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# The Governmentality of Municipal Politics: **Neoliberal Consensus at the Port Moody City Hall**

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## ABSTRACT

**M**y ethnographic research project presents analysis of local municipal council decision-making and discourse in the context of neoliberalism, understood as an ideology and practice privileging efficiency and profit-driven growth over policies of social justice. In the City of Port Moody, I observed processes of consensus-formation at four Council meetings and multiple small committee meetings, and interviewed three Council members and three candidates in the months of October-November 2011, leading up to the Nov. 19th municipal election. I employed content and archival analysis to interpret City-produced meeting minutes and official publications, candidate-produced campaign brochures, and media-produced local newspaper articles, including how campaign photos were visually presented. Discourse at City Hall centered on the role of state planning of infrastructure and services to stimulate economic growth, yet also centered on the need for prudent financial management and fiscal discipline, framing the citizen as tax-payer. The articulation of a 'smart growth' paradigm sought to increase quality of life by synthesizing notions of sustainability and capitalist growth in a legitimate way. Finally, Port Moody's adoption of the "City of the Arts" label was associated with the accumulation of cultural capital and the preservation of 'small town charm,' which would lead to tourism and investment, increasing the municipal tax-base of the City.

**Keywords:** local governance consensus, neoliberal project, smart growth, governmentality, cultural capital accumulation

## **INTRODUCTION:**

While “neoliberalism” has been a common theme in accounts of state activity since the 1980’s, there is some doubt regarding how this political-economic ideology and practice may affect the activities of local-level decision-making, such as municipal councils. In the context of state policy and government, neoliberalism advocates market-based solutions to social problems and a prudent, austere approach to managing state resources, especially in times of crisis. Given that North America is in the middle of an historic world recession, that Port Moody has won several awards for “fiscal sustainability,” and that a municipal election was taking place on November 19th, 2011, the City Hall at Port Moody constituted an excellent research site to observe the articulation and ‘micro-politics’ of the neoliberal project. In my ethnographic research carried out over a period of ten weeks, I explore the nature of the relationship between the discourse of my local municipal government and the ideology and practices of neoliberalism, seeking to show how the actions of the City Council may contradict or conform to the neoliberal project as a whole.

## LITERATURE ON NEOLIBERALISM, THE CAPITALIST STATE, AND LOCAL GOVERNANCE

Since the late 1970's, the redistributive and welfare functions of the Canadian state have significantly declined and a neoliberal model has become a common project to most levels of state governance. At a basic level, neoliberalism has effected a shift toward privatization, economic deregulation, regressive taxation, and individual self-responsibility in public agendas, debates, policies, and programmes (Teepie 2000). The state, in the present moment, is primarily concerned with assisting the process of capital accumulation, i.e., the ever-expanding production, appropriation and re-investment of surplus-value (profit) through contractual relationships of private property on the market. The political-economic practice of neoliberalism depends on an emergent mode of production based on computers and information, organized through supra-national circuits of capital circulation and economic institutions or frameworks, e.g., WTO, World Bank, IMF, and Bank of International Settlements, which are capable of tapping new forms of (economic, cultural, social, human) capital for expanded reproduction. At the paradigmatic level, Alison J. Ayers and Alfredo Saad-Filho (2008) suggest three economic axioms that underlie all neoliberal political projects: first, that at the microeconomic level, the market is considered more efficient than the state in decision-making, and simply requires a legal foundation to be put in place; second, that at the macroeconomic level, processes of globalization and uninhibited capital flows constrain domestic policies to the short-term interests of market growth; and third, that the authority of financial markets should be institutionalized in the form of monetarist macroeconomic policies, with interest rates serving to effectively discipline national and sub-national populations (122-3).<sup>1</sup> Neoliberalism is the dominant theory and practice of capitalism

after the demise of effective welfare state policies; but while it is often associated with de-regulation, it in fact involves practices of rationalized state intervention to manage economic crises, by stimulating growth and capital accumulation, as well as normalizing self-discipline.

In order for the capitalist mode of production to 'function' in the interests of capital accumulation and the capitalist class, according to some neo-Marxists, a relatively independent state is required to lay the foundations for market exchange and provide opportunities for achieving legitimacy through consensus. The state is crucial in its capacity for providing infrastructure, a legal framework, and a deliberative body for capitalists to organize their general interests. Despite its coercive capacities, the state seeks consent from its citizens in the form of a hegemonic "illusory general community" where disagreement is tamed, minimized, or overcome (Marx 1978, 160). However, this does not imply that state policies are always able to successfully reproduce the ideal conditions of capital accumulation. As Wright (1978) points out, the state may be forced, under certain circumstances, to implement policies and assume forms that are contrary to the functional reproduction of the capitalist system, because it is locked into a "mode of determination" by class struggles and changing class structures (22). In the Marxist view of politics, the state is an essential dimension of class relationships and central to the process of accumulation: while it may have a degree of independence, it does not operate in a separate 'sphere' with its own internal logic. Others have pointed out that the neoliberal state is involved in constructing political identities, or in governing self- and self-other relationships in civil society: e.g., the

<sup>1</sup> Monetary policies are also known as "supply-side," anti-inflationary, and market-based policies designed to foster capital accumulation via minimizing unproductive capital allocation. Fiscal policies, by contrast, characterize the "demand-side," or Keynesian, welfare state era of capitalism, which emphasized the origin of capital accumulation crisis in the inability of workers and citizens to consume sufficient amounts of products to avoid overproduction, and sought to generate full employment.

They are marked in the period of neoliberalism by the appointment of Paul Volcker to the United States Federal Reserve (Harvey 2005, 23-5).

re-conception of the individual's role in 'their own' welfare (as self-responsible) and in shaping economic processes as consumer-citizens (cf. Foucault 2008; Larner 2003; Munck 2005, 65). Analyses of governmentality, inspired by Michel Foucault, are ultimately consistent with those from the Marxist tradition in their analysis of the ways in which governmental rationality legitimizes itself (in the modern liberal period) with reference to the "rational" behaviour of the economic agents in civil society (Foucault 2008, 310-12). The ever-present assumption guiding neoliberal activity is that people are always self-interested capitalists (*homo economicus*), and that therefore, the state is irrational unless it intervenes to preserve this internal logic.

While neoliberalism is made possible by a changing global division of labour that has increased mobile capital's power to demand political concessions, there has also been an emphasis in the literature on uneven geographical development, and hence, local contingency. For example, Hackword and Moriah (2006) detail how, despite the ideological force of neoliberal doctrines, some contingency existed in the formulation of social housing policy in Ontario. Although the municipal form of the state has limited autonomy, and is burdened with increased decision-making responsibility (McBride and McNutt 2007), it is potentially more responsive to grassroots, local concerns than other forms of governance and administration. In practice, at least in England, it has served a site where socialist experiments were implemented (Harvey 2005; Teeple 2000, 108).<sup>2</sup> Due to the contradictory need to rationally oversee economic growth at the same time as to limit state revenues and capacities, 'programmatic' policy consensus should not be assumed, as governance strategies may be more dependent on civil society organizations, or as Munck (2003) conceives it, "the 'post-political"

steering of the political process toward less directive, more networked, modalities than in the past" (67; cf. Harvey 2005, 64-86). While there is no shortage of research on neoliberal governmentality in cities (Keil 2002), there is insufficient attention to neoliberal municipal governance strategies, despite some notable examples (e.g., Slater 2004). Ethnographic research can reveal the contradictions in the different applications of neoliberalism in concrete political settings, comparing a collection of qualitative 'data' with neo-Marxist and Foucauldian theories of the capitalist state.

## RESEARCH SITE AND METHODS

The site of my research was the Port Moody City Hall. The City Hall is a large building connected to the City Library and at the crossroads of the major roads and residential shopping centres in the city of Port Moody. The Council Chambers is a 200-seat, sloping auditorium with a speaker's desk at the front of the audience, a press gallery on the right side in front of the audience, and a raised platform in the front stage, with two rows of Councillors' tables on either side of the Mayor's seat.<sup>3</sup> The Councillors' tables slant toward the center of the room and hide several councillors and City staff members from full view of the public. Council and Committee meetings are both open to the public, allowing me to easily gain access as a citizen and avoid needing signatures of consent for observations. I had no history of prior meeting attendance and was frequently the youngest person in the room. Thus, while I 'participated' by attending as a citizen, I was a distant observer in this context. It was also not possible to spend extended lengths of time observing in the main lounge of City Hall, since the night Receptionist

<sup>2</sup>Other authors working in this theoretical tradition note the resurgence of the concept of 'civil society' in connection to the proliferation of non-governmental organizations (NGO) in the governance process, e.g., non-profit and not-for-profit organizations, citizens' associations, interest groups, policy institutes, and 'expertise' (Sinha 2005).

<sup>3</sup>Formal rules are immediately visible in the Council Chambers: the Mayor is formally referred to as "Your Worship" while wearing a Mayoral insignia over his shoulders, bylaws are referred to in number format, and the Council as a whole follows Robert's Rules of Order very closely, e.g., requiring that all proposals be read three times, and "Moved, Seconded, and Carried," among other examples. In my experience as an undergraduate student union in the Department of Sociology/Anthropology, RRO tended to be unpopular and to prevent meetings from having attractive qualities that would draw greater numbers of undergraduates to attend. I was one of the small handful of undergraduates who volunteered to work within these formalities. However, in Port Moody City Council meetings, I was continually surprised by how strictly and abstractly RRO were followed.

(security guard) appeared visibly agitated whenever someone spent too much time in the lounge area - whistling, tapping his hands, and glancing over - whenever I attempted to make sustained observations.

Observations, a total of eleven hours over eight weeks, in the context of bi-weekly City Council meetings held in the Council Chambers and monthly committee meetings on the third-floor Brovold Room of City Hall, were based on a convenience sample of scheduled meetings.

The majority of meetings were an hour long or less, but involved many agenda items and speakers. During observations, I sought to note key figures who exercise political agency in decisions. This was part of my larger objective to understand the unfolding governance process, and the extent of consensus and participation to show how ideas were legitimated or taken for granted in municipal discourse. I attended two Council meetings in person (October 25th and November 8th), and analyzed the video footage of two additional meetings by watching them on Shaw Cable's 9 AM broadcast for roughly two hours of observation time. While I was generally an inactive observer, alienated from the jargon of meetings, during one Arts and Culture committee meeting I was called on by Councillor Geoff Neil to reveal my name and purpose of attending. Embarrassed at attending late, I blurted out that I was a Port Moody resident studying "how decision-making outcomes takes place at the municipal level, who is active, and what are the main concerns." Because one candidate did not textually indicate whether she wished her name to be revealed in the write-up, all Councillors and participants I interacted with were given pseudonyms except where (in the case of Mayor Trasolini) names were revealed through the titles of bibliographic sources. This was the case for Rachel Hudson, Lisa Onduron, Katherine Robertson, Amanda Wilson, Dave

Kaldor, Geoff Neil, and Ben Eastwood but not for the other election candidates.<sup>5</sup>

With three then-current Council members, I used semi-structured interviews, which allowed me to engage questions of identity/biography, governance theory and practice, views on socio-economics, and overall ideology in relation to their discursive associations between ideas. Due to their socialization as Council members in strict question-and-answer styles of analytical discussion, this was the most practical interview method. I selected Mayor Joe Trasolini, who has served in Council for 15 years, and two other long-term councillors representing what I perceived were "left" (Katherine Robertson) versus "right" (Amanda Wilson) political ideologies to examine the extent of ideological differences expressed at City Hall. The direction of the interview with Amanda Wilson, which emphasized sustainability initiatives in the context of rapid economic growth, also served as a cue to guide my selection of election candidates for interview toward those concerned with notions of 'smart growth.'

With candidates for the November 19th who had been answering questions on a range of issues and providing in-depth answers during campaigning activities, I conducted three less-structured interviews.<sup>6</sup> For two candidates, Dave Kaldor and Lisa Onduron, I conducted autobiographical interviews in which I asked them to narrate their biographies, in order to get a sense of the trajectory and life chances of individuals who seek positions of political authority at the municipal level. I also conducted one "oral history" interview with the Green Party candidate Rachel Hudson, asking her to narrate the major developments in governance in Port Moody in the last 15 years. Unfortunately, the candidate's memory of specific events was inconsistent at times, but overall, the unstructured interviews were as successful as the semi-structured interviews in revealing what concerned and motivated local municipal political agency.

<sup>4</sup> Two election candidates - Rachel Hudson and Lisa Onduron - also shared their frustration at the inaccessible nature of meetings to the non-participant, especially in the way bylaws are formally referred to in agendas and minutes with very little explanation of their content. Candidate Hudson proposed holding weekly drop-in discussion with residents of the city to help them make sense of issues and learn how to participate in Council decisions, but was not elected.

<sup>5</sup> Interviewees were asked to sign a consent form to share their background information (demographics) and views with me. Because one candidate did not textually indicate whether she wished her name to be revealed in the write-up, all participants were given pseudonyms except where (in the case of Mayor Trasolini) names were revealed through the titles of bibliographic sources.

<sup>6</sup> Again, interviewees were given "face sheets" to fill out about their demographic information, e.g., education level, household income level, and ties to different associations.

## ANALYSIS

### CONTRADICTIONARY IMPERATIVES OF ACCUMULATION AND STABILIZATION

Both the need to attract investment-capital to the city and to devote state revenue to constructing infrastructure projects stood out as imperatives for City Council, individual Councillors, and candidates for the municipal elections. A prime goal of neoliberal policy and economic orthodoxy is to sustain consistent growth and profitability for private owners of capital, and this becomes the object of economic development policies, mediated by the state's capacity for infrastructure and general planning (Saad-Filho 2005, 113-4).<sup>7</sup> A major focus of council activities in the period I observed was on maintaining and upgrading infrastructure in order to allow citizens commuting between the suburbs and the inner city of Vancouver to travel in a reasonable amount of time as well as to attract new investment to the city. Controlling the flow of traffic is necessary because Port Moody is the smallest city in the Tri-Cities but the main entry-point for cars travelling between suburbs and urban metropolitan areas (Rosemary Small, campaign brochure, <sup>3</sup>). Yet, at the same time, municipal budgets are consistently lower because of decreases in funding from federal and provincial governments (Katherine Robinson, interview, November <sup>9</sup>; McBride and McNutt 2007). Moreover, Mayor Joe Trasolini has refused to raise property taxes significantly in his two terms due to citizens' concerns during elections as well as his own rationality of governance (Trasolini 2008, 6; 2011, 5). According to a local newspaper article, if Port Moody decided to develop the connector themselves, it would cost the citizens an extra tax increase of 1.86% (Strandberg 2011). Thus, construction of both the Evergreen Line high-speed sky-train and the reconstruction of the

One of the most useful methods I undertook was archival and content analysis. I selected six articles from the local Tri-Cities and Now newspapers which mentioned Port Moody politics or government in their titles, as well as two pre-election editorials from residents. Moreover, I selected twelve (out of twenty-three) election candidate brochures from those received in my family's mailbox or as part of local Now and Tri-Cities newspapers. Meeting minutes and agendas from all City Council and committee meetings of Oct.-Nov. 2011 were available online through the City of Port Moody's archive, in addition to reports such as the Official Community Plan (2011), the Mayor's Inaugural Council Address (2008) and Annual Address to Council (2011), which I analyzed for content relating to neoliberal governance strategies. The ways in which political-economic ideas and decisions were presented and justified to the public was most clear through content and archival analysis.

Visual analysis was also conducted on the brochure photos submitted by candidates for the municipal election and the photos of the history of past Port Moody Councils at City Hall. The purpose of analyzing the self-presentation of municipal candidates was to understand how similar semiotic approaches might reflect similar concerns and contexts. The purpose of analyzing past City Council membership was to understand how the current City Councillors fit into the overall history and power structure of City Council. This would widen my understanding of the significance of their actions in context.

<sup>7</sup> However, neoliberal policies have in fact exacerbated long-term structural trends toward reduced economic growth and avoidance of inflations and crisis, as orthodox consensus policies "systematically favour large domestic and foreign capital, especially finance capital, at the expense of smaller capitals and workers" (Saad-Filho 2005, 116)

<sup>8</sup> Rosemary Small (unelected): [http://www.rosemarysmall.ca/The\\_Issues.html](http://www.rosemarysmall.ca/The_Issues.html)

Murray-Clarke overpass have been significantly delayed, in the case of the latter for over two decades. This has caused concern for Port Moody residents, yet, despite repeated promises, no Council has yet been able to implement the Murray-Clarke connector project since its policy enactment in 1991 at the regional level. Why would this be the case? Essentially, the state is called on to play roles it cannot reconcile, which is not surprising given the restructuring of local governance under neoliberalism (Teeples 2000, 107<sup>9</sup>). As predicted by the neo-Marxist literature there appears to be a gap between programmatic objectives and the contradictory manifestations of actual neoliberal policies and programmes in the case of municipal governance strategies in Port Moody.

### FRUGALITY AND EFFICIENCY AS 'GOOD GOVERNANCE'

It is theoretically interesting to find that although those serving in positions of decision-making power in the city of Port Moody do accept socio-economic values of efficiency, frugality, and private enterprise, their biographies do not unambiguously lead them to such values and practices. Participation in the "American Dream" of success (social mobility) through hard work, saving, small business ownership, financial responsibility, and educational attainment can shape the later attitudes and identities of individuals in making decisions despite their lower socio-economic position in earlier life.<sup>9</sup> The following is an excerpt from an interview

with Port Moody Mayor Giuseppe "Joe" Trasolini (November 10):

MM: *Did you ever worry about the poor or experience the fear of being poor when you were growing up?*

JT: *Worry about being poor? I was poor. My father was a construction worker and my mother was a factory worker in Italy. When you grow up like that you have to learn to save in whatever areas you can in order to make do with what you have. Then I came here when I was 16, went to British Columbia Institute of Technology, graduated with the highest grades in my cohort and got into the business world [with G. Trasolini Contractors Ltd. and Pug Investments Ltd.]*

MM: *Do you think that early experience of growing up poor influenced your approach to governance to a significant extent in terms of saving resources?*

JT: *Yes. I think so. You learn to become very 'frugal' and Port Moody was given an award for being the most frugal city in the Greater Vancouver Regional District for several years [referring to the government-sponsored Canadian Award for Financial Reporting, 2005-07, and the business-sponsored Most Fiscally Responsible City Award, 2008]. But it doesn't mean there is a limit on services. We still maintain some of the best facilities and streets around [points outside to Port Moody Recreation Centre]: it's beautiful in this city but we've done it on fewer resources so those two sides can be balanced.*

<sup>9</sup> In the film *Wall Street* (1987), billionaire financial tycoon Gordon Gekko tells his working class protégé Bud Fox the type of ideal person he seeks: "Give me guys that are poor, smart and hungry, and no feelings. You win a few, you lose a few, but you keep on fighting." This is in distinction to "those MBA types" who are presumably privileged and less hard-working.

If we analyze closer Mayor Trasolini's words, the idea emerges that if government operates more efficiently, like a corporation, it can provide better services with less revenue and taxation. As Trasolini says in his Inaugural Council Address (2008):

*As Mayor, I have taken the lead in the past by bringing a business approach to Port Moody's budget process and city expenditures. This approach is even more relevant today as we enter a time of financial hardship.*

Trasolini, like others I interviewed, became a wealthy businessman from lower-middle class origins, in his case, after immigrating to Canada from Italy in 1963 at age 16 and attending the British Columbia Institute of Technology. Mayor Trasolini presided over several agreements (such as the Port Moody Official Community Plan) that recognized affordable housing, job opportunities, and the availability of goods and services as part of a livable, "complete community" (OCP 2010, 52). As New Democratic Party of BC leader Adrian Dix stated, endorsing Trasolini as an NDP candidate in the next provincial election: "He understands business, he understands community, he understands working people" (Strandberg 2011b). A 'frugal' approach to financial management is also echoed by more "liberal or left" politicians" such as Katherine Robinson as well, a union steward and Labour Relations Board Chair, who commented on the challenges of keeping a "financial house" in order with less assistance from higher governmental bodies in an interview on November 9th:

*MM: Do you think that there's a lot of pressure in terms of having to manage budgets now?*

I concluded that the differences between left and right ideologies which had defined the era of the welfare state were mainly formal, rather than substantial or practical, in terms of real decision-making outcomes. Despite the 'participatory' rhetoric of local politics, all political actors must work within a framework which depends on steady capital accumulation to secure state revenues, whether or not this is ultimately successful.

### DEMOCRATIC PARTICIPATION

The discursive framing of citizens as taxpayers is part of an exclusionary process that exists alongside the openness of weekly Council meetings and Mayor's office hours. Content analysis of City Council candidate brochures for the Nov. 19th election showed that a major concern for the election was the allocation of "your dollar"<sup>10</sup> and "your tax dollars used wisely [over the next three years]."<sup>11</sup> To meet the citizen's needs, the successful Council member needs "a wealth of experience from corporate management,"<sup>12</sup> "a no-nonsense entrepreneurial approach,"<sup>13</sup> "strong business skills" (Zoe Royer, 2011 campaign brochure,<sup>4</sup>) and "prudent financial management" (George Broderick, 2011 campaign brochure:<sup>1</sup>). This is a strategy of governmentality, one which positions citizens ontologically as homo economicus: "homo economicus is an entrepreneur, an entrepreneur of himself...being for himself his own capital, being for himself his own producer, being for himself the source of [his] earnings" (Foucault 2008, 226). This defines the "enterprise-unit," i.e., the rational allocation of scarce resources to competing ends, as the basic element of all areas of society, making subjects increasingly predictable, i.e., governable (225, 268-71). At City Council meetings themselves, I noticed that expensive-looking vehicles were parked directly in front of the City Hall, in contrast to regular citizens' cars, which tended

<sup>10</sup> Shane Kennedy (unelected): [http://www.aprilroad.com/files/Shane\\_Kennedy\\_for\\_Port\\_Moody\\_Council.pdf](http://www.aprilroad.com/files/Shane_Kennedy_for_Port_Moody_Council.pdf)

<sup>11</sup> Gerry Nuttall (elected councillor): <http://www.gerrynuttall.ca/>

<sup>12</sup> Katie Kickbush (unelected Mayor): [http://www.bcdailybuzz.com/media/9064/Katie\\_Kickbush/](http://www.bcdailybuzz.com/media/9064/Katie_Kickbush/)

<sup>13</sup> Jimmy Malamas (unelected): <http://www.facebook.com/JimMalamasforCouncil?sk=info>

to be parked in the lot behind the library - on the other side of the building. Inside the doors of City Hall, I immediately noticed a dissonance between my 'normal' clothes and backpack, and the more expensive looking attire of the 'involved' citizens networking in a throng outside the Council Chamber doors. As expected by the neo-Marxist literature on neoliberalism, the Port Moody City Council is constrained by the pressure to maximize scarce resources and interpellates citizen-subjects to share this mentality in their activities, while involving informal barriers to full participation. While it is possible to resist the neoliberal political project through class struggle, it is also possible for citizens and workers to become more detached, i.e., 'post-political,' thus leaving political activity in the hands of 'expert' politicians, 'civil society' leaders, and program administrators.

### SMART GROWTH

Agendas for Council and committee meetings, as well as statements by candidates and councillors, are eager to promote sustainability under the paradigm of 'smart growth.' In an interview with conservative Councillor Amanda Wilson on Oct. 31st, she qualified her views as moderately conservative, in distinction to the "extreme" views of neo-conservative<sup>14</sup> groups like the Fraser Institute think tank:<sup>15</sup> thus, Wilson sought to pursue other, i.e., social and environmental goods, "so as to preserve our small-town charm." After my interview with Councillor Wilson, I took home a copy of a book lent to her by a co-worker entitled *Massive Change*, by Bruce Mau and the Institute Without Boundaries, to explore the meaning of the phrase she had pointed to me inside the cover: "it's not about the world of design, it's about the design of the world." The book reflects on modern society's dependence on rational design principles that mimic natural eco-systems to construct seamless life-worlds. It promotes "design economies" based on dynamism rather than stasis (e.g., circulations

and exchanges of information), in addition to interactive collaboration between designers and users in "the global commons," a concept highlighted by Rachel Hudson in my November 14th interview with her. The book embraces the paradoxes of technological welfare and "Third Way" thinking<sup>16</sup>, as opposed to "utopian" (i.e., left and right) political goals of improvement. As an example, it promotes urban densification, sustainable architecture (e.g., manufactured housing), digitally integrated worldwide networks, and the possibility of non-violent techno-warfare. Wilson's book openly promotes "colonizing what remains of the natural terrain" (2008, 47) but in conjunction with resource-management and systems-theory-grounded sustainability. This text is indicative of the context of municipal governance because as the Green candidate Rachel Hudson told me, Wilson was in her opinion one of the "most powerful," i.e., most socially and economically connected, politicians in the city, and she had been a member of the City Council for a considerable period of time (see Appendix below). The articulation of neoliberalism at the Port Moody City Hall is not fundamentally opposed to the state or social "intervention" as such, but against particular forms of the state which are deemed ineffective or destabilizing for general capitalist interests.

Despite her apparent enthusiasm to lend me her co-worker's book, it was initially unclear whether Amanda Wilson embraces the ideas inside it, or the ideas she speaks about (such as sustainability, green initiatives, etc.), as her first priority in Council meetings. Port Moody Mayor Joe Trasolini describes environmental issues as "in vogue and more important" in the last two decades. The book *Massive Change* promotes the idea that Wilson's principles of market growth and sustainability are indeed compatible, and Wilson enthusiastically shared her efforts to ban

<sup>14</sup> I understand "neo-conservative" and "neoliberal" to be very closely related phenomena, due to the fact that both advocate private ownership and a market economy with a social division of labour between workers and supervisors, managers, and investors.

The only difference is in how the two ideologies achieve this goal: whether through 'modernizing' or through quasi-traditional values and strategies.

<sup>15</sup> The Fraser Institute is a policy institution based in Vancouver advocating "a free and prosperous world through choice, markets and responsibility": <http://www.fraserinstitute.org/>.

<sup>16</sup> A "Third Way" approach to governance and development is an "irenic ideology" which synthesizes values of liberty (private property or capitalism) and equality (social welfare or "socialism"), the needs of both the global system and local contexts, and order and contingency. It resembles syntheses such as that found in contemporary

<sup>19</sup>Katie Kickbush interview:  
[http://www.bcdailybuzz.com/media/9064/Katie\\_Kickbush/](http://www.bcdailybuzz.com/media/9064/Katie_Kickbush/)

<sup>20</sup>At the very prolonged Arts and Culture committee meeting on November 7th, committee members in attendance debated how to get young citizens and parents of Port Moody involved in running the Youth Festival, in response to Manager of Cultural Services (Devin Jain's) concern that responsibility for the interdisciplinary theatre festival would be delegated to his administrative department. The uncertainty of volunteer support caused the committee to rescind its request for \$5000 of funding from City Council which it had previously agreed on. By contrast, the Tri-Cities Homelessness Task Force meeting of October 7th brought twenty-two people together from non-profit organizations such as Purpose Society, Laurel Foundation, and St. Andrews United Church. Homelessness represented a serious demographic concern for candidates such as Tom Bell and re-elected Councillor Bob Elliott. However, according to Teeple (2000, 112-4) and Sinha (2005, 163-9), this represents the increased reliance on private organizations to solve problems of social reproduction and reduce the demands of "social citizenship" in the context of the general decline of local government ability form substantive social policy under neoliberalism (2000, 107-8).

cosmetic pesticides and develop a community sustainability plan as evidence of her moderate governance philosophy. Another candidate and small businessperson, Dave Kaldor, whose green platform also embraces Port Moody's sustainability goals, told me that he had spoken on good terms with Wilson before our Nov. 15th interview. In our interview, he advocated local food autonomy as "good for economic development," an idea that was shared by other candidates, such as Mayoral candidate Katie Kickbush, who said that Port Moody needs to maintain "the overall look and feel [of a small town]" yet simultaneously to ensure "that economic growth that will help the sustainability of our community."<sup>19</sup> One rationale for controlled growth is that construction of the Evergreen Line rapid transit station threatens small businesses with a loss of revenue and inconvenience (Nuttall 2011; Small 2011), opening opportunities for finance capitalists to make speculative profits at the expense of the petite-bourgeoisie ("Mayor's Inaugural Address to Council," 2011, 6). Wilson's book and interview, and the statements by other local political actors seem to validate one another regarding smart growth, but the ideology itself (i.e., that of sustainability and profit-oriented economic growth) may be inherently contradictory. The city of Port Moody, and presumably other Canadian municipalities, seek investment-capital and growth, but only in certain 'responsible' forms.

## THE ACCUMULATION OF CULTURAL CAPITAL

The concerns of the Port Moody City Council to implement "arts and culture" objectives can also be traced to a profit-driven growth ideal, where cultural developments attract investment and human capital to the city on the basis of 'livability.' The City of Port Moody labels itself 'City of the Arts,' however, as two election candidates conveyed to me, there is little sense among citizens that the recent Councils have understood how to advertise cultural events, despite "our city's immense artistic talent" (Lisa Onduron, interview, November 15th; Dave Kaldor, interview, November 15th).<sup>20</sup> One possible reason for the city's attempt to brand itself in this way is to attract investment and expand local small business in its tourism industry. The increase of the city's cultural capital (Bourdieu 1986) is seen as a way of increasing economic capital (profits and revenue), at least in the view of Zoe Royer, another Council candidate, who was elected (2011 campaign brochure, 3). According to the Port Moody City website, the City also seeks to pull in more human capital, i.e., highly skilled labour, through this strategy. The contribution of these forms of capital to the reproduction of capitalist class relations can be seen in Chapter Ten of the Official Community Plan (OCP), entitled "Arts and Culture," which states that strategies of cultural capital accumulation should "contribute to Port Moody's economic life" (58). Finally, in the context of a November 2nd committee meeting on Economic Development, citizen David Spence requested that the 2011 Annual Report of the committee should mention the economic benefits of the City of the Arts 'brand' in its contents. Tasked with increasing economic growth, Councillors appear to be upholding the "City of the Arts" brand-label to increase the flow of capital into the city and benefit small-business projects.

<sup>19</sup>Katie Kickbush interview:  
[http://www.bcdailybuzz.com/media/9064/Katie\\_Kickbush/](http://www.bcdailybuzz.com/media/9064/Katie_Kickbush/)

<sup>20</sup>At the very prolonged Arts and Culture committee meeting on November 7th, committee members in attendance debated how to get young citizens and parents of Port Moody involved in running the Youth Festival, in response to Manager of Cultural Services (Devin Jain's) concern that responsibility for the interdisciplinary theatre festival would be delegated to his administrative department. The uncertainty of volunteer support caused the committee to rescind its request for \$5000 of funding from City Council which it had previously agreed on. By contrast, the Tri-Cities Homelessness Task Force meeting of October 7th brought twenty-two people together from non-profit organizations such as Purpose Society, Laurel Foundation, and St. Andrews United Church. Homelessness represented a serious demographic concern for candidates such as Tom Bell and re-elected Councillor Ben Eastwood. However, according to Teeple (2000, 112-4) and Sinha (2005, 163-9), this represents the increased reliance on private organizations to solve problems of social reproduction and reduce the demands of "social citizenship" in the context of the general decline of local government ability form substantive social policy under neoliberalism (2000, 107-8).

## CONCLUSION

My research sought to address to fill in gaps in the social scientific understanding of neoliberalism, which has, in the words of Wendy Larner (2000), "not paid a great deal of attention to the politics surrounding specific programmes and policies" (14). By focusing on the discourse at Port Moody City Hall, and of those active at City Hall, I have been able to link the common threads and "messy actualities" of several contradictory neoliberal projects: relating to infrastructure development, redefinition of the role of citizens and state through the subjectivity of the tax-payer and homo economicus, as well as to the environmental problematic and the accumulation of cultural capital through municipal identity. Most of these, in fact, encountered little resistance, partly because potential criticisms had already been integrated into the very form of proposals, and because municipal political participation was very low – e.g., 15% in the 2008-11 elections. Yet, the scope of state intervention was still substantially intact, aside from its reliance on voluntarism and 'civil society organizations' in decision-making. At the local level, the articulation of a neoliberal agenda – literally, in municipal meeting agendas - is balanced by the particular class fractions whose property interests are served by decisions. In the case of Port Moody, this did not lead to unrestrained capital accumulation or 'programmatically policy consensus,' but it did show strong evidence of neoliberal mentalities, concepts, rationalities and practices structuring notions of 'good governance' and political agency. At a personal level, factoring in my life course position, I can attest to a certain dissonance with these institutional channels and discursive contours to political activity left in me, and to questioning how autonomous local politics can really be in resisting the macro dynamics of neoliberal capital accumulation, if at all. Scaling capitalism down to the more 'homely' and 'small-town' level of the petite-bourgeoisie is not in itself a less intense form of abstract capital accumulation and reinvestment, since it is precisely the construct of the individual 'rational-actor' – as efficiency-maximizer in all areas of social life – which is most clearly embodied in this form of political-economic life.

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