



# Policy mobilities, politics and place: The making of financial urban futures

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## Abstract

The comparative and extrospective nature of contemporary urban policy-making is one that has demanded our attention in recent years. Relatively long established and formal inter-urban networks of professionals of one sort or another have been joined by activists, consultants, financiers, lawyers and think tankers who have involved themselves in the arriving at, and making up of, urban policy. Through conferences, documents, knowledge banks, policy tourism, power-points and webinars, an emergent informational infrastructure has emerged to shape and structure the circulations and making of policy-making across a numbers of areas. From aging to creativity, climate change to drugs, education to transport, urban policies in different spheres have been rendered mobile. There is political work of adaptation, mediation and translation that has to be done to move policies from one location to another, of course. In some cases these policies appear in a range of locations, while in others they do not, a reminder – if one was needed – that those involved in the making up of policy are not always able to render all elements of the future under their control. This emphasis on the relational *and* territorial geographies of global-urban policy-making captures some of the issues facing those who lead cities. This paper sets out some of the intellectual challenges for those working on these issues, highlighting some potentially fruitful ways forward, illustrating the main arguments through the use of Tax Increment Financing, a financial value-capturing model.

## Keywords

Policy mobilities, Tax Increment Financing, urban policy, value capture

## Introduction

Benjamin Barber's (2013) *If Mayors Ruled the World: Dysfunctional Nations, Rising Cities* has generated significant interest amongst policymakers. The book argues that while nation states are struggling to address the major challenges of the 21st century, such as aging, climate change, inequalities and security, cities are not. Rather, on their own and through the formation of various inter-city alliances and networks they are setting about making policy in these areas

and in others. Cities are where these challenges are most keenly felt and are where the most creative, experimental and innovate approaches are being

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trialled. According to Barber (2013), what we have witnessed over the last couple of decades is the emergence of a new urban frontier in the realm of policy-making, as nation states have proven themselves to be one or more of the following: too bureaucratic, too corrupt, too undemocratic or too unwieldy. Of course, he is not alone in making claims that we are experiencing an urban age or urban century, which speaks both to the planet's growing urban population and the place of cities in the making up of the global. Here, amongst many others, we can identify Richard Florida's (2004) *Cities and the Creative Class*, Edward Glaeser's (2011) *Triumph of the City*, Anthony Townsend's (2014) *Smart Cities* and Charles Montgomery's (2015) *Happy City*. Each serves to bring forth a claim about the agency of cities in the current geo-economic and geo-political planetary order.

This paper is based on a five-year-long research programme including fieldwork in Australia, Canada, the UK and the USA. The focus is on Tax Increment Financing (TIF), a financial value-capturing model. First established in California in the early 1950s, TIF is now on the books in every US state except for Arizona. Its introduction, or a variation on it, continues to be considered across a number of countries and their cities, despite its abolishment in California in 2012. It facilitates the penetration of cities by global financial markets and their various actors, one of a range or suite of policies advocated by national and international actors who are increasingly making the case for experimenting with various land-value capture mechanisms at the urban scale (Squires et al., 2016; Squires and Hutchinson, 2014). Despite being a "once-obscure instrument" (Weber, 2010: 251), the emergence of TIF in a growing number of, first, US cities, and subsequently other cities around the world, speaks to the locally variegated but systemic ways in which cities are being required to behave entrepreneurially and speculatively (Hall and Hubbard, 1996; Harvey, 1989). While there is a history to this sort of financial experimentation in the USA (Cummings, 1988; Sbragia, 1996; Squires, 1989; Ward, 2018), this is not the case in many countries around the world.

The formation of a TIF project area involves the freezing of some of the rates of taxation (business, education, fire, police, property, etc.). This is the

"base assessed value" that continues to be paid to these taxing bodies. Capital is then borrowed against the (projected) uplift in the rates of taxation that are predicted on the basis of expenditure, normally but not exclusively, on infrastructure. This borrowing occurs in most cases through the issuing of bonds. This ring fencing continues for a specified period of time, in most cases either 23 or 25 years. Over those years the "base assessed value" continues to be paid to the normal tax-collecting authorities. Meanwhile, "the increment" or the "incremental assessed value" – that is, the difference between the frozen rate and the post-expenditure rate multiplied by the value of the taxable properties in the ring-fenced land – accrues to another authority. In the case of California it was a specially established agency, while in Chicago it is city government. At the termination of the TIF, the land is un-ring-fenced and the "total assessed value" returns to being payable to the pre-TIF taxing bodies.

This paper is organised in the following manner. The second section consists of three subsections, presenting three global-urban policy-making vignettes. The first is from Chicago, as those charged with thinking about financing the UK's urban futures visited the city to learn from its use of the model. The second is from the UK. A range of consultancies, lobbyists and think tanks drew upon evidence from elsewhere to make the case to national government for greater fiscal devolution to city government. The third is from Edinburgh in Scotland. This city government was the first in the UK to be granted a TIF district for its Leith dockland/waterfront. The third section draws upon these vignettes to advance a particular way of understanding two important aspects of contemporary global-urban policy-making. It does this in light of Bunnell's (2015: 1985) astute observations regarding how representations of one city's past are used to shape and structure another city's future, a process he terms "urban antecedence". On the one hand, from a city's perspective, how arriving at "local" policy can involve the work of comparing, learning, mediating and translating models from elsewhere, while, on the other, from a policy perspective, these often evolve, morph and mutate through their travels. The fourth section of the paper uses the example of the financial value capture model of TIF to make some more general

points about urban policy mobility studies and their conceptualisation of the future place of cities in the world and of the world in cities. The fifth and final section of the paper offers some reflections upon how urban policy mobility studies speak to wider issues regarding the conceptualisation of place.

The research programme draws upon 100 semi-structured interviews with a range of stakeholders from community, finance, housing, legal, private and public sectors. Those interviewed were a mixture of elite policymakers and “middling actors”, with CVs that took in the private and public sectors (Bunnell, 2015; Larner and Laurie, 2010). This generated an understanding of some of “the practices through which policy is made mobile” (Roy, 2012: 35). In the cases of the Chicago and UK interviews, these took place after the emergence of the former as the “poster child” of TIF and after the visits by UK policymakers and the work subsequently done to promote/sell it to UK national politicians. In the case of Edinburgh, the interviews took place after the production of Edinburgh’s TIF business case and its agreement by the then Minister for Scotland, John Swinney MSP, but while the city government continued to negotiate with other stakeholders, the most important of which was Forth Ports Limited who owned the land that was to be designated a TIF. There was then, during the interviews and meetings that I attended in Edinburgh, a degree of both joining-up and seeing the dots (attempting to be) joined (Jacobs, 2012). Local and national media archives were drawn upon and used to situate historically the current focus on infrastructure financing and redevelopment. So, I use a combination of semi-structured interviews and archives, across different geographical locations, covering different time periods but united in their representation of something called “TIF” and the wider social worlds of which it is constitutive.

### **Arriving at and the making up of the Edinburgh Tax Increment Financing: Three topological vignettes**

#### *Policy tourism in “the Loop”: Chicago, late 1990s*

If California is the birthplace of TIF, then Chicago is kind of where it went to college and learnt how to do

what it wanted to do, because it works really well in Chicago. (Interview #62, Columbus, Ohio, April 2012)

The first TIF district in Chicago was ’84, ’85. By ’90 there was several. And then in the ’90s it just went crazy. We were creating 20 TIFs a year for a number of years. I mean when I came in there was 50 TIFs, when I left there were 150! (Interview #16, Chicago, January 2012)

The Loop is in the centre of the downtown of Chicago and its boundaries have been subject to redrawing and revision since its name was first coined in the mid-1890s. Historically it has been the economic, cultural and political centre of the city, headquarters to city government and private corporations as well home to a range of cultural institutions. Like many US cities, it began to experience a downturn in fortunes between the 1960s and the 1980s (Gilloth and Betancur, 1988). Its relatively small population dropped during this period, only to treble between 1990 and 2015, as it and surrounding neighbourhoods experienced gentrification (Betancur, 2002, Betancur, 2011; Hwang and Sampson, 2014; Wilson and Grammenos, 2005). The city government’s use of TIF from the mid-1980s was important in creating the pre-conditions for this process of socio-spatial restructuring, subsidising residential and retail redevelopment and underwriting financial risks that would have otherwise be borne by banks and/or developers (Weber, 2002).<sup>1</sup> This link was explained thus:

In the mid to late eighties could someone have ever envisioned how wonderful Chicago and how renovated and rejuvenated State Street and Block 37 and along the river and so forth could be? But TIF is a tool that helped to facilitate all of that. Could someone have envisaged the South Loop in the downtown area and the population in the downtown area would grow to 200,000 residents living within a block or two of where they worked? ... Chicago has gone from a city where population was exiting the city to a place where ... level professionals want to live. It’s completely opposite to what it was 30 years ago. (Interview #79, Chicago, April 2012)

The Central Loop TIF was established in 1984 by Mayor Harold Washington. It was to oversee the redevelopment of Block 37, the block bounded by

Washington, State, Randolph and Dearborn streets. Covering nine full and partial blocks to the north of the Loop, its establishment was not straightforward. Described as “slow moving” (McCarron, 1986a: n.p.), the first TIF bonds were not issued until 1986. The pace of redevelopment was set by a combination of “negotiations over a land-sale contract” (McCarron, 1986b: n.p.) and the city government’s underestimation of how much it would cost to buy the blocks. Nevertheless, the land was eventually bought, parcels assembled and redevelopment occurred. Its expansion in 1997 sought to “promote private investment on additional blocks to the east and south” ([https://www.cityofchicago.org/city/en/depts/dcd/supp\\_info/tif/central\\_loop\\_tif.html](https://www.cityofchicago.org/city/en/depts/dcd/supp_info/tif/central_loop_tif.html)), when it then covered a total area of 139 acres. The TIF was wound up in 2008, having generated an increment over its life of just over US\$1 billion.

Over the decades Chicago city government’s use, and the State legislation of, TIF changed:

And that has to do with the difference between how TIFs were used when Harold Washington first implemented the programme and how they’re used now ... What I mean by that is that when Harold Washington first implemented the TIF he had a very-defined purpose; develop one block in the loop ... And he decided that it was in the best interests of the City of Chicago to tear down the existing buildings there and put new buildings, skyscrapers. But Harold Washington’s people promised that this programme would be limited only to developing that block, and as soon as that block was developed, they would dissolve the TIF so that all the property taxes generated by that TIF would go back to the taxing bodies. (Interview #18, Chicago, January 2012)

Under Mayor Richard Daley, who was first elected in 1989, the city became known as “one of the heaviest users of TIF in the US” (Interview #19, February 2012). According to Weber (2010: 261), “he saw TIF as a way of encouraging development in the central area despite the loss of federal funds and general displeasure with property tax hikes.” This was particularly the case after his election for a third term of office in 1995:

Mayor Daley quickly seized on the fact that TIF was, and still remains, virtually unregulated, very little

effective oversight, [General conversation] that there were tremendous self-interest on the part of businesses and the Mayor’s administration to continually expand the uses of TIF and to begin to use it as a generic economic development tool and to capture property tax revenues that could then be directed towards favoured types of development. So after about 1996 when Mayor Daley really embraced this and started calling it the only game in town, the number of TIF districts in existence in the city exploded. (Interview #25, Chicago, February 2012)

The late 1990s saw a steep increase in the use of the TIF model in Chicago. For example in 1990 there were 14 TIF districts and by 2000 this had risen to 103. The peak was 163 in 2011, and by the end of the 2015 Tax Year there were 146 TIFs in the city (Cook County Clerk, 2016).<sup>2</sup> This accounted for almost half the total area of the city.

As Chicago established more TIF districts over the course of the mid-to-late-1990s, and while its use was garnering an international reputation amongst urban consultants, planners, policymakers and politicians, so the politics around the use of the model deepened. This took various forms. There were those locally who were concerned about the consequences for uneven development, both inside and outside of the city. The model was seen as deepening intra-urban inequalities, underwriting the gentrification of the downtown (Betancur, 2011):

I use the term sort of Darwinian, you know, like if you are the fittest it can work really well for you ... but I don’t think it does much to help neighbour areas that are not going to be able to generate, you know, the increase in property values unless there is some major kind of development. (Interview #17, Chicago, January 2012)

That is not to say that what had taken place in the downtown was dismissed entirely. It was not, as there was an acknowledgement of the inter-relationships between the core and the surrounding neighbourhoods:

I mean down town really completely changed in the last 20 years and I do think that benefits the whole City. I don’t think that’s enough, I really believe the neighbourhoods need more attention, but I think it’s a

lot harder for a neighbourhood if there's not a strong down town. (Interview #20, Chicago, February 2012)

The use of TIF by Chicago was also understood to have exacerbated the system-wide inter-urban competition that has been one of the defining features of the US urban and regional political economy since the late 1980s (Harvey, 1989):

Ford for example, Ford was going to build this new supplier park and they basically said "We have it narrowed down to Chicago or Atlanta, which of you are going to give us the best package?" and so should Chicago have said "You know what we're not subsidising Ford," we would have lost it ... So we put together the best package we could and we won and I think that was a good thing for South Chicago but I don't know if that's a good thing for the United States to be doing that. (Interview #20, Chicago, February 2012)

More generally, there were seen to be winners and losers over the particular way that TIF had been used in Chicago. Specifically, private sector consultants were said to have benefitted from the city's use of TIF. To some this was outlined as simply being about augmenting the work of city government. When asked about their role, it was outlined as follows:

To add capacity to the municipality when they're trying to do fairly specialised things that they don't, necessarily, have full time people around, all the time for, in some cases, we just...they're very complicated and the community is only going to do it once, so, we come in and help them do that, then, we go on our merry way! (Interview #19, February 2012)

However, as others have argued, a case can be made that their role was a more active one as they sought to construct and make markets for their services (Baker et al., 2016; Pacewicz, 2013):

And I think what happened in Chicago was that there became this whole industry of consultants that would help developers maximise the amount of TIF money that they could get, and the law is that the amount of TIF subsidy has to be only what is required to make the development economically viable. (Interview #20, February 2012)

Alternatively, community and neighbourhood groups were for the most part marginal in decisions over the establishment of TIF districts (Neighborhood Capital Budget Group, 1999). As it was explained:

It really was this sense that that department and the Mayor's office should control the money completely and that the voice of the community should be listened, the voice of the alderman should be listened and we would listen to them but the input was limited. (Interview #20, Chicago, February 2012)

Finally, and unsurprisingly given what other work has revealed about the redevelopment of US downtowns (Squires, 1989), the subsidising of private capital by public capital was seen to have characterised the use of TIF in Chicago, with consequences for issues of accountability and transparency:

TIFs have been basically used to help developers, you know, with major projects, not just in blighted areas, but in downtown business districts that meet the technical definition of blighted, but don't necessarily meet some of the public's belief as to what TIF's should be. (Interview #21, Chicago, February 2012)

TIFs by and large, at least in Chicago, are used in places where development was going to occur anyway, and it's a way of siphoning some of the money through an account in the mayor's office that doesn't have the same kind of oversight. (Interview #75, Chicago, May 2012)

The defining of "blight" and the way in which the definition was translated into practice around the establishment of TIF districts was highlighted as an issue, as it was in other US states that used TIF, with Gordon (2003: 307) moved to argue that in general terms "'blight' has lost any substantive meaning as either a description of urban conditions or a target for public policy." So, in Chicago an area was argued to be blighted, with the state's definition used as a reference point, without a lot of pushback. This was a concern to some, such as this community activist:

The legal definition of the TIF, in Illinois, is very broad, so, when they say it's for blight, or the "but for" provision, it's been, completely, eroded to be used for, essentially, anything you want, for anywhere you want. (Interview #24, Chicago, February 2012)

Despite this local politics around the use of TIF in Chicago and its wider spatial consequences, the city's experiences from the 1990s onwards formed the basis of other cities' use of TIF (Weber, 2010). The election of Rahl Emmanuel as Mayor of Chicago in 2011, and his subsequent re-election in 2015, saw a concerted strategy to increase the amount of public scrutiny over the collecting and use of TIF monies (Civic Federation, 2011). In particular, there was attention on the social inequity generated through the use by the city of TIF, in relation to the gentrification of downtown neighbourhoods and the undermining of the public school system (Lipman, 2011). By then, however, the possible introduction of TIF into the UK was being discussed, in part on the basis of the earlier experiences of Chicago.

### *Translation work and urban antecedence I: UK, late 1990s through to mid-2000s*

TIFs have been around in the sort of sub-conscious of urban development since the urban white paper in 1999, I think it was Richard Rogers report, so and a lot of people have said yes this is a good thing, we should be doing it, we should be doing it for that period – no one ever really rolled their sleeves up and said what does this look like in the UK, what does this look like on a particular scheme, will it work and we've got our unit, central unit is me and one other person, we've got access to some great brains within the cities, so for example all our treasurers meet, so we had a conversation with the treasurers and said look, what is it? What are the big barriers for you in unlocking growth and creating investment, came back and absolute top priority for all of them was infrastructure investment and there are a number of schemes that no matter what cocktail you put together, you couldn't get there to unlock the infrastructure for those schemes, but if you could bridge that gap, the benefits would be enormous, they knew they would be enormous. (Interview #13, Manchester, January 2012)

In London in the mid-1990s, the writing was on the wall for John Major's government. After 18 years in power the Conservatives were set to lose the 1997 UK General Election. Activists, consultants, lobbyists and think tanks were vying for influence on the likely incoming Labour government, led by Tony Blair MP. A raft of potential policies were being

debated and discussed as the process of readying for government began. In the realm of brownfield urban policy, some leading policymakers from across the private and public sectors had been meeting informally. The focus was on the potential to shape the urban agenda under the Labour government if the party was elected:

There had been some brownfield dinners I think they were called, going on in London. A [a senior local government figure] had convened them. That created a small group of people who were concerned about regeneration and urban sprawl and all those kinds of issues. That must have been well pre-Labour getting into power I guess ... sometime in the early mid-90s. (Interview #52, London, March 2012)

These meetings were the genesis for the establishment of the Urban Task Force in 1998 by John Prescott MP, the then Deputy Prime Minister. Its brief was to identify the causes of urban decline and to establish a vision for Britain's cities based on the principles of design excellence, social well-being and environmental responsibility (Urban Task Force, 1999). This sat with the then Labour Government's wider spatial strategy, which saw it establish Regional Development Agencies (RDAs) as well as focus upon the future of UK cities.

Chaired by Lord Richard Rogers and including among its members well-known luminaries such as Sir Peter Hall and Professor Anne Power, as well as lesser known officials, in June 1999 the Task Force launched its report, *Towards an urban renaissance*. Consisting of over 300 pages, it contained over 100 recommendations across a wide range of areas related to UK cities. It used the postcard as a device to convey those locations members of the Task Force visited and from where they learnt. One was from Chicago. It argued "[w]e were ... impressed on our visit to the United States ... [with] the TIF scheme ... [we] believe this approach has much to commend it" (Urban Task Force, 1999: 285), an example of "policy tourism", which involves the "re-scripting of places, the reassembling of cities out of the bits and pieces that are visited" (Gonzalez, 2011: 1400; see also Ward, 2011). Amsterdam, Barcelona and Manchester were also visited by the Task Force as it sought to learn from the

experiences of elsewhere. The advantages of this way of working were clear to those involved, particularly in the pre-internet era:

I definitely think there were massive advantages in going to them. First of all I think when you go to a place you actually spend time and most of these study visits they vary between two and four days and you do it very intensively. What you pick up on is actually the energy, the political dynamics, the relationships that have actually underpinned the things that have happened rather than just the theory, you know, or the philosophy that might underpin what's happened and I think it's much richer than just where you're trying to research them from a distance. (Interview #74, London, May 2012)

As someone who took part in the visit noted about the importance of Chicago vis-à-vis how the experiences from the other visits featured in the report:

Chicago was probably the most influential in terms of the lessons. Because the first day the planners showed us kind of, some of the inner, very badly decayed, hollow core, and the industrial belt, and some declining homes ... but also some of the bits they were trying to redevelop. And, we had a little sort of discussion with them over dinner, and then the following day there was this breakfast think tank, which was extremely good, and I think that's where we picked up a lot of the ideas ... and they filtered into the report. (Interview #47, London, March 2012)

It was clear to those involved that what was seen to have worked in Chicago could not simply be uprooted and introduced into the UK. Along the way, between Chicago and the UK, the two points on the map, there would be some unmaking and remaking work on elements of the model. It would arrive not as a finished "product" (Peck, 2011). Rather it would continue to be made and unmade over the following weeks and months, through conversations, discussions and presentations:

Certainly there were on-going conversations during the course of the visit and I can't say that going back we were probably on the red eye and were probably asleep. The conversation was on-going; the whole process was a conversation. It was the whole process was based on the iterative exchange of ideas and

building hypotheses and then testing hypotheses and refining them. (Interview #74, London, May 2012)

In terms of system-wide features, it was the differences between the US and the UK financial and legal contexts that demanded most attention according to those involved at the time. The extent to which the (contested) successes attributed to Chicago's (and other cities') use of TIF stemmed from the relatively decentralised governmental and tax-raising system in the USA was unclear. In all cases of policy mobility, isolating "what works" and making it mobile involves making decisions over what stays put. In addition, these are decisions over which those doing the rendering have incomplete control or imperfect information:

So the major issue at the time seemed to be that the property taxation system in the States was quite different from the one in the UK. So they had a much more buoyant tax base because they'd effectively re-valued much more frequently. So your ability to capture uplifts in value was much more immediate. So we were having very infrequent, slightly random basis re-evaluations. So that seemed to me to be the major problem of translation. (Interview #52, London, March 2012)

There was, though, confidence that the Chicago TIF model was one that could be adapted, modified and translated for use in the UK, not least because its US origins generated a largely receptive audience amongst UK policymakers. As Peck and Theodore (2001: 430) have argued, "inherited institutional structures, established political traditions, and extant policy conventions and discourses all operate to ensure a degree of continuity in the policy development process." As it was explained:

We just immediately thought that that was a process an approach that was translatable and we could see where the Treasury would have hang ups around it in terms of hypothecation and free riding and substitution effect. We felt that there was enough, if you could focus it on the right areas and given the previous UK history around enterprise zones where those same issues applied, we felt that it was a transferrable model. (Interview #74, London, May 2012)

In its subsequent follow up report, the Urban Task Force argued for the introduction of "TIF pilots"

(Urban Task Force, 2005: 3). This was understood as a way of mitigating some of the concerns expressed by policymakers and politicians over the introduction of a model with no track record in the UK. However, this was anything but a fast introduction. Slow-burner policy mobility might be more apt. As a member of the Urban Task Force commented, “What I didn’t realise was it would then take 12 years for everybody else to agree!” (Interview #74, London, May 2012).

A series of events and publications in the late 2000s took up this earlier work (All Party Urban Development Group, 2009; British Property Federation, 2008; Core Cities Group and the British Property Federation, 2010; Webber, 2010). This was part of a wider agenda advanced by a range of lobbyists and stakeholders. It argued for the devolution of various financial powers and responsibilities to UK cities. Most recently, it has culminated in a set of “deals” between combinations of English local authorities and UK central government (O’Brien and Pike, 2015). Comparisons and references to the US experience were made, unsurprisingly, reaffirming its status as the default site from which to learn about urban policy (Barnekov et al., 1989; Wolman, 1992). The work sustained the “momentum of policy development” (Peck and Theodore, 2001: 455). Favourable and supportive national conditions were established for the interest in TIF by UK city governments and others with a stake in local government finance and the reforming of the public sector.

In April 2010, the then UK Labour Government committed £120m over 2011–2012 to pilot some TIF schemes. English cities, such as Birmingham and Leeds, experimented with what were called Accelerated Development Zones (ADZs). These were to be “based on TIF in ... [the] ... US” (Howl, n.d.: 5), sharing many financial and governance characteristics with their transatlantic predecessors. Specifically, areas would be ring-fenced, business rates (or Non Domestic Rates) frozen and a proportion of any growth would be retained by city government, while the rest accrued to central government and the Treasury as per usual. Although none of the ADZs actually came into existence, their business cases simply reinforced and underscored the earlier work done by the likes of the British Property Federation (BPF),

Pricewaterhousecooper (PWC) and the Core Cities Group, a point made by Webber (2010: 1) when he argued at the time that “[t]he possibility of introducing TIF in England has been under discussion for some time (among think-tanks at least).” The May 2010 formation of the UK’s Coalition Government saw the introduction of a form of “localism” (Clarke and Cochrane, 2013). An important element centred on the potential to empower cities financially, allowing them to retain a proportion of whatever uplift in taxation they were able to generate. In the case of TIF, the then Deputy Prime Minister Nick Clegg MP, at his party’s annual conference on Monday 20 September 2010, outlined publicly for the first time the Coalition Government’s position, and subsequently consulted over potential changes in local government borrowing and finance. For example, in 2012 it published the *Local Government Finance Act*, which contained details of its approach to TIF, and the new ways in which local business rates (or Non Domestic Rates) would be distributed between central and local government. So, the national institutional system was established for the possible introduction of TIF districts in the UK.

### *Talking TIF and urban antecedence II: Edinburgh, 2011–2012*

The development of Edinburgh’s waterfront between Leith and Granton is a major opportunity for Scotland’s capital city ... Edinburgh’s waterfront can become a tourism gateway for the wider city region and Scotland ... Attracting new investment to Edinburgh is critical to the city’s sustainable growth and lies at the heart of the Council’s economic development strategy. (Edinburgh City Council, 2010: 6–7)

To the north of the centre of Edinburgh is the port and waterfront of Leith. Once a thriving economic and social hub, since the 1980s it has witnessed the sort of restructuring that has been experienced by many ports around the world. Despite numerous and regular attempts at redevelopment, the 144 hectare site remains partially derelict and partially developed.<sup>3</sup> There were three ways in which those involved in assembling the case for an Edinburgh TIF came to know about the model’s “own histories and geographies” (Peck, 2011: 792). That is, those relations with



elsewhere that were drawn upon in its “local” arriving and making up (Robinson, 2015; Ward, 2006). Some of the reasons those involved in Edinburgh gave for exploring the potential use of TIF echoed the language used by those who done the earlier work of introducing into it the UK policy realm. This centred on the existence of a “gap” of sorts around “finance” or “money” that needed to be filled in order to “unlock” growth (All Party Urban Development Group, 2009; Core Cities and Pricewaterhousecoopers (PWC), 2008). Turning to how those in Edinburgh came to know about the model, first, there was an acknowledgment of the earlier work done in the UK:

TIF was being mooted as a means of unblocking obstacles to development caused typically by infrastructure requirements ... So we see it as a means to unlock development and therefore to recoup the benefits, bringing in additional business rates into the particular zone in question ... We researched it. I mean TIF of course is an idea, as you say, in the 50s in America it was looked at very closely indeed in the late 90s by the Rogers Commission or Taskforce I think it was called at the time. And the UK Government of that period did come out with some sort of local tax reinvestment policy ... there is a history. It wasn't quite there, so I mean it has been looked at very closely at a number of levels beforehand. We researched the evidence from the United States ... So we used that as an evidence base, and we looked at the pros and cons, we looked different forms of TIF at that time. (Interview#8, Edinburgh, November 2011)

Second was through the first-hand experience of its use in the USA. Not, in this case, in Chicago but rather in San Francisco, California. Here those from Edinburgh had the chance to meet those in the Governor's Office, to hear more about the state's use of TIF, and how there was a sense that they “cooked their books and [had] overdone it” (Interview #3, Edinburgh, July 2011). What was learnt through this example of “policy tourism” was then discussed and folded into preparations for the establishment of the Edinburgh TIF. The benefits of talking to those involved, seeing the types of projects that had been paid for and reflecting upon the limits to the model both in terms of its current and its future usage were outlined:

You get these connections where you can start to communicate with people from a common understanding,

because you're not just being some bod from the other side of the world, trying to pick your brain and get a leg up, without having to sort of pay for consultancy or whatever it might be. So there is sort of a common cause amongst many public sector groups to try and establish a common understanding, try and establish that almost a benchmark of where we should be, what we should be doing, what are the best models to use. (Interview #3, Edinburgh, July 2011)

Third was through those involved drawing upon experiences acquired in past occupations. As Lerner and Laurie (2010) argue, those who make policy, whether activists, consultants, politicians, policy-makers or technocrats, accumulate expertise, knowledge and understanding over the course of their working biography, as was explained:

Well in my case, in a previous life with [another economic development organisation in Scotland] I was involved at looking at some research and innovative funding methods for infrastructure, and in 2005, with a colleague, I made a one week study visit to the States and met a couple of planning directors and talked about TIF. (Interview #6, Edinburgh, July 2011)

Thinking of this sort was given an extra focus with the onset of the Great Recession of the late 2000s:

The kind of logic that took us into TIF as a model was the recognition that the private sector has stopped investing, the recognition that the public sector is on a journey of deficit reduction, and therefore we don't have discretionary funds...and that fact that we don't have significant savings tucked away. So if you can't invest from savings, if you can't invest on the back of current income because it's all committed ... then your only option is to look to the future and believe that there will be growth, and if you can accelerate that growth and if you can look at, you know, this is a line of development, if you like, with notice, but if that line increases you know, with TIF, then your borrowing... the kind of gap and the incremental revenues between the two...so development happens faster than it would otherwise happen, and the benefits to the city are greater. (Interview #6, Edinburgh, July 2011)

In the case of Edinburgh, as it is in similar redevelopment schemes around the world, private consultancies were present in the politics around the

potential use of TIF (Peck, 2005; Ward, 2006). Remember it has been argued that in Chicago, consultants were involved in a variety of market-making activities (Baker et al., 2016; Pacewicz, 2013). One in particular made its presence felt in Edinburgh, according to those involved. PWC made use of its geographical reach, including its presence in the USA. Far from being neutral or simply recording and representing the US experience, however, PWC inserted itself in the wider policy-making environment through its work in translating “evidence” to render TIF appropriate for use in Edinburgh. To local policy-makers, PWC served to make TIF possible:

PWC were knocking on our door saying, they were aware of the TIF products, or the TIF experience of North America and, so, I recruited PWC to do some early work, so, it was PWC and the Council, working together, dusting off what the theory was, adapting it for the Scottish politics and the politics of potential borrowing, the politics around central Government grant or no grant, central Government ability to offer some comfort guarantees, or not, what was devolved, what was not, in terms of Westminster, to the Council, what was retained, all became quite complicated territory. (Interview #12, Edinburgh, January 2012)

A senior figure at a professional trade organisation-cum-think tank who had been involved in writing one of the reference documents at the end of the 2000s explained how the US experiences were important. This was learning-at-a-distance via podcasts, power-points, presentations and websites, reinforcing argument that “the fleeting, the ephemeral, the geographically distributed and the suddenly proximate are of increasing importance.”

### **Urban policy mobility studies: Taking stock and moving forward**

So, how are we to understand the three vignettes and what they might reveal more generally about urban futures, financial or otherwise? The three short accounts of the making up of a particular policy around finance and redevelopment in geographically discrete locations, at different periods of time, are topologically at least related in terms of spaces of

policy-making. Chicago in the mid-1990s, the UK in the late 1990s and early 2000s and Edinburgh in Scotland in the late 2000s: the time-space connective tissue that binds these three together is revealed in different archives and through the words of those involved in rendering the TIF model mobile, assessing, editing, mediating, reflecting and translating. In addition, this is not an isolated example of how and where goes into the arriving at policy in cities around the world. There is a growing literature outlining similar work being done across a whole range of geographies and policy fields, termed by Jacobs (2012: 418), “urban policy mobility studies”, an important presence in broader relational urban geographical scholarship. This is both critical and post-positivist for the most part and includes examples of movement amongst and between cities of the global north and global south. The literature avoids the presentism-trap, historicising the contemporary focus on urban policy-making while acknowledging a wider historical perspective.<sup>4</sup> This includes those policies that work against as well as with the neo-liberal grain, an element of which is the financialisation of urban politics embodied in the growing use of land-use value capture mechanism, such as TIF (Halbert and Attuyer, 2016).

These urban policy mobility studies take their intellectual nourishment from three longer standing fields, as a series of reviews have outlined in recent years (McCann and Ward, 2012, 2013; Temenos and McCann, 2013). Firstly, these studies have taken aim at more traditional accounts of urban policy and politics. While generative and insightful, this earlier work has tended to privilege proximate relations over those from further afar. That is a focus rooted in a topographical conceptualisation of space. Secondly, urban policy mobility studies also junk the positivist/rationalist-formalist work on policy transfer, and replaces it with a post-positivist/rationalist-constructionist approach (McCann and Ward, 2012, 2013; Peck, 2011). The third and final field upon which these urban policy mobility studies draw is that on mobilities, an inter-disciplinary area that itself is relatively new in existence (Cresswell, 2010a, 2010b). This conceives of mobility as a process infused with meaning and power. It sets the terms of analysis to encompass more than the movement of

people and objects from A to B, rejecting “desocialised movement” (Cresswell, 2001: 14) and instead focusing on the practices, the politics and the power embodied in the mobility. The emergence of the urban policy mobility studies sub-field continues to be well captured and documented in critical reviews, of course (McCann, 2011; McCann and Ward, 2010, 2012, 2013; Peck, 2011; Temenos and McCann, 2013), while the number of empirical studies that offer methodological and theoretical refinements shows no signs of abating. These range from those on bus rapid transport (Sengers and Raven, 2015; Wood, 2015, 2016) to creativity (Cohen, 2014; Oancă, 2015; Prince, 2010), economic development (Baker et al., 2016; Cook, 2008; Cook and Ward, 2011; Stein et al., 2017; Ward, 2006, 2018) to harm reduction (Longhurst and McCann, 2016; McCann, 2008; Temenos, 2016); planning (Clifford and Morphet, 2015; Cook et al., 2014; Healey and Upton, 2011; Swanson, 2013) to smart cities (Crivello, 2015; Wiig, 2015); security (Machold, 2015, 2016) to sustainable urbanism/eco-cities (Blok, 2012; Chang, 2017; Chang and Sheppard, 2013; Hult, 2015; McKenzie et al., 2015; McLean and Borén, 2015; Müller, 2015; Pow and Neo, 2015; Rapoport, 2015; Rapoport and Hult, 2017). Through this geographically and thematically rich set of case studies we now have a fuller appreciation of the range of cities implicated in the connections and relations through which models of one sort or another are fashioned and forged, given “license to travel” (Pow, 2014: 287). That is not to say that all cities and their experiences are equal in terms of how they are imagined and represented amongst those who would make policy. They are not, and while there is growing evidence of the movement of expertise, knowledge and models amongst some cities of the global south and between some cities of the global south and some cities of the global north, these examples still remain a minority (Bunnell and Das, 2010; Chua, 2011; Peck and Theodore, 2010b; Pow, 2014).

While characterised by notable differences, as one might expect from such a heterogenous field that draws upon contributions from anthropology, cultural studies, environmental studies, history, human geography, planning, political science and sociology, nevertheless it is possible to discern some important

points of connection and overlap. In the remainder of this section I outline and discuss eight using the three vignettes to push the existing understandings, while also using these understandings to analyse the various geographies and histories of play at, and in between, the examples of Chicago, the UK and Scotland. The purpose is both to take stock of the field and to outline where there is scope for it to be developed further.

First is the emphasis in urban policy mobility studies on how the making up and arriving at “urban” policies requires an understanding of the relational nature of place. Amongst human geographers it has long been axiomatic that place is fundamentally grounded, local and territorial. More recently that place is also in part constituted through its relations with other places and scales has become widely accepted (Allen et al., 1998; Massey, 1994). Rather than conceiving of these as opposites, the territorial and the relational, work in this vein on urban policy-making has understood them as mutually constituting. In the case of Edinburgh, for example, work around the TIF involved city government negotiating with “local” land owners in order to assemble land parcels against which capital could be borrowed and a debt established, as well as drawing upon evidence and experience from elsewhere, as the geographically proximate and distant were folded in upon one and other. There was a clear territorial element to the city’s TIF proposal. As others have argued:

There are seemingly few policy ideas more ‘grounded’ and fixed than TIF. It is a policy with a clearly-defined territorial extent, intent on maintaining and developing local physical infrastructures. (Baker et al., 2016: 460–461)

Second is an attention to what happens between those locations or sites, on the journeys taken by models. Unlike the early work on policy transfer, the emphasis in policy mobilities seeks to underscore that the distance between points on a maps is central to the construction of any “model”. Far from pre-existing, waiting to be discovered fully formed and internally coherent, models are in part made through their travels. The work that happens along the

way involves various acts of interpretation and translation as actors of varying geographical reach seek to arrive at a particular “local” urban policy. This is a profoundly social and spatial process, often ideological and political in nature, which rejects the “accounts of rationally selected best (or better) practices moving between jurisdictional spaces” (Peck, 2011: 774). Those involved in the example of policy tourism (Gonzalez, 2011; Ward, 2011), where policymakers and practitioners visited Chicago to hear about the city’s particular approach to redevelopment, explained how much work they did between visiting the city and generating the report, *Towards an urban renaissance*. Arguments, discussions, negotiations, note-taking, reflections: all occurred as what was taken from the Chicago TIF experience was reinterpreted and translated multiple times in an effort to render it in synch with the prevailing financial, governmental and legal systems in the UK.

Third is the sensibility to the ways in which mobility and mutation are simultaneous processes. That is, the ways in which policies are constituted and reconstituted over the course of the various travels. For Peck (2011: 2), “the movement of policy is more merely than a transaction or transfer, but entails the relational interpretation of policy-making sites and activities.” Jacobs (2012: 418) argues that translation “brings into view not only the work required for a thing to reach one point from another, but also the multiplicity of add-ons that contribute, often in unpredictable and varying ways, to transportation, arrival, adoption and ... non-arrival and non-adoption.” So, far from models or policies being identified and moved from one location to another, this approach argues that in part the model or policy is made through the identification and movement. These are not separate but rather mutually constitutive episodes in a longer process of the making of policy. So, over a number of months those who visited Chicago worked with others on the Task Force and with some of those inside the UK central government to translate what they heard and saw into one of its “key proposals” (Urban Task Force, 1999). This involved restructuring the model in order to render it present and proximate. Likewise, in the case of assembling the Edinburgh TIF, those who reported back what they took from their visit to

California did so while at the same time reinterpreting it for the Scottish property tax system.

Fourthly, within the field there is an awareness of the range of social actors who participate in the mutually constitutive process of producing and moving policies and their location in and across institutional contexts. “The imperative ... remains to consider the full spectrum of expertise” according to Larner and Laurie (2010: 224). This range of stakeholders in the policy movement process, particularly “the enlarged roles for intermediaries” (Peck, 2011: 773), such as consultants, marks a departure from previous eras of policy mobility, where professionals such as architects, engineers and planners, together with their representative organisations, tended to dominate (Cook et al., 2014; Harris and Moore, 2013). This requires a need to acknowledge the role of activists on the one hand, and of consultants on the other, some of whom are primarily – but not exclusively – “local” while others are less geographically anchored (Longhurst and McCann, 2016; Temenos, 2016). In the case of Chicago, a range of actors, including community activists and neighbourhood associations on the one hand, and private sector economic and financial consultants on the other, were involved in the generation of the TIF model from which others looked to learn (Urban Task Force, 1999; Weber, 2010).

Fifth is the work in this field that highlights how cities are rendered comparable. According to Larner and Le Heron (2002: 417), in recent years “the global has become more knowable by placing the experiences and performances of others into quantitatively and qualitatively encoded proximity.” Cities are the centre of this new knowable global context. Through the process of translation – the means through which governance is performed over a distance – cities (or particular bits of them in some cases) are brought into line, the unknown rendered both knowable and comparable. Perhaps the most well-known example of this is benchmarking. This process reduces urban complexity to a series of numbers, bringing into comparative co-existence territories from around the world. Cities are then ranked alongside one another (McCann, 2004). As a result, the act of comparison becomes a particularly political act (was it ever really anything other?). As a consequence, “‘local’

policy development now occurs in a self-consciously comparative ... context” (Peck, 2003: 229). Key Performance Indicators – which are the most common and globally well-known benchmarking technology – are no longer just the talk of corporate managers. They make comparison and ranking easier, while reducing it to a technocratic exercise and masking the politics behind the generation of the indicators. In the case of Chicago, it and others with a stake in the use of TIF and other financial models compared its use with that of other US cities.

Sixth is the role of people as infrastructure in the arriving and making up of policies. While many types of infrastructure condition and shape urban policy mobilities, including the “informational infrastructure” of which McCann (2011) writes, here I want to make a different contribution. In his work on African cities, AbdouMaliq Simone (2004: 407) notes that “[i]nfrastructure is commonly understood in physical terms”. Using ethnographic methods he makes an argument for an alternative conceptualisation of “infrastructure”. As he puts it:

I wish to extend the notion of infrastructure directly to people’s activities in the city. African cities are characterised by incessantly flexible, mobile, and provisional intersections of residents that operate without clearly delineated notions of how the city is to be inhabited and used. These intersections, particularly in the last two decades, have depended on the ability of residents to engage complex combinations of objects, spaces, persons and practices. These conjunctions become an infrastructure – a platform providing for and reproducing life in the city.

In the case of the rendering of policies mobile, the emphasis on the embodied and performative nature of the work done brings centre stage the importance of how people communicate and interact, of the various objects, spaces, technologies and times that facilitate these various intersections. This invokes a “relational sense of infrastructure” (Leigh Starr, 1999: 382), one *of* the city if not *in* the city. For example, the work done by those involved in various ways in the generation and circulation of the *Towards an urban renaissance* report, the conversations had, the documents shared, the meetings held, the press releases written, the knowable and the unknowable,

the ephemeral and fleeting as well as the stable and tangible, together provides a structure of support, an infrastructure of sorts.

Seventhly, this field highlights the role of those “sites of encounter, persuasion, and motivation” (Temenos and McCann, 2013: 346), of “learning and exchange” (Temenos, 2016: 127), such as conferences, seminars, summits or workshops that are understood as temporary and that draw together people from particular epistemic communities for face-to-face interaction and the exchange of verbal, visual and symbolic information (Cook and Ward, 2012; Temenos, 2016). These events involve different notions of expertise and understanding being performed, making them active forces in the transforming of the policy-making environments of which they were part as opposed to simply reflecting them. In the case of the UK, the mid-2000s saw a range of conferences organised around local government finance and the possible use of TIF. Experiences from far and near were compared, the work of translation done at events such as the SOCINVEST Innovations in Regeneration Finance annual events that ran from 2007 to 2013, examples of the at-work “topological spatialities” (Robinson, 2015: 831).

Eighthly, and finally, is the continued importance of territoriality in the arriving at, and making up of, urban policies. While work in this field emphasises the relational and the topological, it does so acknowledging the contradictory nature of policy-making, the tension between policy as relational and dynamic, on the one hand, and fixed and territorial, on the other (Harvey, 1982; McCann and Ward, 2011). Nowhere is this clearer than in the political economy of land use and the use of value capture mechanisms, such as TIF. In the case of Chicago, the initial use of TIF did not occur in the most blighted areas. The poorest neighbourhoods, predominately to the south of the city, remained largely blighted and deprived. These were also largely African American neighbourhoods, understood to be too financially risky for the use of TIF. It was instead others, where the financial and political calculations identified them as easier-to-reach areas, in which TIF was used. This created the pre-conditions for gentrification and land speculation, as city government led the revitalisation of particular neighbourhoods (Bentacur, 2002,

Betancur, 2011; Hwang and Sampson, 2014; Wilson and Grammenos, 2005). In the case of Edinburgh, it was the promise of increased land value on the waterfront that was behind the area's selection for a TIF. One significant effect of this has been that the use of TIF has tended to reproduce rather than address intra-urban spatial inequalities.

## Conclusion

Thinking through contemporary ways in which cities relate to one another raises some important questions about how it is that urban policy is made up and arrived at in particular locations (Robinson, 2015; Ward, 2006). In many instances, this involves the bringing together of the global and the urban. This is about the complex realities of urban governance and urban politics. No longer is it either possible or desirable to imagine the world through lenses that implicitly or explicitly locate things within nested scalar hierarchies. The focus on relations between cities and the work involved in making urban policy acknowledges the extent to which urban politics by its very nature incorporates actors and interests that are often understood to be located elsewhere, although that elsewhere is always somewhere, so to speak. As this paper has outlined, this leaves us with a number of insights as we think about conceptualising urban futures and I want to end on just two, related as they are to the field of urban policy mobility studies.

The first is that urban policy and politics cannot and should not be taken as given. Or, put differently, it is not straightforward to define them as scientific objects of study. There is no formula that will fix them in place and explain their operation as flowing from some necessary set of relations. Instead, they are part of an ongoing set of processes of making and remaking. That is, they are generated, assembled if you like, in particular ways at particular times in specific locations.

The second insight is that urban politics cannot just be approached through place (although its placing is important, of course) but is also global or international in a much deeper sense – because of the extent to which it is based on systems of comparing, borrowing, exchanging, imitating, learning,

reinterpreting and translating. For, as Massey (1991: 28) argued many years ago, place must be “imagined as articulated moments in networks of social relations and understandings, but where a large proportion of those relations, experiences and understandings are constructed on a far larger scale than what we happen to define for that moment as the place itself.”

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## Notes

1. It is important to note that Chicago was not the first city to use TIF (Johnson and Mann, 2001). The model originated in California in the early 1950s, one of a number of strategies established to allow the State to address urban blight. However, even while named as an “origin”, this model has antecedences in the form of other ways that US cities and states have used borrowing and debt to economic development. The point of this paper is not, though, to identify a particular point of origin for TIF.
2. See also: <http://chicago.github.io/annual-financial-analysis/TIF/>
3. For more on the local politics around the various redevelopment strategies pursued by Edinburgh City Council and other local and national stakeholders, see Ward (2018).
4. This field also acknowledges that there is a long history to cities and those that govern and plan them

learning from each other. UK architects, engineers and planners, for example, have long visited other country's cities, either "exporting" or "importing" methods and techniques. A scholarship, particularly in urban planning, exists and is drawn upon in studies of more contemporary urban policy mobility (Healey and Upton, 2010; Harris and Moore, 2013; Nasr and Volait, 2003; Stanek, 2012a, 2012b).

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