

# Sample essay on neoliberal urbanization

[Countries](#), [Canada](#)



## Introduction

This essay shall explain in academic, journal-level language, what neoliberal urbanization is. The task requires the student to imagine that he or she has been invited by the editor of Canadian Dimension, to write about the neoliberal urbanization situation in Toronto. The description involves two main ideas. The first concept describes how neoliberal urbanization is characterized, in terms of the transformation of urban space and types of restructuring of multi-scalar politics. Exploring this aspect speaks to class, gender, and race politics as witnessed ascriptive identity – which is connected with neoliberal urbanization, in general. The second idea explains neoliberal urbanization's feature of path-dependence. In other word, the job is to discuss these things in specific local, regional, and national contexts. We try to consider institutional and regulatory histories of systems. Additionally, the essay explores the political struggles which have shaped neoliberal urbanization in Toronto. The main thesis statement is as follows. The socio-political nature of neoliberal urbanization in Toronto reflects direct, and in-direct geo-political market and economic forces at work. The secondary thesis shall be revealed later in this paper. First however, a description of how neoliberal urbanization is characterized will facilitate laying the crucial groundwork. The transformation of urban space, and restructuring of multi-scalar politics illustrates some of the features and elements involved. What is neoliberal urbanism, or neoliberal urbanization? First, neoliberalism should be defined. In a lecture series talk, given November 12th of 2013 and sponsored by the ' Art, Activism & City Lecture Series, Jamie Peck defines neoliberalism, explaining “ In a nutshell I would

say, this is an ideological project of market rule which developed itself initially as a critique of – and alternative to – the welfare state models of the post Second World War period” (“ Simon Fraser University”). Peck continues his characterization of neoliberalism, explaining that the concept is approximately one century old which began as an intellectual theory. Peck states, it later emerged into a trans-Atlantic project in which “ the Chicago school got involved” (“ Simon Fraser University”). Its applications eventually would be applied to the States of Chile, and New Zealand.

## **Discussion**

The proliferation of cities completes a fairly recent phenomena, in consideration of centuries-long history. The modern concept of urbanization has arranged new frontiers in how those cities should function. Toronto is no different. Professor of Geography at Johns Hopkins University, David Harvey, observes that cities affect policies. Harvey states “ For many, then, to talk of the city of the twenty-first century is to conjure up a dystopian nightmare in which all that is judged worst in the fatally flawed character of humanity collects together in some hell-hole of despair” (38). This keen observation penned in 1996 appraises what the nature of city life has risen to signify for many people. Policy and politics has affected city infrastructure, and vice versa. The complex mix of neoliberal urbanism must also introduce the reality of a city’s gendered boundaries. Leslie Kern suggests that neoliberal urbanization is not merely about privatization, but that the process is – what she calls – ‘ context specific.’ Kern states that feminine theory argues “ that the concepts of public and private space are relational,” and that there very constructions are problematic (658). Kern believes oppressive ideologies are

inherent in the accompanying policies and practices. Of course, not all would agree this signifies the root of the matter.

Carlo Fanelli and Justin Paulson offer a relevant, working definition of neoliberal urbanization. They deem neoliberal urbanization as kind of range of activities, and urban processes, which runs the gamut of a range of community changes. Such changes do not all happen at once, but rather may be characterized as different time-slots which facilitate privatization, re-structuring, and the streamlining of public goods. This lessening of municipal services also re-allocates responsibilities onto localized fiscal entities and governments. The results endure the cutting of social programs, which some refer to as ‘entitlement’ projects and a narrowing of accountability from the public sector. Fanelli and Paulson state some effects of neoliberal urbanization as it initiates “the shifting of cost of maintenance of public resources onto the working-class,” and wherein “the scaling of regulatory capacities upwards to the regional or international institutions” show little transparency (“Urbanism and the Future”). Thinking about this overall concept, and the resulting correlated results, urban space serves as areas of transformation. Obviously, the associated multi-scalar events of politics ultimately defines its identity.

As one might imagine, this re-structuring takes on aspects of class, gender, and race politics. Yet, one specified feature of neoliberal urbanization captures the concept of its path-dependent quality. In other words, the actual application moves beyond theory and into the practical real of specific local, regional, and national contexts. For the sake of this discussion, the focus will settle on Toronto, Canada. To bring Toronto into the context of a

neoliberal urbanism discourse, the reader must consider the institutional and regulatory histories of systems. The political struggles around Toronto's community belabor the dissatisfaction of some, regarding the changes. May we descend to the situation in real-life, in Toronto? For example, an article in 'The Bullet' by Carlo Fanelli, discusses the ridiculous notions of privatizing the garbage collection and effectively killing the city's public transit.

Rob Ford, Mayor of Toronto shares a great deal of the spotlight. A number of financial crises and aftershocks were noted in Canada. In 2011, Fanelli reported that "The public treasury bailed-out banks and corporations by taking on their bad debts, supplying subsidies and increased spending to counter a sharp recession," also adding that "Now, the economic crisis has moved into the public sector" ("Selling the City"). You may liken the situation to a miniature version of the Wall Street bailout in America. The circumstances outline the factors rather clearly, and blatantly. Rather than cut back the enormous salaries of CEOs, represented in the finance sector, the chosen pathway churns ahead to reduce public expenditures. The targeted expenditures in the public sector include an outright attack upon public employees, public services, and as Fanelli states "the poor, pensioners and just about any user or producer of public services" ("Selling the City"). Is this fair? Nothing is fair on this side of eternity, many would cry. But the pressing problem concerning the situation in Toronto, is that the city particularly suffered since there no national urban policy existed. As Fanelli observes, transferring private-equity debt by funneling it into the public sector, would send Toronto spiraling from the shock of "inevitable reverberations down the governance structure as austerity takes hold" ("

Selling the City”). So, in plain language what does this mean? Quite simply, it spelled the disaster of Canada’s largest populace city (Toronto) roughly occurring at the same time known right-wing candidate Rob Ford was elected Mayor.

In thinking about Foucault’s governmentality concept, as outlined and discussed in the article entitled, ‘ Governmentality and rights and responsibilities in urban policy’ the fact of dumping the majority of fiscal responsibility on the public sector was not a balanced solution. In matters of urban policy citizens should have a fair amount of input, especially since drastic economic failures dramatically affect their daily lives. In the spirit of the Foucauldian framework, Raco and Imrie believe it is just to seek “ to understand the new political and policy agenda on ‘ rights and responsibilities’” (2187). In discussing Tony Blair’s outlook on governmental and civic duty, the article reflects his view of governmental participation as a partnership wherein everyone must be able to fully engage in the society. In the modern era the idea of people is that of ‘ consumers’ rather than citizens. This modern degradation of people being thought of as consumers, and not citizens, presents a disgraceful erosion of societal decency.

At this point in the socio-political landscape of Toronto politics, something was stinking to high heaven. The social infrastructure of the city had shifted its fiscal burdens onto the weakest segment of society. The poor, elderly, and a portion of ethnic citizens would be forced to sustain higher tax burdens. In terms of a consideration of institutional and regulatory histories of systems in Toronto, a brief review is needed. Leading up the time of Rob Ford’s mayoral victory the issues of waste disposal and public transit were

hot topics. The citizens of Toronto worried. The deepening pain and speculations over the city re-structuring public services, like garbage disposal, created discussions about privatization. It is important to note that Rob Ford was the son of a Conservative government figure, according to Fanelli, and ran his campaign on “easily absorbable talking points” (“Selling the City”). In other words, Ford campaigned on the usual political rhetoric of promises that included lowering taxes, reducing government, and enhancing business investments in Toronto’s community. Basically, during his mayoral campaign, Ford indicated that he would do some of the following:

- “Eliminate the \$60 vehicle registration tax”
- “Eliminate the land transfer tax (worth \$200-million annually)”
- “Freeze property taxes for 2011”
- “Halve Councilors’ \$53, 000 expense budget” Notice, it’s an expense budget, not salary.
- “Sell-off Toronto Community Housing Corporation,” affecting “164, 000 tenants.
- Scrapping the city’s Fair Wage policy, and
- “Privatize Toronto’s waste disposal services”

These are the standards which represent how Ford planned to squeeze fiscal savings and to install better planning. You may clearly perceive how various economic tentacles of the ‘financial octopus’ could affect different sectors of the geo-political market. And the forthcoming forces of change and restructure would not be good for some. According to Fanelli, Ford proudly declared that he meant to basically cut everything in sight. The emergence of neoliberal urbanism’s class war began to rear its head.

Newspapers' reporting were rife with the possibilities of impending changes to the fiscal system. For example, Fanelli notes one reporter writing on behalf of supporting Ford's ridiculous cuts that "The excuses must end, the constantly climbing salaries for public sector unions must stop there is no choice but to rein in public sector wages" ("Selling the City"). It appeared as though the right-wing political machine determined to trample over the concerns of the city's politically weaker people. Even third party studies discovered that privatizing the city's garbage disposal was a bad idea. At least the opinion of authors Carlo Fanelli and Justin Paulson agree, as reflected in their article entitled, 'Municipal Malaise: Neoliberal Urbanism and the Future of Our Cities.' Fanelli and Paulson declare "As a solution to the fiscal crisis, neoliberal restructuring of our cities will of course fail; it can only leave a larger social crisis in its wake" ("Municipal Malaise"). Perhaps one reason Ford felt he could get away with institutionalizing a ramshackle situation. Many powerful politicians trust the cleverness of their minds, with little regard for the neediest citizens in the equation. Did Mayor Ford have such little respect for the citizens of Toronto because he viewed them as 'consumers,' instead of citizens? Raco and Imrie state "Active citizens are defined, not through consumerist power, or primarily as passive electors in representative democratic elections, but as democratic agents, empowering themselves through their challenges" (2188). As you think about these mounting circumstances, which occurred in Toronto, you may realize how neoliberal urbanization can truly deliver a socio-economic impact based upon geo-political market forces.

Before moving on to entertain the secondary thesis, a word on Toronto's



public transit system demands review. Toronto, as a major metropolitan city, sustains high levels of traffic jams. This congestion translates into a need to control both associated budgets, sensible land-planning venues, and improvement repairs. According to Fanelli, the \$3.3-billion loss annually was attributed to the traffic inefficiencies. But instead of implemented the much needed task to repair and improve Toronto's public transit system, Ford failed to develop an adequate plan. Fanelli refers to Ford's plans as "deeply flawed," as he appealed to "the worst prejudices of suburban car owners" ("Selling the City"). Perhaps Carlo Fanelli, in his article entitled, 'The City of Toronto Fiscal Crisis: Neoliberal Urbanism & The Reconsolidation of Class Power' summarized the situation best. He suggests that Toronto's entire fiscal nightmare, in terms of neoliberal urbanized realities, the problems have escalated into a complicated economic dilemma. In terms of economic failures and effects, the situation regarding Toronto civic workers springs to mind. Perhaps the title of the key article says it all, 'Toronto Civic Workers Bargaining without a Base: The Significance of 2012.' Fanelli wisely admits the theoretical and practical aspects of neoliberalism ideology, and policies. Are multi-dimensional. In quoting Brenner, Fanelli states "Neoliberalism can be understood as the latest set of socio-spatial and institutional configurations in the ongoing development of a capitalism composed of conflicting tendencies toward destruction and creation" (120). Economic strains resulting from Toronto's neoliberal urbanization woes, weighed heavily upon unions and its workers. Union interests constantly had to defend against their sick-leave benefits being slashed.

The secondary thesis of this essay states that Fordist-Keynesian

development practices functioned better in the 1970s era, but became obsolete in today's modern world. Whereas the functioning worldview of neoliberalism displays on the modern stage of life's drama, the Fordist-Keynesian style was a former policy movement. Yet Fordism took a unique shape in Toronto, Canada. Betsy Donald suggests that Fordism adopted a "particular regulatory" arrangement in the city, which simultaneously "played in the context of the development of Fordism and in Fordism's crisis" (193). Trade imbalances and expensive federal government underwriting of infrastructure represent two elements, says Donald. Nathan Young and Ralph Matthews state that today's global changes, and regulations identify a "movement in political philosophy and policy away from what is often termed 'Fordist-Keynesian' strategies for economic development and regulation" (29). The Fordist-Keynesian style set the basic standard for capitalist growth. According to Matthews and Young, the thriving Fordist-Keynesian practices of the 1970s-1980s era did balance its aspirations with an acceptance of collective bargaining and social welfare institutions (38). Matthews and Young continue their observation, arguing that the Fordist-Keynesian policies dealt with 'compromise' because one of the real costs proved injurious to the environment. The notion and mission of sustainability in the world has a particular interest to Canada, given the abundance of her forests, wildlife, and waterways. Matthews and Young call it an aquaculture. The burgeoning neoliberal style pays attention to salvaging these natural resources, but as Matthew et al. state, it "creates new tensions" in the competition for diversifying rural economies (38). All policies, philosophies, and changing

global practices coincide to merit difficult transitions. One kind of philosophy may fare better or worse, given the context and era of its application.

## **Conclusion**

In conclusion, we have seen the main thesis bear out certain facts. We learned that social politics definitely are involved with neoliberal urbanization schemes. Toronto served as an exemplary real-life token of how stressful, and sometimes unfair to others, these policy philosophies can be. In terms of summarizing a review of the secondary thesis, we learned that neoliberalism had picked up where the older-implemented ‘ Fordist-Keynesian’ style left off. Brenner and Theodore note that “ the neoliberal restructuring projects of the last two decades” have not satisfied a basis for sustainable fiscal growth, but profoundly changed the Fordist-Keynesian style. The primary spaces for neoliberal urbanization occurs in cities. Therefore, careful planning, and cooperative development must synthesize better solutions.

## **Works Cited**

Bibliography:

Brenner, Neil, et al. “ Neoliberal Urbanism: Cities and the Rule of Markets.”  
Draft.

Jul. 2005. Web. 15 Oct. 2014.

Brenner, Neil, and Nik Theodore. “ Cities and the Geographies of ‘ Actually  
Existing

Neoliberalism’.” Handout. Course Title. (Instructor name.) College Name. Oct.  
2014.

Print.

Donald, Betsy. “ The Permeable City: Toronto’s Spatial Shift at the Turn of the Millennium.”

The Professional Geographer 54. 2 (2002): 190-203. Web. 16 Oct. 2014.

Fanelli, Carlo. “ The City of Toronto Fiscal Crisis: Neoliberal Urbanism & the Reconsolidation

Of Class Power.” Interdisciplinary Themes Journal 1. 1 (2009): 1-8. Web. 14 Oct. 2014.

Fanelli, Carlo. “ Selling the City: Rob Ford’s Toronto.” The Bullet. The Bullet Socialist Project –

E-Bulletin No. 533, 8 Aug. 2011. Web. 14 Oct. 2014.

Fanelli, Carlo. “ Toronto Civic Workers Bargaining Without a Base: The Significance of 2012.”

Studies in Social Justice 8. 2 (2014): 119-143. Web. 14 Oct. 2014.

Fanelli, Carlo, and Justin Paulson. “ Municipal Malaise: Neoliberal Urbanism and the Future of

Our Cities.” The Bullet. The Bullet Socialist Project – E-Bulletin No. 357, 20 May 2010.

Web. 15 Oct. 2014.

Harvey, David. “ Cities or Urbanization?” City: Analysis of Urban Trends, Culture, Theory,

Policy, Action 1. 2 (1996): 38-61. doi: 10. 1080/13604819608900022

Kern, Leslie. “ Reshaping the Boundaries of Public and Private Life: Gender, Condominium

Development, and the Neoliberalization of Urban Living.” Urban Geography 28. 7

(2013): 37-41. Web. 16 Oct. 2014.

Raco, Mike, and Rob Imrie. “ Governmentality and rights and responsibilities in urban policy.”

Environmental and Planning 32 (2000): 2187-2204. Web. 14 Oct. 2014.

Simon Fraser University. “ Neoliberal Urbanism: Artful Alternatives?” Online video clip.

YouTube. YouTube, 12 Jan. 2014. Web. 15 Oct. 2014.