1. Introduction

In common with geographical inquiry more generally, questions of power have long been fundamental to research in economic geography. For instance, investigations into the fundamentally uneven nature of economic development point to the enduring power asymmetries between different places and actors within the global space economy (see Storper and Walker, 1989). Meanwhile, the extensive literature on world and global cities has identified certain cities as particularly powerful actors in choreographing the transnational flows of knowledge, people and capital that characterise the contemporary global economy (Beaverstock *et al* 2000; Sassen, 2001). However, whilst questions of power are implicitly central to these literatures, power has only rarely been placed centre stage. This oversight has started to be addressed through an explicit focus on power by authors such as John Allen (2003) and in work beyond geography such as Stewart Clegg's (1989) research in Management Studies. These developments have stimulated a more careful consideration of power relations by economic geographers over recent years. Indeed, this renewed and *explicit* focus on questions of power is particularly evident in work that develops relational and production network approaches to understanding uneven economic development (see Yeung, 2005; Henderson *et al* 2002 respectively).

Inspired by this resurgence of explicit considerations of power within economic geography, the papers in this Special Issue stem from two sessions organised at the 2006 RGS-IBG Annual Conference in London. The aim of these sessions was to use detailed empirical research from a range of geographic and economic contexts to develop understandings of power and the relationship between organisations, power, space and place. Echoing this focus, in this Introduction we consider how

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understandings of power within economic geography, particularly from a relational perspective, have been developed to date. We then consider the questions this raises for research into the organizational geographies of power in the future. We focus on work in relational economic geography, including recent work on global production networks because, as we discuss in more detail below, these literatures have been central to the development of the theoretical foundations that facilitate more sophisticated analyses of power in economic organisations from a geographical perspective.

We develop our arguments over four further sections. First, we consider the central insights developed by recent theorisations of power within geography and the social sciences as they relate to our focus on organisations. Second, we explore how these analyses have been developed within relational economic geography. Third, we provide an example of how these analyses have been advanced by focusing on economic geographical research into processes of neoliberalisation. Finally, we reflect on the consequences of this development for economic geographers and other researchers interested in the intersections between organisations, power, space and place.

2. Theorising the geographies of power

In order to consider the study of power in an organisational context we take as our starting point the work of Stewart Clegg (1989) and in particular his important distinction between what power *is* and what power *does*. Whilst these two facets are clearly co-constitutive, the distinction made by Clegg has significant consequences for research agendas focused on the geographies of power in an organisational

context. Beginning then with questions of what power is, Clegg (1989) adopts a relational approach and identifies three elements that combine to (re)produce power relations. First, he points to the importance of agency and the ways in which the articulations of actions, practices and points of resistance define power and its nature. Second, he draws attention to the structural dimensions of power in the form of the institutional and societal conditions that inform the behaviours and practices of these actors. Third, he identifies the important role of organisations, understood as social collectives, that can both benefit from and yet also enable the creation of power. This analysis of power is instructive because, rather than conceiving of power as an inanimate 'thing', Clegg's (1989) work provides an early example of the ways in which power can be understood as a two-way process with the relations between actors and structures forming the key unit of analysis.

However, whilst Clegg's analysis is valuable for developing understandings of the ways in which power relations are constituted in an organisational context, his work lacks an explicit focus on the geographical dimensions and implications of power. In this respect we turn to the seminal contribution of John Allen (2003). Allen (2003) draws attention both to the different forms that power takes and the variable spatial reaches associated with each form. In terms of our focus on the intersection between organisations, space, place and power, the distinction made between two types or 'modalities of power' as synthesised by Allen (2003) is particularly important.

The first such modality identified by Allen (2003) is a 'centred' form or power in a Latourian (1986) sense. This is an instrumental form of power that is held by certain actors and used by them over others. As such, in this version, power is a 'thing' that

is possessed by individuals who are deemed powerful by others by virtue of them 'holding' power. Allen (2003) argues that this form of power can be thought of as 'power as capacity' such that actors can hold power but may or may not choose to use it. Significantly, even when actors do not use their power, in this form of power, they are still widely regarded as being powerful. In many respects, it is this type of power that has implicitly at least dominated accounts of power in economic geography until comparatively recently with certain actors being identified as being structurally powerful (following Clegg, 1989) and widely being seen as holding power and using it over other actors. Examples would include the headquarters of a transnational corporation (TNC), multilateral institutions such as the World Bank and the IMF as well as particular places such as London as a leading financial centre.

However, a second modality of power identified by Allen (2003) follows the insights of Clegg (1989) much more closely by focussing on how actors derive and reproduce positions of power for themselves within the global space economy. Allen (2003) terms this *'power through mobilization'*. He argues that this is a much more subtle version of power that is reproduced relationally through networks, thereby focussing attention on 'how power is produced *in and through* social interaction' (Allen 2003: 40). This approach to power is heavily influenced by the work of Castells (1996) and Foucault (1982) and points to the ways in which power is not always a 'thing' that can be held and deployed in a hierarchical sense. Rather, in this modality, power emerges through, and is inseparable from, social and economic actions and tactics designed to construct power where it might not already exist. Examples include attempts by a TNC to manufacture relations which allow control of a subsidiary when structural

power relations are weak or do not exist because the subsidiary is financially and organisationally autonomous.

Crucially for our interest in the geographies of power, in this account of power Allen (2003) goes beyond Clegg's (1989) relational approach to consider the geographies of 'power through mobilization'. Allen argues that power is a force that is dependent on how different actors internalize meaning and are enrolled into the networks of others through their social practice. Following work developing topological spatial imaginations (e.g. Amin, 2002), power is, therefore, not necessarily conceptualised as being restricted to one spatial scale but shown to typically cross cut and reproduce both the local and the global depending on the practices associated with power through mobilization. Indeed, in order to tease out the geographical implications of such networks, Allen (2003) argues that attention needs to be paid to the ways in which organisations are able to enrol other actors into their networks and reproduce positions of power by doing this since it is this net-work that determines the ways in which power 'flows' geographically.

Allen (2003) clarifies this point by identifying a range of different forms of power that emerge depending on an actor's strategies and the way in which they mobilize structural resources and enrol other actors into their aims. Following Clegg's (1989) emphasis on what power is, Allen (2003) argues that the types of power that emerge through these practices include authority, coercion, domination, inducement, manipulation and seduction. Importantly, for our arguments here, each of these has distinct geographies that derive from the ways in which power is mobilized. For example, Allen (2003) suggests that domination is usually mobilized by actors

operating 'from the centre', headquarters in a TNC for instance, whereas seduction or inducement may involve 'multi-level' mobilizations involving spatially dispersed actors, in multiple subsidiaries of a TNC as well as at headquarters for example. This suggests certain forms of power may 'travel' better than others, with domination exercisable at a distance whereas authority or seduction might require negotiations between co-present parties. Hence the geographies of power for Allen are topological, determined by the type of power at work and the geographies and practices of the actors mobilizing this power.

This clearly has implications for the second question posed by Clegg (1989) – what does power do? It suggests that power does different things depending on how the modalities of power and their spatiality lead to the construction of different forms of power relations that are grounded differently as power mobilizations are worked out in different places. To date geographers have tended to emphasise the negative impacts of power. Power is frequently seen as something used for exploitation or to force other actors to behave in a way against their will. For example, this can be seen in early work on the core-periphery model as well more recent accounts of the power of neo-liberal organisations such as the IMF. This is clearly an important element of power but, by adopting a relational understanding of the multiple modalities of power, it is possible to consider how power can also be a positive force and act as an enabler for more 'just' economic development. Examples here, although modest in their influence, would include modalities of power 'worked out' in supply chain changes and associated with the growth of the fair trade movement (Clarke *et al* 2007) or the power consumer activists have had over the exploitation of workers in sweatshops.

One of the main remaining challenges is, then, to couple these theoretical developments in understandings of power with empirical analysis of the nature and effects of power relations. This special issue aims to begin to tackle this challenge by drawing on work in 'relational economic geography' and 'production network approaches' (see Boggs and Rantisi, 2003; Henderson *et al* 2002 respectively). As such, in the rest of this introductory paper we consider what can be learned from interrogating the relational geographies of power that are central to contemporary economic life through these literatures and how this might re-orientate future research in economic geography.

3. Relational approaches to the spatialities of power

Relational approaches begin with the belief that understanding the spatiality of economies requires a balanced analysis of both structures and agency because "Economic decisions and their consequences are always shaped by the structure of social relations with other actors and shared institutional conditions" (Bathelt and Glückler, 2005, 1546). Similarly, the global production networks approach emphasises the importance of conceptualising the networks that underlie economic activity as "*both* structural *and* relational. Networks are structural in that the composition and interrelation of various networks constitute structural power relations, and they are relational because they are constituted by the interactions of variously powerful social actors" (Dicken et al., 2001, 94, original emphasis). In terms of power, both approaches draw on the work of Allen (2003) outlined above and emphasize the importance of research that seeks to "unpack what power is in relational terms, but more importantly also to demonstrate how heterogeneous configurations of power relations (i.e. relational geometries) can generate certain

emergent effects" (Yeung, 2005, 6). As such, relational and production network approaches implicitly take into account the importance of studying both what power is and what it does through a focus on the spatiality of social action and interaction. Put broadly, in terms of what power is, these literatures emphasise power as a form of mobilized, spatialized social interaction and negotiation. Meanwhile, in terms of what power does, they emphasise how power (constructed) through mobilization has spatially contingent effects in terms of change, control or inequality. Both of these issues and the way the relational and production network approaches deal with them are explored below.

3.1 What power is and does: practice and situated mobilizations

In terms of the modalities of power, the relational and production network approaches emphasise: first, the organisational practices, strategies and negotiations that a range of economic actors deploy to render ideas, values or positions powerful and influential; second, how such practices are 'received' by network relations; and, third, the spatially and temporally variable nature of the first and second. As a result, it is stressed that "Each of the major sets of actors in the global economy is involved in both cooperation and collaborations on one hand and in conflict and competition on the other…Such apparently paradoxical behaviour should warn us against assuming that relationships between certain actors are always of one kind…these various actor-networks are imbued with an ever-changing mixture of both kinds of relationship" (Coe et al., 2008, 18). Spatially, such an approach echoes Allen's (2003) call for research into power relations to invoke a topological imaginary that appreciates relational forms of spatiality so as to avoid local fetishes in which metric forms of

proximity are considered most influential (see also Amin 2002; Massey 2005). Relational economic geography, therefore, emphasises the multiple connections and entanglements that actors draw on as part of attempts to exercise and construct forms of power. Such a topological imaginary recognises the always contingent and multiple entanglements and networks of social practice that makeup different modalities of power and which lead to spatially and temporally different outcomes both in terms of the nature of power and its effects.

In order to understand the tactics deployed by organisations as part of attempts to construct and exercise power through such relational networks and the ensuing 'cooperation, collaboration and conflict', Jones (2008) suggests that we adopt a practice-based approach (see also Faulconbridge, 2007). For Jones, a focus on practice means a focus on what people do and the way this is influenced by "conventional economic factors (price, costs etc.), and also unconventional ones (organizational culture, personal friendships, social norms)" (Jones, 2008, 79). This is important because it allows the complex social constructions associated with, in particular, power through mobilization to be unpicked. In addition, a practice-based approach helps avoid analyses that neglect spatiality because it focuses explicitly on the multiple spatial entanglements that help define what actors do and the strategies adopted.

Understanding 'what power is' using a practice-based approach whilst emphasising micro-scale social action does, however, have some dangers. First, a practice-based approach should not neglect the influence of structure. Power relations may in part draw on forms of resource-based power. Structural influences may be the preeminent

form of power-relation in some organizations (e.g. a TNC in which financial structures given headquarters control of each subsidiaries resources). Second, a practice-based approach should also be sure not to neglect the question of what power does. Indeed, one of the greatest dangers of a practice-based approach is that it can tell us much about what different actors do, how they interact and the collaborations and conflicts that go on as part of the modalities of power, but little about the long-term impacts. However, this need not be the case so long as we trace through how collaboration or conflict leads to change in the short-, medium- or long-term. In fact, if both structure and its influence on power and the impacts of what power does are incorporated, the practice-based approach provides one of the most powerful tools for explaining the way power relations work *and* what they do rather than just identifying when power relations cause change, inequality or other effects. This means using the practice-based approach to look at the exploitation of structural power, the strategies adopted by actors as part of mobilizations of power, but at the same time also using it to tease out the way spatially contextual variables influence the internalization and enrolment process associated with mobilizations and reactions to all forms of the exercise of power, collaborative or conflictive, because this will help us understand the impacts of these reactions on what power actually does.

To highlight the value of this argument it is worth considering examples of the way geographers have already developed such ideas. As Allen (2003) sets out, the idea of mobilizations of power is drawn from the work of Foucault (1980) on governmentality with discourse being one technique associated with the construction of subjectivities, i.e. the internalization of ideas and enrolment of actors leading to the construction of power relations. It is to questions of discourse and power that we,

therefore, now turn as part of further consideration of how economic geographers have conceptualised power to date.

4. Spatialities of power and discourse: the case of neoliberalization

Economic geographers have extensively explored the way discourse has been used to 'govern' different actors (see for example Coe and Kelly, 2002; Kelly, 2001; Wong and Bunnell, 2007, Larner, 2007). Here we focus on one strand of this work – on neoliberalism - which reveals the value of analyses that prioritise agency by considering the practices of power, the spatial influences on the social negotiations involved in power through mobilization and the ultimate impact of such power relations.

In relation to neoliberalism, there is now an expansive body of work which reveals the way neoliberal logics have been 'rolled-out' as part of discursive strategies which seek to convince different governments and other actors of the legitimacy of post-Keynesian economic policies (see Larner, 2000; Peck and Tickell, 2002). Here we can only summarise the arguments put forward in existing work in relation to questions of the modalities of power. We focus on three of the most important insights. First, in relation to the modalities of power, the *practices* of *agents* promoting neoliberalism have been shown to be associated with forms of governmentality that seek to reproduce particular identities and understandings of economic regulation. As Larner (2000, 14) notes, this means studying the 'messy actualities' of the way different agents seek to construct both themselves and their logics positions of power in relations with governments and others that they wish to convert to neoliberal doctrines. Moreover, as Peck and Tickell (2002, 393) suggest, this means analysing

'actualities' which are made up of "webs of interlocal and interorganizational relations". So understanding how neoliberal logics and actors gain power actually requires study of the *spatialities of the practices of those actors and the resultant entanglements that influence those practices*. These entanglements or networks reach trans-locally as the logic of neoliberalism and the strategies that underlie its power draw from connections that reach across scales and which draw on the structural influence of organizations such as the World Bank and particular states but also the discursive value of insights from think-tanks, academics, business schools and consultants (Dezalay and Garth, 2002; Swain, 2006). Understanding how such spatially diverse networks of association render neoliberalism powerful has been central to explaining its worldwide travels.

Second, work on neoliberalism has shown the importance of studying *the spatiality of the interactions associated with the exercising and mobilization of power*– i.e. interactions at a distance or in situ – and the outcomes of variations in the spatiality of these interactions. This follows Allen's (2003) argument that different forms of power 'travel' better than others. As Larner (2000, 6) argues, those promoting neoliberalism have developed a number of strategies which have effectively overcome the difficulties of constructing power relations at a distance and exercising their influence across space. As she writes, "Neoliberalism is both a political discourse about the nature of rule and a set of practices that facilitate the governing of individuals from a distance". However, other tactics are associated with power relations that rely on in situ, face-to-face encounters. For example, Swain (2006) shows how travelling experts rely not on discursive strategies but more structural forms of power (i.e. their legitimacy as role models from the heartlands of

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neoliberalism). Hence this suggests that it is essential that we analyse *how particular modalities of power relate to particular spatialities* as part of attempts to recognise the heterogeneity in modalities, forms, spatial reach and effects of power relations.

Third, work on neoliberalism also reveals how, when all forms of power are exercised, they are *affected by geographically contingent agency and structure* which are inseparable. One of the main contributions of geographical work on neoliberalism has been to reveal the constantly mutating, reforming and geographically variable nature of neoliberal projects. For example, discourse-based power relations that allow control at a distance lead to different outcomes when the agents constructing and exercising this power interact with agents in different places that are part of situated networks of association. Moreover these interactions influence the internalization and enrolment associated with discursive power and ultimately the effects of power relations. As Brenner and Theodore (2002, 368) argue:

> "it is important to underscore that the processes of neoliberal localization…unfold in place-specific forms and combinations within particular local and national contexts. Indeed, building upon the conceptualization of actually existing neoliberalism developed here, we would argue that patterns of neoliberal localization in any national or local context can be understood adequately only through an exploration of their complex, contested interactions with inherited national and local regulatory landscapes".

This reveals, then, the importance of structures alongside agency with *place-specific structures* - in the case of neoliberalism ranging from incumbent institutional regimes of governance and economic regulation to already existing discourses relating to

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welfare or employment - influencing *what power does in any one place at any one time*.

5. Developing organisational geographies of power

Based on this brief discussion of the way power has been theorised in relation to relational economic geographical approaches and work on neoliberalism, four interrelated issues emerge that need considering in any attempt to better theorise organisational geographies of power. We exemplify these points with reference to the work of TNCs from a relational economic geography perspective but the arguments are equally valid for other types of organization operating at national or international scales.

First, it is important to examine the *practices* associated with power through mobilization and, in an organizational context, the different actors involved in developing and deploying such practices. So, for example, in a transnational corporation, who is involved in attempts to control, from a distance, subsidiaries and what strategies do these actors develop to do this? Second, it is important to examine the *spatiality of the networks* that influence these practices and the different associations, that may well transcend scales and organizational boundaries, which help construct positions of power. In a TNC, how do UK-based actors' strategies to control a subsidiary in Spain draw on insights gained from business schools in the US, the approach of a rival firm based in Germany, the experience of another manager in the firm's Singapore subsidiary and the personal relationships of a manager in the Spanish subsidiary with a colleague based in the UK? Third, it is important to consider the *spatiality of the exercising of power*. This implies a focus on questions

about the differing roles of control at a distance (virtually) and control through proximity (in person), their relationship to different modalities of power and their differing effects. Why, how and with what effects does discourse get used by actors operating at a distance (through documents and telephone calls) as part of control through coercion whilst instructions are given only by actors in proximity (face-to-face) as part of control through authority? Fourth, it is essential to consider how the effects of power are determined by the way the enrolment of *agents who internalise meanings is influenced by situated structures*. Why and how do workers in the Spanish subsidiary react differently to workers in the Italian subsidiary when either discourse or instruction are used to encourage participation in training events deemed important by the firm?

Each of the papers in this special issue begins to address some of these questions through empirical analysis of a range of economic sectors and geographical contexts. In her paper, Sally Weller considers how different modalities, spatialities and scales of power were articulated during the collapse of one of Australia's leading airlines, Ansett Airlines. In addition to positioning transport firms more centrally within economic geographical analysis, her work points to the importance of considering the multiple and relational positioning of economic agents within networks in order to consider both the reproduction of power relations and their effects. Moreover, her case study also identifies the role of the state as an actor in shaping organisational geographies of power. Faulconbridge *et al.'s* paper shifts both the geographical context and theoretical focus of the special issue by exploring how executive search firms in Europe have carved out a powerful position for themselves in both corporate labour management processes and within elite labour markets more generally. Their

analysis points to the discursive strategies utilised by headhunting firms to achieve this and the geographical consequences as individuals seek to obtain positional advantage within such labour markets by emphasising their geographical differentiation. Meanwhile, Jones and Search focus on the geographical construction of power relations within the UK-based private equity industry. Their analysis follows recent work in relational economic geography to identify different forms of proximity that are important in reproducing power relations ranging from cultural, through virtual to organizational proximity.

Taken together, these papers provide clear examples of the value of adopting a relational and practice based approach in order to develop further understandings of the complex relationship between questions about what power is and does, the tactics of organisations, and space and place.

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