



Call for papers for an *ephemera* special issue on:

Peak neoliberalism? Revisiting and rethinking the concept of neoliberalism

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Neoliberalism is a ubiquitous concept nowadays, used across numerous disciplines and in the analysis of diverse and varied phenomena (Springer et al., 2016). It is conceptualized in different ways as, for example, a geographical process; a form of governmentality; the restoration of elite class power; a political project of institutional change; a set of transformative ideas; a development policy paradigm; an epistemic community or thought collective; and an economic ideology or doctrine (Springer, 2010, 2016a; Flew, 2014; Birch, 2015a). In relation to organization studies, and this journal especially, neoliberalism has been strongly associated with the restructuring of economics as a tool of governance (e.g. Davies and Dunne, 2016), the transformation of universities and academia as sites of knowledge production and immaterial labour (e.g. Rai, 2013), the rise of business schools as centres of social and political reproduction (e.g. Harney, 2009), and the extension of particular forms of corporate governance dominated by shareholder interests (Birch, 2016).

Neoliberalism has been used to analyse a diverse range of social, political, economic, and ecological changes, processes, practices, subjectivities, and much else besides. In one article, for example, Venugopal (2015) argues that it has been used to analyse almost everything, from the development of ecosystem services through urban regeneration to financialization. Others argue that neoliberalism, as currently understood and theorized, is over-stated

as a way to understand recent and ongoing social changes (Barnett, 2005; O'Neill and Weller, 2014; Birch, 2015b; Storper, 2016). Such debate raises the question of whether we have hit *peak* neoliberalism in terms of the usefulness of the concept to our analysis of and political engagement with the social world (Springer, 2016b).

Neoliberalism's increasing ubiquity has come at a significant price. Such variety and diversity in intellectual analysis (i.e. explanatory framework) and substantive topic (i.e. thing to explain) have produced a glut of concepts, theories, analyses and so on; while this medley can be seen as a necessary – and fruitful – outcome of such a hybrid and heterogeneous process, it also has the potential side-effect of leaving us more confused than enlightened. According to some scholars (e.g. Boas and Gans-Morse, 2009; Birch, 2015b; Venugopal, 2015), neoliberalism is at risk of becoming almost useless as a result of its indiscriminate use, especially as it is increasingly taken up in popular debate and discourse. Not all agree with this assessment, obviously. A number of scholars stress the need to theorize neoliberalism carefully and precisely in order to ensure its continuing relevance as a useful concept for understanding the world (e.g. Peck, 2013; Springer, 2014; also Birch, 2016).

It is increasingly difficult, on the one hand, to parse or synthesize this intellectual (yet often contradictory) abundance and, on the other hand, to apply it to policy or practical issues facing diverse communities, societies, organizations and individuals around the world. A body of literature is emerging that is critical of current conceptions and understandings of neoliberalism, highlighting these issues. Another body of work is emerging that tries to rehabilitate neoliberalism as a concept and a useful way to analyse the damage that contemporary political economy is doing to so many people.

The aim of this special issue, therefore, is to revisit and rethink neoliberalism as an abstract concept and as an empirical object. We invite contributors to critically evaluate dominant conceptions of neoliberalism, to examine how we use neoliberalism as an analytical and methodological framework, and to offer new ideas about how to productively (re)conceptualize neoliberalism. Below we outline some broad questions that contributors might like to engage with, although others are welcome:

- How conceptually useful is neoliberalism in different disciplines?
- How has the concept of neoliberalism evolved over time?
- Does neoliberalism represent a useful or critical way of understanding the current state of the world?
- What are the limitations to our use of neoliberalism?
- Does neoliberalism need updating as a critical concept in ways that take us beyond hybridity and variegation?
- What is missing from debates on neoliberalism in contemporary scholarship?
- What makes neoliberalism such a popular analytical framework?

- Are there alternative ways to conceptualize neoliberalism?
- Are we in need of finding alternative conceptions that break with the language of 'neoliberalism' altogether?
- What might new visions beyond neoliberalism yield in terms of our collective political future?

Deadline for submissions: 30 June 2017

All contributions should be sent to both Kean Birch (kean@yorku.ca) and Simon Springer (springer@uvic.ca). If you would like to discuss an idea with the issue editors then please email them both. We are looking for a diverse range of contributions including research articles, notes, interviews, and book reviews. Information about some of these types of contributions can be found at: <http://www.ephemerajournal.org/how-submit>. The submissions will undergo a double-blind review process. All submissions should follow *ephemera's* submission guidelines, which are available at: <http://www.ephemerajournal.org/how-submit> (see the 'Abc of formatting' guide in particular).

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