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# Regions

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SUSTAINABILITY TRANSITIONS IN CITIES AND REGIONS



- Sustainability Governance
- Geographies of home and work
- Mergers and acquisitions in Europe

within a city's borders. Considering the limitations of "sustainability in one place" raises fundamental questions about how we should study, plan, and govern for sustainability.

End Note: 'While most of these work-related trips are to Freiburg, a small minority are to other employment locations in the region.'

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**SMART CITY-REGIONAL GOVERNANCE: A 'DUAL TRANSITION'**

**Tassilo Herrschel, University of Westminster, London, UK and Yonn Dierwechter, University of Washington, Tacoma, USA**



are intersecting: broader changes in societal values and goals, and place/topic-specific policy applications and governing strategies/practices 'on the ground'.

**'Dual Transitions' and the 'big picture' of external regime changes**

This essay introduces the concept of 'dual transition' in relation to the notion of 'smartness' in city-regional governance. A 'dual transition' consists of two intersecting dimensions, a broader change in political-economic and societal circumstances which surround city-regions, and a more detailed, local change towards 'smartness' in policy practices. Although 'smart' has become a ubiquitous moniker in urban policy, it projects policies that seek to go beyond a one-dimensional 'growth agenda' by also addressing the quest for social, economic, and environmental sustainability. The underlying rationale, justification of policies and accompanying public and political discourses, however, are not uniform. Priorities differ and reflect established societal values, political practices, and economic circumstances. Resulting policy-making and governance practices are built on that. Changes in this value system, such as through political and/or societal transformations – as theorised and debated under the banner of 'transition', will also affect the formulation and implementation of 'smartness'. Effectively, therefore, two 'transitions'

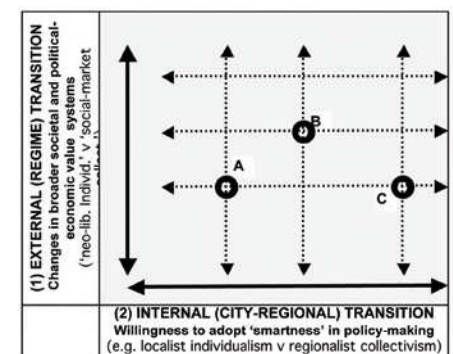
The concept of 'dual transition' consists of two intersecting processes at different spatial and societal scales: one external and one internal to a city-region's governance (see Fig 1). 'External' refers to changing balances in public discourse, such as about the role of competitive individualism v 'responsible' collectivism. These wider external variables may include moments of major regime change, which alter the points of reference and legitimacy for the criteria used so far to guide and justify per se the principles of practiced governance at the city-regional level. 'Internal' captures transition in a city-regional 'milieu', e.g. the inward-looking localist versus outward-looking regionalist (collective) interests (e.g. Jonas, 2013).

The inherent dynamics of these descriptors mean that the whole system of 'dual transition' is in constant flux. Globalisation and technological changes continuously redefine societal-economic parameters, values and political agendas as external context to local politics, including the adoption of 'smart' policy-making principles. Such a 'transitioned' form of city-regional governance, is circumscribed by broader shifts from

post-Fordist, neo-liberal paradigms, to a proclaimed move 'beyond post-Fordism'. In governance terms, this involves new concepts and narratives, mobilising different resources, and being imaginative about new governance practices and using institutions, while employing less formal collaborative organisations. Smart city-regionalism is understood here as being about opening up, and pressing for, important new ideas about democratic legitimacy and political inclusion.

Such 'opening up' includes novel ways of giving established state structures – both institutional and territorial – and modi operandi greater flexibility to boost their

**Figure 1: Dual Transition towards Adopting Smartness in City-Regional Governance**



Source: authors Note: A-C = location of city-region A-C on specific intersections of External and Internal Transition



'Smartness' as image making: clipboard handed out at conference in Gdansk 2014.

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responsiveness to more rapidly changing demands from governance. This is achieved by bringing about innovative ways of using established powers and policy-making tools, including collaborations across institutional and territorial divisions. In return, such cross-fertilisation between structure and agency provides the inherent uncertainty of innovation, imagination and experimentation in governance with a stabilising structural framework. This provides needed reliable points of reference for the location and legitimation of the variable, opportunistic, often ad hoc and personality-based, decision-making processes which characterise network-based policy making as suggested preferred 'smart' form of governance. Nature and outcome of this marriage between structure and agency, in turn, is thus shaped by two intersecting negotiation processes: the particular combination of external and internal factors in a city region, and the one between novel and conventional ways of understanding and utilising territorial, institutional and societal heritage.

The importance of external effects has become starkly evident in transforming societies and economies, such as in post-communist Eastern Europe and post-Apartheid South Africa. Regime changes here have cut up existing, and established new, patterns in economic opportunities, granting some parts, especially the main urban regions – and here, especially, the capital city regions – new and greater opportunities than other, more peripheral (or old industrial), parts of a territory and society. Negotiations about the urgency of 'sustainability' vis-à-vis 'competitiveness' have been fundamentally affected by these far-reaching socio-political, broad 'transitions' (Herrschel, 2013). Elsewhere, e.g. in the US and in Western Europe, such discussions have become leading debates over the last 30 or so years, albeit with differing degrees of emphasis and enthusiasm. This reflects variations in dominant societal values and discourses about neo-liberalism versus social market economy.

### 'Internal transition': Towards adopting smartness in governance

'Smartness' here is taken as an outcome of internal (local) transition in governance, capturing ways of reconciling seeming contradictions between established growth agendas and a rising concern with a broader range of qualitative parameters, such as societal and territorial cohesion in 'quality of life'. This is circumscribed in its formulation by the external 'big picture' transition as broader context for the then scope for, and interest in, adopting such 'smartness' at the local/regional and policy-specific level as novel 'takes' in policy making. 'Smartness' itself has seen changes in its meanings.

Since emerging as a planning concept in North America during the mid-1990's to tackle urban 'sprawl' (Dierwechter, 2008), the concept has diffused rapidly and morphed into a 'label' of a new, more reflective and innovative way of doing things beyond planning, land-use and transportation approaches per se (Caragliu, Del Bo and Nijkamp, 2011). More recent discourses of 'smartness' and 'smart cities' now typically incorporate wider concerns with economic competitiveness, ecological sustainability, energy budgets, improved administrative efficiency, data integration and coordination, technology, citizen empowerment, and, ultimately a more agile, 'intelligent', efficient, and problem-oriented culture of territorial (e)governance. It thus has become synonymous with a more holistic policy-making perspective that recognises, and seeks to address, the complexity of reconciling multiple goals in 'do-able' policies through 'intelligent decision-making and efficient city dynamics' (Shahrokni and Brandt, 2013, p. 117). Yet, the context for such may vary considerably, being more encouraging, or less.

### Concluding comments

In this essay we have argued that the adoption of 'smartness' in city regional governance as both discourse and practice involves a dual transition as intersection of, firstly, wider political-economic regime change, and, secondly, place-specific values and modi operandi of defining and making 'smart' policies. Differences in bigger context set the external 'stage' for the formation of an internal place-specific milieu which may be more supportive, or less, for permitting a second, more localised transition: that of adopting principles and practices of 'smartness' in policy-making.

Yet, the jury is still out whether 'smart'

governance can be more than merely masking deeper structural tensions in contemporary global capitalism. Could a seeming 'smart turn' be not much more than a post-Keynesian, fundamentally neoliberalised, opportunistically driven, and overly 'techno-utopian' adaptation of existing, older forms of territorial and economic governance, as seen, importantly, mostly from a Western perspective. Other societal and political-economic contexts may produce different awareness and evaluation of development objectives and priorities. 'Smart turn' suggests societal, political, and economic reforms that are deemed increasingly necessary to facilitate a discursively wanted more sustainable and democratic form of 'post-neoliberal' development in diverse urban settings. Yet, such normative understanding may be too generalist, ignoring the shaping of practices and values by particular circumstances, histories and political-economic 'milieux'.

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# Regions

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Our *Regional Survey*, edited by Gerd Lintz and Rob Krueger, examines issues related to greening, sustainability, and governance. The papers range from conceptual pieces that make a contribution to local and regional planning theory to empirical cases of how governance has shaped a proposed 'sustainability transition'. The essays are critical in nature because they explore the process of governance and it shapes different transitional outcomes. These essays came from the workshops created by the Sustainability Governance Transition Research Network, which is funded in part by the Regional Studies Association. Over the past three years, dozens of researchers have travelled from around the world to participate in workshops held in London, St. Gallen, Switzerland, and Chicago, Illinois, USA.

In our *In Depth*, Darja Reuschke examines the growth of home-based businesses and their role in modern economies, part of a five year ERC research project called WORKANDHOME.

As the RSA celebrates its 50th year, the Chair reflects on the Association's development over that time period and congratulates the commitment of its long-term members (a list of those who have been members for more than 15 years can be seen in the *Association News*). There is also a healthy list of New Members to the Association.



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