita levels of greenhouse gas emissions.

Of course, energy policies are just one part of a city like London’s policy concerns. Yet just this one example demonstrates the different debates that might need to be had within an extrovert politics of place. London’s external relations are innumerable. There are few places on the planet that are not, in some way, connected to activities going on within the city. London’s financial services industry tends daily to the requirements of global capitalism, organizing its flows, participants, geographies etc. These economic activities construct a large set of the city’s extrovert

relations. We might therefore ask how the politics of these external relations could be reflected in urban politics. If a politics of place must extend beyond the city's boundaries, what is it about London's financial relations that need to become articulated? Just as with energy policy and climate change, we might ask about the responsibility the city has for mortgage securities in the US, for national debt in Greece, for debt burden in sub-Saharan Africa. It is precisely in these sets of concerns that we might find some of the urban politics of social class in an age of globalization.

Class identities in the post-industrial city

If we accept the idea of an extroverted urban politics, it is clear that our political consciousness has to change. We would be as concerned about the relations we have with people beyond the city limits as those relations we have within the city. Yet we cannot forget about the society forged between people living within a particular space. There is little doubt that the city itself represents a community, a grouping of people bound together through concerns such as infrastructure, transit, culture and environment.

Since the advent of post-industrialism (Bell, 1973) there has been a great deal of concern about the class constitution of the city. Debates have raged over whether the post-industrial city has progressively become more middle class (Hamnett, 1994) or whether it is more and more divided between rich and poor (Sassen, 1991). The implications of each reading are significant. This is perhaps best exemplified by the contrasting interpretations of gentrification. For some who see the post-industrial city as an increasingly middle class community, gentrification represents the replacement of a now historic social formation (Butler et al. 2008; Haase et al. 2005).

Neighbourhood transitions from working class to middle class are viewed as a replacement and re-population process. A declining presence of the traditional working classes (e.g. those registered in the census as skilled labourers) is read as a more general decline in the internal presence of

antagonistic class relations. If we therefore remain solely concerned with urban politics as something contained within cities, this interpretation would see politics as less and less wrapped up with class since socio-economic status becomes more homogeneous.

There are two main problems with this interpretation. The first relates to the myopic focus on the city as a setting for politics which leads to a “literal and figurative effacing of the proletariat” (Wacquant, 2008, 199) by overlooking the broader social relations cities are bound up in (see above). The second is concerned with the way we actually understand the class identity of people living in post-industrial cities. Whilst there has been a shift within the class composition of many cities, one that has often been understood as involving a decline of working class presence and, consequently, a decline in class antagonisms, we should proceed with caution using this interpretation (see Watt, 2008). This caution is both methodologically and theoretically motivated.

In terms of theory, we can return to our discussion of social class earlier. For critical theorists, class relations are seen to stem from the antagonistic relationship between capital and labour (Zizek, 2001). As a result the narration of the middle-class city is a highly problematic assertion because it obscures that fact that the capitalist city is bound up in an antagonistic social relation. As sociologists have argued, the idea of being middle class is actually constructed from the counterpoising of working labourers and capitalists:

“The definition of ‘middle class’ is vague but evocative... developed as a negative term [...]. By calling yourself middle class you distinguished yourself from those above you [...] and those below you... But this does not indicate that different people within the middle classes actually have anything in common other than that they are not upper or lower class” (Savage et al, 1992, xi).

The point the authors above are making is that the notion of “middle class” comes from the idea of a group of people being positioned between lower and higher classes. They identify “middle class”

as a vague term since it relies on there being something else either side. As such, if we identify a city such as London as increasingly middle-class we might ask – in the absence of a non-capitalist economy – where is the class relation? On one hand this might involve adopting a new geographical perspective on urban politics, something more akin to Massey's (2007) extrovert sense of place. On the other hand, we might revisit the issue of how we actually measure the class composition of the post-industrial city. This would be a methodological concern.

If we examine the way social class is measured in the UK census, we can see how difficult it is to clearly define someone's class status. In recent UK censuses, the social class measures used have been revised twice, the latest two versions being called SEG (socio-economic group) and SEC (socio-economic classifications) schemes (see **Figure 13.REF**). The conceptual frameworks used to develop these schemes draws heavily on John Goldthorpe's (2007) attempt to distinguish between different locations in the labour market. In this pragmatic attempt to divide up the labour market, Goldthorpe identifies a working class (i.e. skilled labourers) and a middle class (i.e. managers and professionals). As a consequence of using these categorizations in cities like London we have seen significant decreases in the numbers of those occupying working-class positions. This is quite reasonable. But what if the nature of working class occupations has changed in these cities? What if our categories are not good indicators of class status?

Figure 13.REF about here – UK census social class measures

This idea that we might have a new form of working class population is nothing new. Indeed, we have seen a vast documenting of workers in industries such as food services and retail services (e.g. Ehrenreich, 2002) that, whilst being service-economy workers, are also subject to oppressive and exploitative working conditions. But oftentimes these occupations are not viewed as

being working class in the sense that they do not fit into working class categories in census measures. Our methodological problem is therefore concerned with who holds a working class position in the absence of an economy that has clearly delineated class-related occupational divisions.

In London, the SEC groups that have seen the greatest growth since the 1980s are numbered 5.1 and 5.2. (see Butler et al. 2008). These can be considered lower middle class occupations and, consequently, these groups are often used to illustrate how the city has become more middle class and less working class (ibid.). However, if you examine the occupations in these classifications they are highly varied (see Rose et al. 2005 for a detailed discussion). They range from actors, assistant nurses, immigration officers, estate managers through to typists, debt collectors, cashiers, sales assistants and petrol pump forecourt attendants (see Rose and O'Reilly, 1998, 56-91). Clearly, some of these occupations are middle class. However others, such as sales assistants, would seem not to be middle class. Even within the context of an archetypal post-industrial city such as London there is reason to question the extent to which class composition has changed.

We are therefore faced with two inter-twined issues when considering the relationship between social class and urban politics. First, the continued fetishization of the city setting (i.e. it as a bounded political space) means that we need new conceptual approaches to think about how cities are bound up in class relations. As cities become globally interconnected in deeper and more extensive ways we will likely require an extroverted urban politics to capture the political dimensions of urban life. Second, although the post-industrial city is clearly different from its historical antecedents, we need to carefully consider how this transition has impacted social class composition. Whilst it has undoubtedly changed working class occupations, political organizations and class consciousness, the extent to which this should be understood as a process of class homogenization is questionable. We therefore need to rethink the ways in which class antagonisms are both instilled

and produced through the city *and* identify the class character of the post-industrial city in the context of a decline in traditional working class occupations.

Conclusions

In the last two decades there has been a shift away from understanding urban politics as being organized around social class. To some extent this reflects the Anglo-American focus of the urban politics literature, since many cities in the world are not post-industrial and/or have a vibrant class politics (Roy, 2009). This chapter has attempted to demonstrate the necessity to remain concerned with the social class dimensions of urban politics but in a way that looks at questions of class through both the external relationality of cities and the transformed internal composition of occupational structures in the post-industrial city.

Yet we must not rest here. We must be careful with how we think about the post-industrial city itself. Identifying the post-industrial city as a next step in the city's historical development (e.g. Bell, 1973) can serve to depoliticize the city's class relations. Take the idea of New Urban Politics and tendency to see class as unimportant in urban politics. It might certainly be the case that municipal elections and working class politics have come to play a less prominent role in urban politics. But we must be careful with how we develop our understanding of this situation. If we remain focused on the city territory as the locale of urban politics, we eviscerate the class relations that are constitutive of it (Massey, 2007). This is not to say that a focus on internal politics is unimportant, but rather to stress that the constitutive processes of the city demand that our theoretical approach to urban politics be able to incorporate both our the internal and external considerations.

A (re)engagement with the social class dimensions of urban politics therefore requires substantial theoretical renewal. Here we can learn from recent debates in political philosophy. Zizek

(2006) recently made the following point about how we develop knowledge: “*the bracketing itself produces the object*” (56; *emphasis in original*). His point was that the way in which we frame the object of inquiry – in this case urban politics – has important implications for the way in which the researcher approaches and perceives the object. In the case of urban politics we can take the notion of bracketing in the literal spatial sense by pointing to the continued reliance on the notion of bounded urban political space (e.g. John, 2009). Although not to claim this bracketing is redundant, it is to say it is highly problematic when used as the main entry point for thinking urban politics. And this is not purely for theoretical reasons. If we identify this bracketing of urban politics as obscuring the city’s class constitution, the approach also must be seen as having a politics: “... it concerns what Marx called “real abstraction”; the abstraction from power and economic relations is inscribed into the very actuality of the democratic process” (ibid. 56). Here Zizek points to the politics of bracketing. The way we theorize urban politics engages in a procedure that can strip away many of the political aspects of the city. And if class politics is about the full representation of the capital/labour antagonism (Zizek, 2001; 2006), we must be much more reflexive about how certain approaches to urban politics lose sight of class relations in the capitalist city.

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Figure 13.REF – The Mayor’s interpretation of climate change: opportunities and costs

London’s energy policy document, *Delivering London’s energy future* (2010), deals with the potential impacts of climatic change by seeing the change as an economic opportunity. The Mayor’s foreword begins by stating:

“London is at the cusp of an exciting energy revolution. A potent combination of rising concerns over energy security and long-term increases in fossil fuel prices has led to a growing awareness that our traditional energy resources are finite. Meanwhile city living, especially in an expanding metropolis like London, leads to pollution that poses a threat to our health and quality of life. In addition, tackling climate change by reducing greenhouse gas emissions has become a major global priority, which requires urgent action” (5)

The Mayor goes onto reframe this environmental problem as an economic necessity:

“It is vital that our growing city develops and grows in a way that exemplifies greener living... London is well positioned to seize the opportunities coming from this nascent low carbon age, to be one of the world’s leading low carbon capitals and the leading carbon finance centre. But we cannot be complacent – other cities and countries are competing for this prize” (6)

Whereas the urban politics of climate change might have revolved around the responsibility of cities in the Global North to reduce emissions and provide reparations for those affected by anthropogenic climate change, in London’s energy policy document the issue is transformed into another entrepreneurial urban policy agenda.

Figure 2 – Basic breakdown of SEC categories in UK census

Operational Categories of the NS-SEC linked to Socio-economic Groups

Socio-economic group		NS-SEC operational categories
1	Employers and managers in central and local government, industry, commerce, etc. - large establishments	
1.1	Employers in industry, commerce, etc. - large establishments	1
1.2	Managers in central and local government, industry, commerce, etc. - large establishments	2
2	Employers and managers in industry, commerce, etc. - small establishments	
2.1	Employers in industry, commerce, etc. - small establishments	8.1
2.2	Managers in industry, commerce, etc. - small establishments	5
3	Professional workers - self-employed	3.3
4	Professional workers - employees	3.1
5	Intermediate non-manual workers	
5.1	Ancillary workers and artists	3.2, 3.4, 4.1, 4.3, 7.3
5.2	Foremen and supervisors non-manual	6
6	Junior non-manual workers	4.2, 7.1, 7.2, 12.1, 12.6
7	Personal service workers	12.7, 13.1
8	Foremen and supervisors - manual	10
9	Skilled manual workers	7.4, 11.1, 12.3, 13.3
10	Semi-skilled manual workers	11.2, 12.2, 12.4, 13.2
11	Unskilled manual workers	13.4
12	Own account workers (other than professional)	4.4, 9.1
13	Farmers - employers and managers	8.2
14	Farmers - own account	9.2
15	Agricultural workers	12.5, 13.5
16	Members of armed forces	-
17	Inadequately described and not stated occupations	16