

## Rejoinder

### Mike Geddes

I am very grateful for three critically constructive responses. This brief rejoinder is intended to highlight both what seem to me to be points of agreement between us, but also one or two differences. Points of agreement include, first, the relevance of researching and reflecting on radical local governance initiatives in other parts of the world, including but not exclusively those in Latin America. Secondly – and I hope I am not searching too hard for consensus here – that there is a continuing need to think hard about what we mean by neoliberalism, and what are the limits to its reach (whether as an analytical abstraction or a concrete class practice). This is important in places like Latin America, where the term neoliberalism pervades both popular and policy discourses, and can often usefully provide a common reference point but can also gloss over important differences and ambiguities, but also in places like England where the practices and discourses of local governance are so thoroughly imbued with neoliberal ideas that they frequently go uncontested.

Thirdly, all three responses very helpfully explore complexities which my brief mention of examples skated over, and emphasise the context-specific nature of the social forces which construct, inhabit and contest institutional innovations such as participatory budgeting<sup>1</sup>. In particular, I am gently chastised for looking at things too much from on high, and for denying local agency by presenting the process of neoliberalisation as something hitting local government from ‘outside’. My response here is twofold. First, I do agree that, as Janet Newman says, many in local government ‘are active in seeking out – even inventing – neoliberal ways of doing things’. But I do not find this inconsistent with a view that those dominant class interests which promote and are principally advanced by neoliberalism are primarily entrenched politically in institutions at supra-local level (the World Bank, the IMF, national governments) and to that extent neoliberalisation does indeed initially come from outside in most places, however enthusiastically it is then adopted and made to feel at home ‘locally’. However when it comes to contesting neoliberalism the reverse is true. In Latin America contestation has – unsurprisingly - very often originated from below, from the social movements of those marginalised, displaced and impoverished by neoliberalism, in alliance with local governance institutions when they are sympathetic, in conflict with them when they are not. So a generalisation that neoliberalisation is primarily driven from above but resisted from below (while of course subject in practice to local specificity) may have some merit.

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<sup>1</sup> See Geddes M and Sullivan H, Localities, leadership and neoliberalisation: Conflicting discourses, competing practices, *Critical Policy Studies*, forthcoming..