Article

Reconstructing scale: Towards a new scalar politics

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Abstract

In recent years, the dominant political-economic approach to scale has been subject to critique from poststructuralist perspectives. In this paper, I argue that the charge of 'reification' has been accepted too readily, masking areas of conceptual overlap between political-economic and poststructural approaches, particularly in terms of their shared concern with the construction of scale. On this basis, I propose to replace the established concept of 'the politics of scale' with 'scalar politics', arguing that it is often not scale *per se* that is the prime object of contention, but rather specific processes and institutionalized practices that are themselves differentially scaled.

I Introduction

The 1990s witnessed the growth of an extensive literature on the political economy of scale in human geography (Brenner, 1998, 2001; Marston, 2000; Marston et al., 2005; Smith, 1993; Swyngedouw, 1997). In examining the social construction of scale through the strategies of various actors, movements and organizations, this research overturned the traditional conception of scales as fixed and external to social processes (McMaster and Sheppard, 2004). Since the early 2000s, however, the political economy of scale literature has been the subject of criticism from poststructural approaches which aim to develop a relational sense of space as open, multiple and becoming (Marston et al., 2005; Massey, 2005; Moore, 2008). From this perspective, research on scale seemed to cast social relations in overly hierarchical and fixed terms, invariably stressing the 'vertical' links between bounded territories (Amin, 2002;

Marston et al., 2005; Allen and Cochrane, 2007; Moore, 2008). As Paasi (2008: 406) observes, '[t]erritorially bounded spaces have been like a red rag to a bull for many relationalists – even though relational and territorial spaces may exist concomitantly'.

Most provocatively, Marston et al. (2005) call for a human geography without scale, arguing that scale invariably tends to privilege the global as the domain of causal processes over 'smaller' scales such as the local (urban), household and body which are bracketed with agency and practice. Accordingly, scalar thinking should be rejected in favour of 'flat ontologies' which emphasize the multiple linkages between key

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actors and sites within 'horizontal' networks (Marston et al., 2005). In a similar fashion, Thrift (2004: 59) argues that the 'absurd, scale-dependent notion' of space as a nested hierarchy of scales from 'global' to 'local' should be 'replaced by an emphasis on connectivity' (cf. Latour, 1993). Yet, while connectivity is of increasing importance and interest, 'we do … still live in a world of places, regions, nations and so forth' (Latham, 2002: 139). Moreover, as Kaiser and Nikiforova (2008: 538) argue, the excising of scale from critical human geography is likely to reinforce existing scalar relations and the unequal power structures which underpin them by returning scale to the natural, taken-for-granted status that it held prior to growth of research on the social construction of scale from the 1980s. In analytical terms, too, there is a need for ongoing conceptual interrogation of spatial categories such as scale in order to ensure that they are rendered 'theoretically visible' when encountered in particular temporal and spatial contexts (Paasi, 2004).

Reflecting a certain acceptance of its continuing relevance, current research on scale in human geography is comprised of two main strands. First, researchers are emphasizing the co-existence of 'multiple spatialities', based on the need to avoid privileging any particular dimension of sociospatial relations (Jessop et al., 2008; Leitner et al., 2008). As such, Jessop et al. (2008) develop a territories-places-scales-networks framework to emphasize the polymorphic and multidimensional character of sociospatial relations. Similarly, Leitner et al. (2008) examine the co-implication of the different spatialities – scale, place, networks, positionality and mobility – that shape contentious politics. Second, a turn away from the political-economy approach that has dominated the scale literature is becoming apparent, in favour of a poststructuralist-inspired concern with scalar practices and the performativity of scale (Mansfield, 2005; Kaiser and Nikiforova, 2008; Moore, 2008). While this represents a

perhaps overdue corrective to the dominance of the political-economic approach, there is a danger of poststructural accounts fostering an equally partial and one-sided view, divorcing discourse and performativity from material dimensions of scale.

In this paper, I argue that the political-economy literature incorporates a relational conceptualization of scale as constructed out of wider processes, rather than viewing it as intrinsically fixed (see Smith, 1993; Swyngedouw, 1997; Brenner, 1998). While there are tensions between this relational element and more structuralist conceptions which privilege the architecture of scale itself as a spatial category over constitutive social relations, the rather sweeping charge of 'reification' has been accepted too readily, becoming something of a truism in contemporary human geographic discourse (Collinge, 2005; Marston et al., 2005; Kaiser and Nikiforova, 2008; Moore, 2008). This risks jettisoning some important insights concerning the social construction of scale as a material expression of evolving power relations, exemplifying the problem of 'excessive conceptual throwaway' in human geography (Sunley, 2008: 2). The critique of reification also serves to mask areas of conceptual overlap between political-economic and poststructural perspectives, particularly in terms of their shared concern with the construction of scale and how this is shaped by wider social relations and networks, providing a basis for theoretical rapprochement and synthesis. Relational thinking rightly stresses the need for a more dynamic and fluid conception of space (Amin, 2002; Marston et al., 2005; Massey, 2005), but this is not incompatible with the more conceptually open strands of the political-economy literature (Smith, 1993).

More specifically, I propose to replace the politics of scale with the concept of 'scalar politics', arguing that it is often not scale *per se* that is the prime object of contestation between social actors, but rather specific processes and

institutionalized practices that are themselves differentially scaled. This is advocated as a significant new direction for research on scale, attempting to integrate work on scalar practices and discourses with a continuing concern for the material production of scale (Smith, 1996; Swyngedouw, 1997; Brenner, 1998). This work of synthesis is supported by a critical realist philosophical position, combining an ontological sense of scale as a set of material relations with an interest in the epistemological construction of scale through particular social representations and discourses (see Moore, 2008). Rather than aiming for complete integration between political economy and poststructuralism, my approach in this paper is based on a modified or open political economy which takes account of, and responds to, key elements of the poststructuralist critique (Goodwin, 2004; Hudson, 2006; Jessop and Oosterlynck, 2008).

The remainder of the paper is structured in two main parts. First, key arguments of the political-economic and poststructural literatures on scale are examined, identifying themes such as non-fixity, the politics of scale, scalar structuration and scalar practices. I then proceed to develop the notion of scalar politics, attempting to blend aspects of the politics of scale literature with recent poststructural insights. This is followed by a brief conclusion which summarizes the arguments of the paper and considers their implications.

II The social construction of scale

1 Political-economic approaches

Political-economic approaches are concerned with the social construction of scales as material entities, emerging from the broader Marxist project of uncovering the social production of space under capitalism (Harvey, 1982; Smith, 1984; Lefebvre, 1991). From this perspective, space is not a pregiven arena within which human activity takes place, but 'the physical, social and conceptual product of social and natural events and processes' (Smith, 2004: 196). As indicated above, however, this political economy of scale research has become the target of poststructuralist critique in recent years (Marston et al., 2005; Kaiser and Nikiforova, 2008; Moore, 2008). The main point of this is that the political-economy literature ultimately tends to reify and essentialize scales (Kaiser and Nikiforova, 2008; Moore, 2008), despite the insistence that scales are never fixed (Swyngedouw, 1997; cf. Smith, 2004). In an elaborate deconstruction of the scale literature which focuses particularly on Swyngedouw's writings, Collinge (2005) uncovers tensions between different interpretations of scale, concluding that physical size is still privileged over social institutions and state jurisdictions, heralding a return of spatial fetishism. Here, however, I take issue with aspects of the poststructural critique, aiming to recover a more conceptually open and relational sense of scale from the political- economic literature.

As emphasized above, a central theme of the political-economic literature is the notion of scales as products of wider social, political, economic and cultural processes rather than as predefined arenas within which such processes unfold (Smith, 1993; Swyngedouw, 1997; Brenner, 1998). In a highly influential contribution, Swyngedouw (1997: 140) argues that scale is produced through a 'process that is always deeply heterogeneous, conflictual and contested'. Moreover, '[s]patial scales are never fixed, but are perpetually redefined, contested and restructured in terms of their extent, content, relative importance and interrelations' (Swyngedouw, 1997: 141). As such, any spatial scale such as 'the national' or 'the regional' is itself a product of wider processes and social relations (Swyngedouw, 1997). This conception is explicitly process-based, aiming to replace the focus on global-local relations with a concern for the 'politics of scale' (see below). It conceives of scale as a socially constructed instrument of power (Kaiser and Nikiforova,

2008: 539) which embodies and expresses the underlying power relations between actors. At the same time, it is important to acknowledge the tension between fluidity and fixity that runs through much of the political-economic literature. Elements of fixity are apparent in the tendency for scales, once socially produced, to be taken for granted as material entities which act as 'platforms' (Smith, 2000) for the unfolding of social relations (Moore, 2008). At times, scale *per se* has been conceptually privileged over the constitutive social processes through which it is actually produced and transformed (Taylor, 1982; Collinge, 2005). These tensions are apparent in several studies of rescaling processes, which focus particularly on the transformation of state structures since the 1970s (Brenner, 1998; Jessop, 1999; Swyngedouw, 2000).

The poststructuralist claim that political economists end up reifying scale – despite their best protestations of non-fixity – is based upon references to scale preceding social activity, exemplified by Smith's (1993: 101) statement that scale provides 'an already partitioned geography' within which such activity takes place, and the concept of 'scale jumping' which 'conceptually separates scales from social practices' (Moore, 2008: 210; Kaiser and Nikiforova, 2008: 540). This conflicts with the poststructural argument that spaces and sites are 'always emergent', being subject to perpetual 'becoming' through social practices (Marston et al., 2005; Moore, 2008). Based on this approach, Moore (2008: 208) argues that political economists treat socially constructed scales as 'every bit as real and fixed as ontological givens'. The effect of this characterization is both to widen the gap between poststructural and political-economic positions and to elide the latter with a naïve realist view of scale as natural and pregiven. Instead of simply reifying scale, however, Smith (1993: 101) views it as both a product and a progenitor of social processes. Rather ironically, in view of the significance of the progenitor aspect in

triggering the poststructural critique, he devotes far more attention to the production of scale through social processes, emphasizing the dramatic transformations wrought by rescaling since the 1970s. As such, the role of temporal processes of scalar transformation is theoretically underplayed by this strand of political-economy research, leaving it vulnerable to the charge of reification.

Work on the 'politics of scale' represents arguably the most conceptually open strand of the political-economy literature, incorporating a relational view of scalar relations. Contrary to the claims of some critics (Marston et al., 2005; Moore, 2008), agency has been a central theme of this research (Leitner and Miller, 2007), reflecting how scholars moved beyond structuralism by investigating how different social forces have sought to harness, manipulate and transform scalar relations (Smith, 1993, 1996, 2004). The concept of the 'politics of scale' is, of course, closely associated with the writings of Neil Smith, reflecting a certain broadening of his approach to include struggles over social reproduction, gender and identity in addition to capital accumulation and state regulation (Brenner, 2001: 599).[1] Smith also introduced the intriguing concepts of 'scale jumping' and 'scale bending', highlighting the fluidity and openness of scale.

The introduction of these terms reflects how scales and scalar relations are shaped by the processes of struggle between powerful social actors and subaltern groups. The former seek to command 'higher' scales such as the global and national and strive to disempower the latter by confining them to 'lower' scales like the neighbourhood or locality, something which may be resisted by subaltern groups (Smith, 1993; Jonas, 1994). 'Scale jumping' refers to the ability of certain social groups and organizations to move to higher levels of activity – for example, the urban to the national – in pursuit of their interests. Relatedly, 'scale bending' is concerned with how certain social groups and

individuals challenge and undermine existing arrangements which tie particular social activities to certain scales. An 'eruption of scale-bending incidents and events' (Smith, 2004: 201) has signalled a dramatic period of scale reorganization in the 1980s and 1990s as part of the globalization of capital and the 'rescaling' of the state, linked to a restructuring of the urban and regional scales.

Kevin Cox's (1998) writings have also contributed greatly to our understanding of the politics of scale, focusing attention on how particular actors, organizations and movements operate across different geographical scales. According to Cox, local and regional actors construct 'spaces of engagement' (or networks of association) that link them to regional, national or supranational institutions in order to secure their local 'spaces of dependence' – areas in which their prosperity, power or legitimacy relies on the reproduction of certain social relations (Cox and Mair, 1988). MacLeod (1999) deploys Cox's idea to examine the politics of 'Euro-regionalism' in west-central Scotland in the 1980s and 1990s, highlighting the role of local political leaders in constructing regional partnerships in order to secure and distribute European funding. It is crucial to stress the agency of these leaders in forging such links on the basis of their claim to represent the interests of the particular region or scale in question, avoiding any drift toward spatial fetishism where the scale itself becomes an actor (MacLeod, 1999; Collinge, 2005). While Cox (1998) is primarily interested in the 'upwards' movement of local political actors, the broader notion of the politics of scale incorporates how national and supranational actors seek to manipulate and control local spaces.

In their ongoing research on southeast England, Allen and Cochrane (2007) deploy a relational conception of the region, examining the participation of ostensibly local actors in a range of overlapping political networks that span regional boundaries. While they are critical of scalar perspectives for restricting analyses within a narrow, hierarchical framework, local-national relations are far more evident in their account than 'horizontal' linkages with actors in other local spaces, as acknowledged in their references to the politics of scale (pp. 1171, 1172). As Allen and Cochrane (2007) also recognize, the everyday practices of governance are focused upon the scale of the region, though they involve the mobilization of wider networks. In this sense, Allen and Cochrane's research highlights the practical entanglement of networks and scales, but from a relational perspective that is critical of the political-economic approach to scale.

A third key strand of the political-economic literature is concerned with the historical production and transformation of scales. This is best captured by Neil Brenner's theory of 'scalar structuration', which is based upon a number of core propositions (Brenner, 2001: 604–608, 2004: 9–11). First, scales are produced as dimensions of wider sociospatial processes such as capitalist production, social reproduction and state regulation rather than representing inherent properties of spatiality. Second, scales are inherently relational, focusing attention on the 'vertical' relationships between different levels of organization such as the national, regional and global. Third, scalar relations are characterized as mosaics rather than fixed vertical pyramids, comprising a range of superimposed and interlocking scalar geometries and hierarchies. Fourth, the interactions between major institutional forms such as capitalist firms and national states tend to produce periodic 'scalar fixes' through the establishment and reproduction of 'nested hierarchical structures of organization' (Harvey, 1982: 422, quoted in Brenner, 2001: 606) which frame everyday social action. Finally, scalar transformations occur through the path-dependent interaction between inherited scalar structures and emergent regulatory projects and strategies which aim to transform these inherited arrangements. As such, elements of the

prevailing scalar fix of one period can be 'carried forward' to condition and constrain the evolution of future scalar configurations.

This sense of the transformation of scalar relations over time is central to the scalar structuration approach, reflecting a sensitivity to the prior social and institutional occupation of scales through past processes of social construction (Brenner, 2001). While the initial social construction of established scalar structures is theoretically underplayed in Brenner's account, the recovery of this temporal dimension helps to resolve the apparent contradiction between scale as a product and as a progenitor of social processes (Smith, 1993), underlining the crucial point that scales only exist prior to emergent social activity as the outcomes of earlier rounds of social construction (see Paasi, 1996). As Brenner emphasizes, established scales are subject to subsequent transformation through emergent regulatory projects and strategies. In this respect, then, the scalar structuration approach helps to refute the poststructuralist charge of reification, indicating that it is based upon a rather selective reading of the political-economic literature which dissolves the tension between fluidity and fixity in favour of the latter, equating the use of terms such as 'material' and 'real' with reification (Moore, 2008).

As argued above, the key strengths of the political-economic approach lie in its non-fixed conception of scale, concern with relationality through the concept of the politics of scale in particular, and sense in which scales pre-exist emergent social activities as a result of past processes of social construction. At the same time, certain shortcomings are apparent, although these do not amount to an underlying reification of scale in my view. In some cases, contrary to the foundational insistence that scales are products of wider social, political and economic processes (Swyngedouw, 1997), the emphasis on scale *per se* has tended to prevail over examinations of the actual social practices and institutions subject to scaling processes (Kaiser and

Nikiforova, 2008; Mayer, 2008). Moreover, scale has been viewed as something of a 'conceptual given', leading to its imposition on aspects of social and political practice (Marston et al., 2005). The overwhelming concern with the material production of scale has meant that the performativity of scale has been largely overlooked, particularly in terms of how 'scale talk' and scale politics are implicated in processes of identification and place-making (Kaiser and Nikiforova, 2008).

2 Poststructural approaches

Poststructural approaches view scale as 'fundamentally an epistemological construct that presents specific sociospatial orderings', rather than as something that has an ontological existence (Moore, 2008: 204). Accordingly, research should assess the significance of scale as a representational device or discursive frame deployed by different actors and groups as they seek to gain particular forms of recognition and advantage (Delaney and Leitner, 1997; Jones, 1998). This approach remained underdeveloped until the recent infusion of poststructural perspectives into the scale debate, inspiring an alternative research agenda. In this sense, the concern with how scales are socially constructed through social practice and discourse and the ways in which scale becomes embroiled in forms of identification and place-making represent a real strength of poststructural work, opening up a new set of issues from those emphasized by political-economic researchers. While this research agenda has emerged out of a critique of political-economy research, the relationship between them can be seen as contingent, such that my rejection of the critique of reification does not diminish the significance of the poststructuralist research agenda. Rather than distinguishing between a poststructural concern with the fluidity of scale and the alleged political-economic emphasis on fixity, it seems more productive to suggest that each highlights different

dimensions of the construction of scale, emphasizing material and discursive processes, respectively. At the same time, the neglect of the politics of scale and denial that scale can pre-exist social activity through past processes of social construction can be identified as weaknesses of poststructural accounts.

In advancing a poststructuralist approach to scale, Adam Moore (2008) deploys Roger Brubaker's distinction between categories of analysis and categories of practice – whereby the former encapsulate everyday experience and the latter refer to the more abstract concepts developed by social scientists – to argue that scale is primarily a category of practice, and has been erroneously treated as an analytical one by scale theorists, leading to its reification as an ontological entity (see above). From this perspective, research should focus on the processes through which 'specific scalar configurations solidify in consciousness and practice, and the effects these developments have on social, political and cultural relations' (Moore, 2008: 214). In this way, researchers can examine scale politics without scale, viewing scales as 'variably powerful and institutionalized sets of practices and discourses rather than as concrete things' (pp. 213–14). More specifically, Moore argues, research should focus on five main issues: scale as epistemology, scalar categorization, spatial reasoning and cognition, scalar projects and practices and the variability of 'scaleness'. This represents an important agenda for scale research, given that such issues have been underplayed in political-economy research, but there is no inherent reason for its advancement to entail the abandonment of scale as an analytical category. Research needs to address both epistemological and ontological dimensions of scale and scale politics. Building on the scalar structuration approach, scalar discourses and practices can become institutionalized and absorbed within emerging scalar arrangements and relations (see Poulantzas, 1978) which acquire a material form once established, but are always subject to subsequent modification and transformation as they come into contact with emergent social forces and practices.

In another poststructural contribution, Kaiser and Nikiforova (2008) view their analysis of the performativity of scale in relation to the town of Narva in Estonia as a precursor to a larger project, inspired by Foucault and Butler, of uncovering the political genealogy of scale ontologies. The concept of performativity provides a clear 'vantage point' from which to examine how 'scale talk' and 'scale politics' are inserted into processes of identification and place-making, while also highlighting the 'gaps and fissures' that destabilize these processes (p. 542). Their empirical analysis uncovers the social construction of four scale effects: an international soviet/proletarian one; the nation state of Estonia, transnational Europe and local Narva (p. 559). In addition, Deckha (2003) examines the use of competing scalar narratives in the context of urban regeneration, with governance agencies seeking to reinsert 'the local' into wider circuits of capital, while community activists resisting this agenda aim to protect the established local scale. Finally, Gonzalez (2006) usefully brings together political-economic and poststructural themes through an analysis of scalar narratives in Bilbao, adapting a 'cultural politics of scale' approach that emphasizes the role of discursive fixes in the construction of particular scalar projects.[2]

III Towards a new scalar politics

In this section, I seek to bring together key aspects of the political-economic and poststructural approaches to scale through the notion of scalar politics. In addition to sharing an underlying concern with the social construction of scale, each approach views scale and scalar relations as non-fixed and fluid, regarding scale as a dimension of wider sociospatial processes. I have attempted to clarify the issue of reification, arguing that it is only as a result of past processes of

social construction that scales can be said to precede emergent forms of social practice, confronting them with an 'already partitioned geography' (Smith, 1993: 101). This provides a stronger basis for rapprochement between the two perspectives, proceeding beyond the implication that they are inextricably opposed, such that the advancement of a poststructural research agenda must be based upon a thorough-going critique of political-economic research (see Kaiser and Nikiforova, 2008; Moore, 2008). In some respects, the political-economic and poststructural perspectives can be seen to offer complementary insights into the construction of scale, focusing attention on processes of material production and capitalist restructuring, on the one hand, and social practice and discourse, on the other. Rather than advocating full theoretical integration between political economy and poststructuralism, I am seeking to promote increased cross-fertilization by bringing together elements of each approaches' treatment of scale through the concept of scalar politics. The value of this enterprise is that of developing a fuller and richer understanding of scale and scalar relations which is sensitive to both material and discursive dimensions of the 'scaling' of contentious politics (Gonzalez, 2006; Huber and Emel, 2009).

Attempting to combine elements of political economy and poststructuralism does, of course, run into potential philosophical problems, particularly the danger of mixing 'divergent and contradictory socio-theoretical assumptions' (Mayer, 2008: 418). In response, as indicated earlier, I am drawn to critical realism which combines a belief in an external reality with the recognition that this can only be known through socially mediated concepts and representations (Bhaskar, 1989; Sayer, 2000). As an important dimension of space, scale is understood in realist terms through the objects and processes that constitute it, though it cannot be wholly reduced to these objects (Sayer, 1985: 51). Once scales are established through processes of social construction and reproduction, they exist independently of individual actors' conceptions of them, although they are reproduced socially (Lawson, 2003). At the same time, of course, scales are only represented and understood through particular scalar narratives and discourses (Gonzalez, 2006; Kaiser and Nikiforova, 2008). Rather than being inherently fixed, they are subject to subsequent modification and transformation through the effects of emergent social processes, as suggested by the scalar structuration approach (Brenner, 2001). This critical realist standpoint provides philosophical support for the notion of scalar politics by licensing research into both material and discursive processes of scale construction, stressing the contingent nature of particular scale effects and outcomes.

My theoretical perspective in this paper is that of modified or open political economy which holds on to many of the traditional concerns of political economy (capital accumulation, class relations, uneven development), but is receptive to the strengths of other perspectives, referring particularly, in this context, to the poststructural emphasis on scalar practices and narratives (Kaiser and Nikiforova, 2008; Moore, 2008). This overlaps with the cultural political economy developed by Jessop and Oosterlynck (2008) which combines an emphasis on social construction and discourse with a recognition of the materiality of social relations (Gonzalez, 2006).[3] Interestingly, cultural political economy is distinguished by its evolutionary ontology, focusing attention on continuing variation in discourses and practices, the selection of particular discourses and the retention of some resonant discourses (Gonzalez, 2006).

The term scalar politics is not itself new, but has often been used interchangeably with the politics of scale in the literature (see, for example, Bailey, 2007; Swyngedouw, 2007; Bickerstaff and Ageyman, 2009; Huber and Emel, 2009). The concept has affinities with Jonas's earlier discussion of the 'scale politics

of spatiality' (Jonas, 1994) which drew on Massey's integrative approach to space and spatiality, emphasizing their dynamic and relational qualities (see Massey, 1994, 2005). While he offers no explicit definition of the term, Jonas is concerned with the deployment of scale by actors and movements in political discourse, criticizing geographers' tendency to conflate abstract and metaphorical conceptions of scale. Interestingly, Jonas's approach seems to overlap with both later poststructural conceptions, in terms of its interest in the linguistic and metaphoric presentation of scale in everyday life and politics, and the concept of scalar structuration, through its sense of how 'the language of scale' (Jonas, 1994: 262) tends to 'map out' future scales, which subsequently interact with existing material scales to produce new scalar fixes. In what follows, I seek to build on these insights, giving the term scalar politics a more specific meaning as distinct from the established notion of the politics of scale.

The concept of scalar politics is comprised of four key elements. First, it replaces the implication that the politics of scale are fundamentally about scale with the idea that particular political projects and initiatives have scalar aspects and repercussions. As such, it is based on a revisiting of the 'of' question in the politics of scale originally raised by Brenner (2001) in relation to the distinction between 'singular' and 'plural' senses of scale. Political projects and initiatives are generally about exerting influence and control over particular areas of social activity and public policy rather than the command of scale *per se*. Scale is typically a dimension of this, though its precise role and significance will vary considerably (Mansfield, 2005). Thus, I view scale as an important dimension of political activity rather than the prime focus (see Brenner, 2001; Mansfield, 2005). My conception of scalar politics is consistent with the critical realist conception of space (see Sayer, 1985) since scale is defined by the political relations that constitute it, rather than existing as a pregiven arena,

although it cannot be wholly reduced to these relations once particular scalar arrangements are established.

My interest in the scalar dimensions of political projects and movements is informed by the process-based conceptions developed in the political economy of scale literature, stressing the fluidity of scale and the efforts of political actors to move between scales (Smith, 1993; Swyngedouw, 1997; Cox, 1998). Following the poststructuralist critique, it also reflects the need to avoid imposing scale as a conceptual given upon particular research problems, letting it emerge as a dimension of contentious politics according to its empirical significance (Leitner et al., 2008). In bringing these conceptual strands together around this first aspect of scalar politics, my aim is to promote more open and multifaceted accounts of scaling processes than would be achieved by 'purer' political-economic or poststructural approaches alone. As such, rather than defining scale as an 'ontologically given 'level' of social life ... or simply an 'epistemological ordering frame', I view scalar politics as an 'object of inquiry' (Huber and Emel, 2009: 372)

Second, scalar politics focuses attention on the strategic deployment of scale by various actors, organizations and movements, echoing one of the key themes of Jonas's account of the 'scale politics of spatiality' (Jonas, 1994). In this respect particularly, I agree with the poststructural notion of scale as an 'epistemological construct' (Moore, 2008). As Moore rightly observes, scale must be examined in an integral fashion, incorporating the 'simultaneous identification and labeling of horizontally bounded levels of space and social life and relational ordering of these spatial containers' since these are inextricably bound up together in 'everyday scalar discourse' (p. 214).[4] This focuses attention on the scalar classifications and discourses deployed by different political actors and movements in order to make the scaling of particular projects seem as 'natural, normal and legitimate

as possible' (Gonzalez, 2006: 838). One example of this is the official classification or labelling of scales by states, alongside attempts to challenge or subvert these (Moore, 2008: 215). In the UK, for example, the civil service conventionally designated Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland as 'territories', implicitly recognizing their additional historical and institutional weight over the standard regions of England (Paterson, 1994; Morgan, 1985), while seeking to neutralize the political implications of this, betraying the deeply entrenched classificatory practices of an 'empire state' (Tomaney, 2000). Since the 1970s, such practices have been challenged by the rise of 'regional nationalism' (McCrone, 1998; Keating, 2001).

Where I depart from poststructuralist approaches, however, is in my insistence that scale is not only an 'epistemological construct', contending that such constructions are often linked to the efforts of particular actors, organizations and movements to ontologically 'fix' or 'undo' scales as material expressions of emergent power relations (Gonzalez, 2006). As such, I stress the material-discursive nature of scalar struggle, in contrast to many discursively orientated accounts which often leave the materiality implicit (Huber and Emel, 2009: 373). This position is underpinned by a critical realist standpoint which recognizes the importance of discourses and representations to the social construction of particular objects and relations, while maintaining that such objects remain independent of individual actors' conceptions of them. This means that prevailing discourses tend to have unintended consequences, not least in terms of generating contestation and resistance (Sayer, 2006). In addressing the highly pertinent question raised by Moore (2008: 215) of '[w]hat makes it more or less likely for particular scalar categories and categorizations to take hold in practice', there is a need to consider the articulation between such categorizations and the material conditions that shape scalar arrangements. This focuses attention on the ability of particular

social actors, organizations and movements to harness and manipulate the discursive and material dimensions of scale effectively in pursuit of their agendas (Huber and Emel, 2009).

The third element of scalar politics concerns the influence and effects of pre-existing scalar structures, created by past processes of social construction. In this context, poststructural approaches view space and scale as 'always emergent', being subject to ongoing processes of becoming through the construction of social relations and identities (Massey, 2005; Moore, 2008). The political-economic tradition, by contrast, is more concerned with the transformation of inherited social structures and spatial configurations (Swyngedouw, 1997; Brenner, 1998, 2001). A key underlying issue here is the conceptualization of time and time-space (Massey, 2005; Dodgshon, 2008). Clearly, scales and scalar arrangements are made and unmade in the 'extended' or 'specious present', raising the question of how this is related to other, past times (Dodgshon, 2008). Dodgshon (2008) identifies two ways in which this question has been addressed in human geography. The first is based around performative approaches, informed by Deleuze (2004), which regard the present as a synthesis or contraction of all times, generating an openness to processes of becoming through the routine practices of everyday life (Dewsbury, 2000; Gregson and Rose, 2000; Thrift and Dewsbury, 2000). The other is based around contingency approaches, emphasizing the structuration of everyday social practices and institutions (Pred, 1984; Paasi, 1996), and, in some versions, incorporating 'macro' processes such as investment cycles (Massey, 1995). In her efforts to develop an open and fluid conception of space, Massey (2005) draws on Bergson's concept of duration, referring to a sense of temporal flow from the past and its collision with the emergence of the new, arguing that Bergson eventually came to recognize a sense of duration in external things as well as consciousness (p. 24).

This notion of duration, particularly in relation to external objects, provides further philosophical support for an approach to scale and scalar politics that stresses the interaction between inherited arrangements and emergent projects and relations (Brenner, 2004; Jones, 2009). According to Jones (2009), sociospatial relations are:

> Deeply processual and practical outcomes of strategic initiatives undertaken by a wide range of forces produced ... through a mutually transformative evolution of inherited spatial structures and emergent spatial strategies within an actively differentiated, continually evolving grid of institutions, territories and regulatory activities. (Jones, 2009: 498)

From this strategic-relational perspective (Jessop, 2001; Jessop et al., 2008), space is effectively shaped and layered by ongoing processes and practices (Paasi, 1996). Informed by the concept of 'phase space' derived from the physical sciences, Jones (2005) suggests that this passage of time can be seen to give space extra 'height', emphasizing how certain structures and practices can become (temporarily) sedimented and 'fixed'. Strengthened by the Bergsonian concept of duration, this approach can be contrasted with the 'flat' sense of time in performative accounts informed by Deleuze's contraction of other times into the present (Deleuze, 2004). As such, the 'flat ontologies' approach seems deficient not only in terms of its neglect of process of historical 'layering' and sedimentation, but also in its expulsion of 'vertical' forms of spatial ordering through scale (Marston et al., 2005). The implications of this 'structurationist' conception of space-time for research on scalar politics are to focus attention on processes of interaction between inherited scales and emergent social activities (Peck, 1998). Here, poststructuralism makes the important contribution of foregrounding the actors, routines, practices and networks through which such interaction takes place, helping to animate and enliven the scalar structuration approach developed by political-economic researchers (Brenner, 2001).

The fourth element of scalar politics concerns the closely related question of the creation of new scalar arrangements and configurations, occurring at the point of interaction between inherited and emergent projects and scales. According to Bergson (1910), novelty is added to what is carried over from the past (Dodgshon, 2008: 302). This is consistent with the scalar structuration approach which emphasizes that new arrangements and structures are derived from the interaction between inherited spatial structures and emergent spatial strategies (Brenner, 2004; MacLeod and Jones, 2007; Jones, 2009). Informed by poststructural work on scale, I would adapt this position to argue that the interaction occurs between inherited scalar structures and emergent social and political projects, stressing that agency lies with the social forces advancing such projects (Jessop, 1990). These projects are not themselves scalar (or spatial), but have scalar dimensions and repercussions (Mansfield, 2005) that may only become apparent as they develop, particularly as they come into contact with inherited scalar structures. In so doing, particular projects tend to privilege some inherited scales over others and reshape inherited scalar arrangements in line with their ideology and sociopolitical outlook (Jessop, 2001; Brenner, 2004).

In analytical terms, there is a need to interrupt the flow of time (see Thompson, 2003; Sunley, 2008: 16), focusing attention on the interaction between inherited scalar structures and emergent forms of scalar politics at a particular moment, thereby generating empirical insights into the broader process of scalar structuration (Brenner, 2001). Furthermore, as Sunley (2008) argues, scales can be viewed as emergent phenomena in the philosophical sense, where emergence is defined as 'a relationship between two features or aspects such as one arises out of the other and yet, while perhaps being capable of reacting back on it, remains causally and taxonomically irreducible to it' (Lawson, 1997: 63). Thus, scales are created from the interactions between

actors and organizations, but, once established, are irreducible to those actors and organizations. At the same time, established scalar structures can, as manifestations of prevailing power relations, influence how wider processes of political, economic and social restructuring are played out in particular spatial contexts. These structures are, of course, also subject to change and potential transformation through these wider processes. The precise degree of change or transformation of scale that ensues is ultimately an empirical question which is likely to generate different answers, according to the 'variability of scale' (Moore, 2008) and the particular contexts and relations under investigation. The scalar structuration approach, suitably reinforced by the concept of duration, is, however, suggestive of a considerable degree of continuity in the evolution of institutions and spatial structures through processes of historical sedimentation and social reproduction (Paasi, 1996; Jones, 2009; MacKinnon et al., 2009). As Leitner et al. (2008: 169) observe, particular spatialities 'emerge as a result of manifold material and discursive processes, and exhibit a certain durability that shapes the conditions of possibility for political action'.

IV Conclusions

This paper has reviewed debates on scale in contemporary human geography, identifying the key strengths and weaknesses of the political-economic and poststructuralist approaches. The main strengths of the former are its non-fixed conception of scale, incorporation of a relational dimension through concepts such as the politics of scale, and recognition that scales can pre-date emergent social activity as a result of past processes of social construction. At the same time, there has been a tendency to impose scale as a 'conceptual given' (Marston et al., 2005: 422) upon particular research objects, and the role of scalar practices and discourses has largely been neglected. By contrast,

poststructural approaches are concerned with the epistemological construction of scale, focusing attention on the performativity of scale through various social practices and narratives. While this represents a novel and exciting research agenda, I have taken issue with aspects of the attendant critique of political-economy perspectives, arguing that the central charge of reification is over-drawn in view of the foundational political-economic emphasis on the non-fixity of scale and the sense in which scales only exist prior to unfolding social practices as the results previous rounds of social construction.

While recognizing the divergent socio-theoretical assumptions of political economy and poststructuralism (Mayer, 2008), this paper highlights their shared interest in the social construction of scale. My approach is informed by a critical realist philosophical position which views scales as 'real' material entities, which are known and understood through particular social representations and discourses. Rather than advocating full theoretical integration, I favour an 'open' political-economy approach which is receptive to crucial poststructural insights concerning the importance of scalar practices and narratives (Gonzalez, 2006). The approach to scale developed in the second half of this paper aims to integrate three strands of the scale literature: the highly processual concepts of the politics of scale, 'scale jumping' and 'scale bending' derived from the political-economy literature; the sensitivity to the historical construction and transformation of scale through social processes of the 'scalar structuration' approach (Brenner, 2001); and the poststructuralist concern with scalar practices and narratives. On this basis, I developed the notion of a scalar politics, arguing that the so-called politics of scale are not fundamentally 'of' (about) scale, though scale is typically implicated as a key dimension. The concept of scalar politics focuses attention on the strategic deployment of scale by various actors, movements and organizations, overlapping substantially with the poststructural interest

in epistemological constructions of scale, though I also depart from this through my ongoing interest in the material production of scale. This effort to integrate material and discursive dimensions of the construction of scale identifies a research agenda of examining how different actors and groups seek to tie particular scalar categories and categorization to specific material relations. Here, the strategic-relational approach developed by Jessop (1990, 2001) may offer a useful framework, facilitating a form of strategic context analysis that can link specific forms of agency to broader social structures and relations.

The notion of scalar politics also highlights the influence of inherited spatial structures and scales. Here, I follow contingency-based approaches to the question of time in human geography (Dodgshon, 2008), emphasizing the structuration of everyday social practices and institutions, and adopting the Bergsonian concept of duration. At the same time, I modify the scalar structuration approach to argue that scales are made and unmade at the point of interaction between inherited scalar structures and emergent social and political projects (Peck, 1998). Adapting the work of Brenner (2001, 2004; cf. Jones, 2009), I contend that such projects are not inherently spatial or scalar, but have scalar dimensions and repercussions that became apparent as they come into contact with inherited scalar structures. My approach emphasizes that spaces and scales are always prestructured and preoccupied in contrast to poststructuralist accounts which risk over-emphasizing the openness and fluidity of space in their desire to overturn conventional conceptions of it as closed and static. The degree to which inherited scalar structures are subject to transformation through emergent social and political projects is an empirical question requiring further research, though the structurationist concern with processes of historical sedimentation and social reproduction does suggest a need to take fixity more seriously.

Acknowledgements

Notes

1. In his earlier work on uneven development, Smith (1984) identified three main scales – the global, national and urban (local) – created by the 'see-sawing' of capital between locations.
2. This discursive fix is seen as an integral part of the wider scalar fix, based on the ability of groups of actors to develop a coherent and self-explanatory scalar political project that imbues a particular scale with a distinct meaning and identity (Gonzalez, 2006: 853).
3. Although I am less explicitly concerned with semiosis.
4. As such, the 'failure' to always identify which particular meaning of scale – as size, level or a set of relations (Howitt, 2003) – is being discussed represents perhaps the least heinous of all the apparent crimes committed by scale theorists against Geography (Marston et al., 2005; Moore, 2008), reflecting their practical entanglement in particular research contexts. Like space itself (Massey, 2005), scale is constituted by multiple and overlapping social relations, generating different levels of social activity that are subject to both 'horizontal' bounding and 'vertical' ordering' (Moore, 2008: 214).

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