



# Co-creating with the homeless? Postmodern administration and participatory citizenship

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## Abstract

The article is based on the case of a group of homeless people who in the fall of 2013 occupied a central site in the Danish town of Aarhus. The authors argue that this specific case is an ideal object of investigation for casting light on a new situation in the field of public administration. Public administration has recently moved from the paradigm of New Public Management to a new and still undetermined paradigm, which focuses on activating and engaging citizens, treating them as equal partners in the process of co-creating welfare services and the community itself as a brand. Using the case of the homeless, the authors argue that participatory citizenship should not only be viewed as “added value” to the field of public administration, but rather as emerging within a dynamic and conflict-ridden field between citizens and administration where new types of value are potentially created.





## Keywords

Participatory citizenship; postmodern  
administration; homelessness;  
political philosophy

## Introduction

In the fall of 2013, a group of homeless people occupied a central site in the Danish town of Aarhus. Having chosen a site just next to Godsbanen (“the old freight train station”), which opened in March 2012 as a new main center for cultural production in Aarhus, the occupation made quite a stir among local politicians, local media, and citizens. Furthermore, as an alderman from the town council turned in the occupants to the police, this triggered a wide-reaching public debate on topics from homelessness to the cultural policy of Aarhus. Over the period from December 2013 to March 2014, which we will be focusing on in this article, the case of the homeless metamorphosed further, as the above-mentioned alderman altered his conviction, new groups joined the group of homeless, and new action was taken by the city’s body of public administration.

In this article, we argue that the case of the homeless forms a perfect object of investigation for casting light on a new situation in the field of public administration. In recent years, public administration, especially in Denmark, has moved from describing itself as an institution defined by efficiency in the service of citizens (New Public Management) to an institution interested in activating and engaging its citizens, treating them as equal partners in co-creating (or co-producing) welfare services, as well as in co-creating the community itself as brand. As public administrations open up, however, and slowly liberate themselves from conventional forms, new problems replace old ones. A general paradox, which we will be touching on in this article, seems to be that municipalities at simultaneously want to empower its citizens and control the output of their activities. The case of the homeless thus puts public administration in a tight spot: Should this project be shut down, be rejected as uncontrollable, or should the public administration support and endorse it? We regard this “schizophrenia” of postmodern public administration as going beyond the rationality of New Public Management.

In the following, we rely on a body of material consisting of semi-structured interviews with one of the partakers in the case of the homeless, as well as observations from the site.<sup>1</sup> We begin by presenting the case of the homeless, and we do this in a rather detailed manner, as the example provides fruitful insight into the complexity of postmodern public administration. Then we present a history and theoretical overview of various paradigms of public administration. Finally, we use

the theoretical framework of political philosophers Antonio Negri and Michael Hardt to analyze the processes that took place at the site of the “homeless tent” in interaction with postmodern public administration, relying on their concepts of “the multitude” and “imperial administration”. Building on but also developing the insights of Hardt and Negri further, the perspective of the article is to point to a situation where a new “shared field” between public administration and civil society is opening up. Even if this article only tentatively outlines this shared field, we here find something that demands a new theoretical understanding of the challenges and possibilities in postmodern public administration with regard to progressive participatory citizenship.

### **The case of the “homeless tent”**

One day in late September 2013, a Norwegian doctor and social activist, along with three fellow activists, arrived at Godsbanen in Aarhus. They had just spent the summer in Copenhagen, or more precisely in Freetown Christiania<sup>2</sup>, where they had been protesting on behalf of the numerous young people who regularly pass through the capital of Denmark – homeless and with no opportunities to find shelter for the night. The activists had organized these activities from a camp outside of Christiania and from a teepee inside the reigns of the free city, hosting campfires, debates, and offering people coffee. After the local police had evacuated the camp three times, the Norwegian activist decided to move the fight for the poor and the homeless to Aarhus.

Godsbanen in Aarhus used to be the focal point for the freight trains in the Danish mainland of Jutland. As is the case with many landmarks of industrialization, Godsbanen has in recent years been transformed into a creative platform for encounters between the arts, business, and education. Maybe somehow connecting to this, the activists, upon their arrival in Aarhus, headed straight for Godsbanen, where they set up two tents and went to sleep. In the daytime, some of the activists began to move around the underground milieus of Aarhus, seeking out places where homeless and people from the sub-cultures meet to smoke weed, drink, and talk. In the nighttime, they would set up a fire, and more and more people began to gather around the tent. As winter approached, however, the need for some kind of shelter became an important issue, and the Norwegian activist



used his network to find an old Moroccan tent (110 m<sup>2</sup>), which was raised just next to the tracks of Godsbanen. This tent became known as the “homeless tent”.

The homeless tent became a powerful symbol from very early on, when in December an alderman from the city council decided to report the tent activities to the police. The alderman is politically responsible for the administration of buildings, parks, sites, roads, etc., and he believed that the tent was put up illegally and wanted the police to remove it. From that moment on, the tent as a symbol surpassed the individuals in and around it: The story made headlines, and groups of citizens joined in. Facebook groups were set up, and a protest march in support of the homeless was organized. The inhabitants of the tent began to get daily visits from self-organized humanitarian groups of citizens bringing food, cake, and clothes. And all the while, back at City Hall, the political discussion continued. A newly elected local politician, who was to become responsible for the part of the administration that deals with social issues (homeless and marginalized people), heavily criticized his colleague for reporting the homeless. He wanted a solution to the basic social problem(s). After a visit to the tent, however, the first alderman completely altered his conviction and decided that the tent could stay for now – with the addendum that the task of the administration was to find *another* place for the users of the tent that they could run on their own. The newly elected alderman of the social administration also visited the tent, and in the middle of January, the homeless tent was turned into a project under his administration.

This is where our informant comes into the picture. Within the administration in the Aarhus Municipality we find what in brief could be summarized as an anarchistic character with a heart for the marginalized. For many years, he has been setting up projects and places for the homeless and the like, and he is, in his own description, the project type who makes things happen, sometimes even at odds with the rules and regulations. Since early 2013, he has nurtured a vision for a specific part of the area of Godsbanen, a short street with a Klondike-like atmosphere: Old shelters, wooden cabins and rough, bare land. The vision is called: Håbets Allé (“the Avenue of Hope”) and is supposed to be a place for “alternative” socio-economic enterprises, music joints, artistic activities, etc. Under the jurisdiction of the newly elected alderman, the case of the homeless tent became somehow connected to Håbets Allé, and our informant was made responsible for dealing with the

tent and its users. The way in which the administration told the story to the press shows that Håbets Allé has now become part of the solution to the problem of the homeless.

Since then, however, the case has become even more complex. Our investigation of the condition of the homeless tent through talks with our informant three months after it was set up (in March 2013 when we first took interest in the case) yields an interesting story: At this time, not many homeless people are left at the site. On a regular basis, two to three people who lack a stable place of residence come to sleep in the tent. The primary users of the tent are in fact now groupings of young people. They are not homeless; they just fancy a place to meet and eventually crash in case they get too stoned. So interestingly, the group that our informant has come to facilitate is not the group that the wider public, informed by the media, thinks it is. Several media have identified the Norwegian activist as the central figure and spokesperson of the “homeless tent” (understood as consisting of a group of homeless people) – easily identifiable with his clear-cut political activism – but some of the users of the tent disagree with him being the spokesperson. And, in fact, he has himself moved on to another project in the meantime. The homeless people themselves keep a very low profile and do not want to speak to the media or to representatives from the public administration. The group of youngsters is also very fragmented, consisting of different types of people with different agendas. All in all, the “group of homeless” is not very easily definable. As we will argue further below, there is no collective “we” connected to the tent, or at least only a very fragile one. Even though there have been various spokespersons on behalf of the tent, no one has ever been officially chosen, and no shared agenda has been agreed upon.

A description of the further developments in the case contributes to marking it as a project growing wild. In the middle of March, the administration took initiative, through our informant, to set up a meeting with all the relevant actors who were related to the homeless tent. In preparation of the meeting, our informant brought a small group of eight people from the tent with him on a trip to a weekend cottage, where they brainstormed and discussed what dreams and demands should be presented to the administration. The Norwegian activist also took part in this trip, but since then, as mentioned, he has moved on to another plan, which he is currently developing with a local attorney, namely an organization called Universitas Convivencia – a humanitarian organization based on the virtues of the pre-institutionalized universities of ancient Greece. The homeless, the young, the



Norwegian activist, the attorney and some other stakeholders and organizations from Godsbanen were all present at the dialogue meeting, together with some powerful people from the public administration (the alderman of the social administration, the director of the municipal authority for social affairs, the leader of the social services department and a lower manager from the same department), who – according to the notice of the meeting – were there as “listening panel”. No decisions were made, and no conclusions were drawn, but the alderman promised to have his administration look into all the ideas and keep the process of co-creation going.

### **New welfare, new value**

First of all, what the case of the homeless tent shows us is a public administration that acts and reacts in a very particularistic manner *vis-à-vis* the actors and interest groups outlined in the case. It is not possible to trace a universal line of reasoning in the way they act; a trait one would suspect from public agencies (Christensen 2011). This is partly due to the complexity of the case, of course, in terms of the different types of actors involved (from activists to the homeless to young people to the citizens of Aarhus, etc.), but it is also due to certain incoherence in the measures taken by the administration itself. Part of the administration thinks that the tent project should be shut down and removed, and another part (although the two parts overlap and merge) thinks that the project should somehow be supported and are looking for the best ways to do this. The administration even ends up as a mere “listening panel”, as described. As mentioned, the case is an ideal object of investigation and helps us understand the new situation in the field of public administration, as it delineates an administration that functions in a more open way towards its social surroundings. So the question to pose here is: How can we come to understand this type of postmodern public administration? To answer the question, we must present some background material on the history of public management in Danish municipalities. In recent years, especially in the domain of welfare administration, there has been a rapid development, which is about to transform the way administration is practiced, as it challenges traditional professional roles as well as the roles of the citizens.

Most municipalities in Denmark (and in Scandinavia) are presently asking themselves how they can keep delivering welfare services at a higher standard on lower budgets and still meet the citizens' expectations. Different models for new welfare systems are currently being sketched and tested. In the Municipality of Skanderborg, for instance, a new vision for how to conduct public administration has been born, which is entitled "Municipality 3.0" (Mandag Morgen 2013: 22). Setting out from the narrative of the Municipality of Skanderborg this of course begs the question of the characteristics of municipality 1.0 and 2.0, which we will shortly elaborate on. Municipality 1.0 was a traditional bureaucratic setup addressing the citizens as clients. The civil servants should be met with respect and the judgments of the system were not to be questioned. In the late seventies, however, the inefficiencies of the public sector and the ever-expanding budget deficits began to haunt most western welfare states, including Denmark. In the United States, Ronald Reagan took office, and in the United Kingdom, Margaret Thatcher moved to Downing Street, both on promises to wrestle the bureaucratic monster, fight the power of the unions, and free the creative potentials of the capital. Following the trends from not only the US and UK, but also New Zealand and other western countries, the Danish government began to reform the welfare system, creating municipality 2.0, according to some basic principles adopted from the market: Decentralization, professional leadership, contracts, incentives and control systems (Ejersbo and Greve 2008). The citizens were no longer clients but customers to be served. The quality of the public sector activities was measured in terms of how well the needs of the citizens were met.

With the financial crisis in 2007, a new agenda began to materialize; an agenda that has not yet found its final form, but is in the process of changing the terms of public administration. In municipality 3.0, the public sector is no longer in the service of the citizens, but is an equal player in the co-creation of welfare. The citizens, non-profit organizations, private enterprises, interest groups, and the like, are all co-creators in this process. To paraphrase the words of the Municipality of Skanderborg: In version 2.0, the municipality was an enterprise with 5,000 employees trying to fulfill the needs of the citizens; in version 3.0, the municipality is a community of 56,000 villagers all working together in the spirit of cooperation, helping and taking care of each other through localism, devolution, and voluntarism (Mandag Morgen 2013: 21). The welfare community is now what *we*, the citizens, make of it. Skanderborg is of course not the only municipality in Denmark to experiment with new forms of public administration and management. Today, this has become a



widespread phenomenon, both in terms of discourses on “engaged communities”, but also in concrete projects and practices where co-creation in cross-sector setups are being tested. In Holstebro Municipality, they have labeled it “Active Citizenship” and have made it a strategic priority to engage local communities, citizen groups, families, and the like, in the implementation of traditional welfare services. The municipalities of Aarhus, Viborg, Hedensted, and Horsens are in different ways engaged in the same process, promoting ways of co-creation and participatory citizenship.

What these models of postmodern public administration have in common is a new way of defining and implementing traditional welfare tasks. Many municipalities, as well as Mandag Morgen (“Monday Morning”), the leading think tank on this area in Denmark, simply call this *new welfare*. New welfare is a new way of thinking, a new mindset, when it comes to addressing complex matters in the relation between administration and citizens. New welfare, thus, does not (only) entail problems that call for more efficient solutions, as in municipality 2.0. New welfare addresses what has come to be known as “wicked problems” (Rittel and Melvin: 1973); problems that cannot be solved because they dialectically metamorphose or displace themselves every time a solution is tried out. These problems cannot be treated according to objective standards and procedures (such as a contract between the professional manager and the citizen), because they are part of an ongoing negotiation, which involves both the manager and the citizen on the same level. The old way of doing things depended on rules, regulations, universality, and professionalism, and subsequently, on contracts, goals, incentives, and control systems. New welfare, however, is a matter of “meta-governing” (Sørensen 2002, 2003; Torfing and Sørensen 2006) multiple agents and stakeholders, networks, interest groups, etc. (Eggers and Macmillan, 2013). According to such theorists as Eva Sørensen and Jacob Torfing, meta-governance, as we will develop and discuss further below, relates to a new fragmented and postmodern reality of public administration, characterized by globalized, differentiated, and complex societies, moves away from traditional bureaucracy, and thus engages in new visions and paradigms of how to manage dynamic networks of co-creation (Sørensen and Torfing 2006: 23).

## Paradigms of management

Going deeper into what postmodern public administration is about; we must consider the management theoretical paradigms underpinning the municipality in its various versions. The paradigm of public administration under the era of municipality 1.0 is well described in the existing literature. It has primarily been discussed and developed in political science departments, under the discipline known as Political Administration (PA) (Osborne 2006: 378). The paradigm of PA peaked in the post-World War II era, with its focus on a direct connection between policymaking and implementation. In the period from the late 1940s to mid-1970s, there was a confident expectation that the state would meet all the social and economic needs of the citizenry. The welfare state was handling your life “from cradle to grave”, as it was termed, and PA was the instrument with which to manage this endeavor.

In the tradition of PA, the state is a unitary entity where policymaking and implementations are vertically integrated within the government (Osborne 2006). Democratically elected (and therefore accountable) politicians decide the policies, and effective public managers implement the policies downstream at the benefit of the citizenry. This “line of command” in policymaking and implementation ensures accountability when it comes to the taxpayers’ money. Relating PA to our case, we can see the first alderman’s reaction as a typical municipality 1.0 act. We have a regulation and we have a situation, and the situation is not in accordance with regulation, so it must be corrected. The key management mechanism here is hierarchy, and educated professionals grounded in a public-sector ethos as an integrated value base ensure the stability, as well as the legitimacy, of the system.

The paradigm of municipality 2.0 is New Public Management (Hood 1991). New Public Management (NPM) was conceived as a child of economics and especially rational choice / public choice theory. From the perspective of NPM, the era of PA failed to ensure effectiveness and efficiency, and as a consequence, as mentioned above, several western welfare states looked to the private sector for inspiration. Under the NPM paradigm, the state becomes an increasingly disaggregated entity, primarily as a result of the ongoing process of decentralization. Policymaking and implementation are disentangled, and the implementation processes now take place through a wide range of independent service units – ideally in competition with each other (ibid.) (Hood and Jackson 1991). The independent service units in NPM are responsible for delivering high-quality



welfare services to the public at a low cost. At the same time, NPM reacts as a general rule to its surroundings in the same way as it reacts to a market, namely with sensibility to new trends and tendencies that are important to catch up with. In the case of the homeless tent, the reaction of the second alderman could in fact be read as an NPM way of dealing with complex problems. By making it a project within the organization of the municipality, the case is made manageable. We have a problem, ideas for solution, a plan, an organization, and a project manager responsible for the further process.

At the end of the 1990s and during the first decade of the new millennium, it became more and more evident, however, that the paradigm of NPM could not match public service in an increasingly plural and pluralistic world (Rhodes 1997). NPM as both an analytical prism and a set of tools to guide and underpin public administration and management began to be conceived as too narrow and one-dimensional. The demand for a more holistic approach to the complexities of society arose; an approach beyond the dichotomy of administration versus management, of the making of policies versus the management of implementation (Osborne 2006).

The paradigm to grasp the fragmented and complex reality of today's welfare society has been termed New Public Governance (NPG). Where traditional PA tended to focus on the policy system in a unitary state, and NPM on intra-organizational management in a disaggregated state, NPG is focused on inter-organizational governance mechanisms in a plural and pluralistic state (ibid.). A "plural" state means that multiple inter-dependent actors contribute to the delivery of public services – that is, actors who represent public institutions, private enterprises, third sector organizations, and more or less self-organized citizen groups. A "pluralistic" state in this context means that multiple processes inform the policy-making system (Osborne 2006: 384).

The organizational sociology and the network theory underpinning NPG thus proceed from two general assumptions of the state: 1) the state must be seen as a fragmented, multi-leveled, and multi-centered political system, tied together by more or less formalized networks; and 2) the dividing line between the state and the surrounding society is vanishing (Sørensen 2003:13). Under NPG, the complexity of the postmodern welfare state calls for co-creation and for network governing mechanisms in order to guarantee the necessary flexibility and dynamics in the

production of welfare services, as well as in the relation between administrators and citizens in general.

In order to maintain a certain amount of influence on the processes of governance within the networks of NPG, public administration has in recent years had to develop strategies for how to govern self-governing entities. Self-governance is a necessary trait in NPG, but it is also urgent that the public administrators and the policy system are able to coordinate the activities on an overall level. This is where meta-governance comes in (Sørensen 2003: 14). As described and theorized by, for example, Sørensen, the phenomenon of meta-governance does not imply some all-encompassing, gods-eye-like regulatory system, but describes various strategies for influencing and indirectly guiding the decisions taken within the networks. The repertoire to accomplish that task includes: 1) Framing through institutional design – for instance legal directions, setting the context, and marking the boundaries for the self-governing entities, or by influencing decisions through incentives. 2) Establishing a shared sense of culture or identity through storytelling. By creating a collective vision of right and wrong, good and bad, etc., public agencies can more easily direct group and network activities towards specific objectives. 3) Supporting and facilitating processes by means of funding, administrative resources, rooms, facilities, etc. Especially the widespread use of objective-focused funding exemplifies how the policy system can direct network activities towards areas of preference to the public administration. 4) By direct participation in, for instance, project groups. It is not unusual to see government actors become part of groups or networks on equal terms with the other partners – most often in combination with the above mentioned strategies. In these cases, meta-governance theorists highlight the importance that public representatives follow the internal rules of the specific institution or network in order not to function as direct representatives of power, whereby they would be compromising the values of network governance (ibid.).

In our case, we can identify at least the last two mechanisms, which were activated up until and during the dialogue meeting (facilitation and direct participation), where the municipality sat face to face with all the different groups and individuals with an interest in the homeless tent. The administration opened up and invited everyone to participate in the process, they supported and facilitated, and the municipality was directly engaged in the project.



As mentioned above, NPG is still in its making. No one really knows what it means yet to “co-create” or, to an even lesser extent, what it means to “meta-govern”. Furthermore, NPG seems to situate itself in some kind of paradox, pointing in (at least) two directions: Is NPG a sophisticated way of reducing costs on welfare and getting more out of its citizens in a situation where the western world is undergoing a financial crisis and western countries are in need of better competitive positions? Or is it, on the contrary, a much-needed new angle on public administration, pointing to and trying to correct some central weaknesses in NPM, for example its narrow focus on (economic) efficiency, to the detriment of public involvement? The Foucauldian thesis, which suggests that every installation of power, and especially modern “bio-power”, governing the very activities and life of its citizens creates its own possibilities of counter power, is very useful here – this thesis is, among other perspectives, also discussed by Sørensen and Torfing (2006: 115-139). In the case of the homeless tent, the postmodern administration suddenly had to react to what could be called a “political happening” or even a “protest action”, which, in older paradigms, it would not have noticed, nor treated seriously. From the perspective of municipality 3.0, the homeless tent in fact potentially becomes a phenomenon of “participatory citizenship”, and for that reason it cannot simply be shut down.

### **New value**

What is very interesting about the NPG paradigm is that – in formal terms – it opens itself up towards something “outside” of it. We will address this further in the next section. For the NPG paradigm, a citizen is not simply a predefined manageable object. Neither is welfare, nor good service, predefined entities; rather, they need to be co-created along the way. The slogan is, as we said, “new welfare”. What this relates to is, as we argue in the following, a whole new situation in both the economic and overall rationality connected to the state. If the state has always been about handling and managing the value already created by citizens and delivered back to the state through taxes (municipality 1.0 doing this rationally, municipality 2.0 doing this effectively), municipality 3.0 to some extent points to a situation where a new kind of value emerges from within the dynamic interplay of the citizens and the state (cf. Majgaard 2014). Of course, there is a tradition for understanding the importance of investments in the public sector (e.g. in education, infrastructure,

child care services, etc.), increasing the value of the work performed by citizens, as well as their motivation to work. However, the new value discussed here comes, in a much stronger sense, from the shared field of administration and citizens, not necessarily initiated by the state. The value in mention is first of all subjective and particular, and as such unmanageable. The homeless tent, for example can be of great value for the group involved in it, giving the individuals from the group new possibilities in life, as well as visibility in the public space – at the same time as being at the odds with public regulations and, in this case, with the district plans of the municipality. Conflict thus arises as to the “higher”, public value in the homeless tent, but engaging in participatory citizenship means exactly that citizen-initiated activities cannot simply *de jure* be turned down. In the end, new value thus emerges from complex and possibly conflict-ridden negotiations between citizens and the administration, constantly redefining what “public” means. From the perspective of the administration, engaging in participatory citizenship also means that the value created cannot beforehand be counted on, but must be regarded as a “spill off” effect, e.g. if the homeless tent becomes a renowned social experiment, attracting new citizens, tourists, even new investors to the municipality. Another way to measure this unpredictable type of value would be, as some municipalities do, to focus on processes of participatory citizenship as potentially creating more respect and responsibility among the citizens for their local area and the (social, urban development, etc.) projects going on in it, creating a stronger, more robust municipality, being able to reduce cost in social affairs, but also literally thriving on the social capital of its citizens.

It is this new dynamic interplay that the paradigm of NPG somehow touches on, without being able to theoretically articulate – or least, to articulate in a manner, which effectively addresses questions of – what progressive or emancipatory participatory citizenship would look like in this situation. Which new distributions of power emerge as a result of the transition from traditional public administration to postmodern administration? Which new challenges and possibilities arise for the weak, the marginalized, as well as for protest groups and political activists? This is what we will attempt to discuss in the following, basing our arguments on the work of political theorists Antonio Negri and Michael Hardt. Hardt and Negri work by forcefully presenting ontological-political interventions into postmodern, global capitalism, and postmodern society. Our engagement with Hardt and Negri, then, does not consist in using their work as a theoretical basis for explaining what *prima facie* happens in contemporary administrations and relations between state, citizens, and

capital, let alone to explain how things could function a little better. Rather, as we see it, Hardt and Negri offer an approach meant to bring about new understandings of work, administration, and the creation of common wealth, pushing our very ontological-ideological framework for understanding contemporary society and its potential in new directions. Engaging with Hardt and Negri thus means trying to invert perspectives, imagining and discussing completely new possibilities for society – in this case, beginning from the newest developments in postmodern administration, “municipality 3.0”.

### **The postmodern battlefield**

What is refreshing about the approach of Hardt and Negri is their ambition to understand nothing less than the new world order of postmodern capitalism, or what we in our daily lives refer to as “globalization”. Linking this to our initial presentation of paradigms of public management, the plural/pluralistic condition that Rod Rhodes theorizes is here given an economic-philosophical underpinning. Hardt and Negri propose to call this new order “the Empire”, as it transcends the borders of nation states, basing itself on a world market where goods, labor, and knowledge are exchanged, and where new forms of exploitation of knowledge workers, third world workers, and common resources arise. What rules in the era of the Empire is not a clearly definable power, but rather capital itself, so to speak, in the form of transnational corporations and enterprises, and power belongs to those who best manage to conform to the market. The state is, to be sure, very far from being dead, but something has fundamentally changed in the relation of capital to state, according to Hardt and Negri: The state is today to a very large degree dependent on capitalist corporations creating flows of value, as well as on the institutions administering these flows.

For Hardt and Negri, the decentered, but all-encompassing Empire equals the situation of postmodernism. The transition from modernism to postmodernism means the creation of new processes of wealth accumulation. From a Marxist standpoint on the exploitative nature of capitalism, Hardt and Negri thus analyze a situation in which capital today is in the position to feed on human labor in a new way. Not only does postmodern capitalism exploit our work, it also exploits our thoughts, creativity, and affections, our spontaneous ways of inventing new lifestyles, new products and solutions, new ways of communication, etc. This is not to say that industrial



production and sweatshops in the third world, which fabricate material goods of consumption, do not exist anymore. It is simply that “immaterial work” in this new situation plays a hegemonic role, as Hardt and Negri phrase it (Hardt and Negri 2005: 107-115). This also means, however, that the working class today, at least virtually, is international. Since capitalism not only feeds on our direct, physical, “individual” productivity, but also on our ways of collectively collaborating and communicating, there is a new possibility for emancipation. For Hardt and Negri, a battle ensues between the Empire, interesting in serving global capital and the ruling class, and what they call “the multitude” of the international working class, encompassing a wide spectrum of bio-politically productive life – i.e. working, thinking, affective life. The ideology of the nation state is, or at least it should be according to Hardt and Negri, about to vanish and unveil the real conflict between global capital and the international or “alterglobal” (Hardt and Negri 2011: 102) multitude.

### **The homeless tent as multitude**

If we are to understand where the “real” dynamic principle in the relation between citizens and state (and capital) comes from, we are, according to Hardt and Negri, to understand the multitude. We will expand on this concept below and discuss it in relation to the case of the homeless in order to approximate a conception of what “drives” or could drive postmodern public administration.

The multitude is not only, as one could come to think, the so-called “creative class”, from which texts and images flow. The multitude is also, and maybe even more importantly, “the poor, the unemployed, the unwaged, the homeless, and so forth” (Hardt and Negri 2005: 129). What Hardt and Negri want to accomplish with their concept of the multitude is thus an “inversion of perspective”, where the unemployed and homeless stand at the crux of what a mobile and creative life really means. No one is more flexible, they argue, than a migrant driven by the negative condition of fleeing from misery, but also by the “positive desire for wealth, peace and freedom” (ibid.: 133). No one is more creative than an unemployed, a homeless, or an entire poor population struggling to survive on a daily basis. This is not to say that the poor, the migrants, and the homeless do not suffer as a result of their lack of food, housing, security, etc. Hardt and Negri’s inversion of perspective is rather a polemic attack against the ideologically constructed hierarchies of the Empire; an inversion meant to rearticulate the wealth of knowledge that these groups, when

viewed from a skewed angle, posses. Hardt and Negri's polemic in fact attacks the very definition of work as such, which can be found in both Marxist and conservative versions, and which state that the only source of value is the factory (or the office) and the hard working male with calloused hands. In postmodern productive flows, they argue, the creation of value is bio-political, in the sense that it feeds on thoughts, creativity, and affections, as well as mobility, flexibility, etc., and thus the sphere of what is productive and what is unproductive has today become very blurred: "In fact, the old Marxist distinctions between productive and unproductive labor, as well as that between productive and reproductive labor, which were already dubious, should now be completely thrown out" (ibid.: 135). For example, how much is the invention of a new lifestyle worth? A new lifestyle can be worth millions to a capitalist corporation in the process of creating the products to fit this new lifestyle. A new lifestyle can also, potentially, transform the whole way a society thinks about (the production of) value, e.g. when new sustainable forms of life emerge.

In many ways, the theoretical perspective of Hardt and Negri can thus enlighten us on the status of the homeless tent at Godsbanen in Aarhus. First of all, the tent only came to be as the result of some very interesting movements of activists. A Norwegian activist, who had been camping in the area of Christiania in Copenhagen, along with some collaborators, moved to Aarhus to continue agitation. Even though the tent at Godsbanen has been described by the media as just a tent set up by and for the homeless, the truth about the tent is, as mentioned, that it serves as the background for the activity of many different types of people. As our informant tells us, they (he and his volunteer co-worker) in fact talk about the tent as roughly consisting of three groups: The homeless, the young (itself a diffuse group consisting of students, punkers and "garbage divers"), and "the others" (hangarounds with unknown motives). Then there was the Norwegian doctor himself, who borrowed the actual tent from a local underground busker. Finally, there was our informant, of course, employed by the Aarhus Municipality, but in practice functioning as some kind of anarchistic facilitator of the activities of the group around the tent. Furthermore, as mentioned, the group *around* the tent is much larger than the actual number of people sleeping *in* the tent (at the time of writing, March-April 2014, 2-3 persons), and not even those who sleep *in* the tent form any easily definable group, e.g. based on a local fight for the homeless, etc., as none of them in fact are citizens of the Aarhus Municipality (they are either foreigners or have home addresses in other municipalities). In summary: The tent group is not an easily definable entity. The

best description of it would be to say that it consists of marginalized people who are activists in some sense or other. In other words, they form some kind of chaotic multitude; not a coherent organization, but a “collective” nonetheless consisting of alternatively thinking/living singularities. In the words of Hardt and Negri: “The multitude [...] is composed of innumerable elements that remain different, one from the other, and yet communicate, collaborate, and act in common” (ibid. 140). The very fact that the activity of this multitude is organized around a tent also works perfectly well with Hardt and Negri’s theorization of the mobile and “nomadic” character of the multitude: The multitude is not something which belongs to one social class, or one simple demographically or geographically definable strata or place. It can move around, and it can transform itself.

The difficulty of defining what the tent is, and what it means, is played out in the very vocabulary of the users of the tent themselves. When at a public meeting one of the young spokesmen tried to speak on behalf of a “we”, he was corrected by some of the others, who reminded him that one can only speak on behalf of “oneself from the homeless tent”. In other words, no one can represent us. We are simply here, we took this spot, in one of the most valuable areas of Aarhus, ripe for development in terms of a new cultural and commercial town center, with cultural production, a new building for students of architecture and several company domiciles on the drawing board, but we do not have anything other than our mere “being here” as a weapon. What is interesting about the homeless tent from this perspective is that two very opposite things seem to spring from it: On the one hand, a spirit of “resistance”, of “being against”, a focus on the conditions of the poor and marginalized, whether young or homeless. On the other hand, the users of the tent have – under the guidance of our informant – produced a document containing a set of ideas about what to do with the area around Godsbanen, if they were to decide. Furthermore, they have for some time been upholding the practice of organizing common meetings at the tent (open for all) on Wednesdays, where they discuss and develop ideas (and furiously disagree or get drunk). Sometimes then, what the tent stands for is confrontation, or even (self-)destruction; at other times, however, it stands for what one could dub “creative resistance”.

The homeless tent is a local phenomenon, a tent set up in Aarhus, and the users of the tent battle local politicians, local police, and administrators. But it is also something more. The tent constitutes a symbol about which to fight; a symbol open to interpretation. In some sense, we have

here simply a tent in the sense of an empty form, a question mark at a central spot in Aarhus, waiting to be filled up with the interpretations of ordinary citizens, media, politicians, administrators, etc. In the light of the theorizations of Hardt and Negri, one interpretation interestingly prevails, while another one is barely visible. The prevailing interpretation of the tent so far seems to be that we have here a group of people who are calling for mercy, and it is our duty, as good, moral citizens, to provide them with shelter, food, security, etc. This is, and was from the very beginning, the interpretation made by the citizens of Aarhus, who started to donate stuff to the users in the tent – from clothes, to pillows and sheets, to chocolate, cake, food, etc. What this amounts to, however, could be said to be a drowning of the users of the tent in the ocean of mercy and compassion. Several loads of stuff donated to the homeless have in fact been trucked to the waste dump, because it simply “filled up” the tent, making it uninhabitable. Interpreting the symbol of the tent in this way amounts to identifying the users of the tent as “weak” and romanticizing this good old-fashioned weak position a bit. As our informant told us in one of our interviews: “[T]here is a symbolic investment in the picture of living under a bridge in Aarhus, having no food, etc.” What gets lost here is precisely the wealth of the poor (of the multitude) theorized by Hardt and Negri. What if they, with their occupation of a central spot in Aarhus, point to possibilities for this area, which not even the smartest city developer had dared to think of? What if they, by simply being there, and by refusing to move, inscribe a question mark into the current plans for the area, which conform to the ordinary capitalist Empire?

### **Administration and beyond...**

Having come so far as to see the homeless tent at Godsbanen from another alternative perspective, we must return to the public administration, which is, behind the scenes of the public debate and showing off politicians in the media, the nearest opponent (or possible partner) to the users of the homeless tent. If Hardt and Negri can help us form another vision of the creative activity of the multitude, we think that – especially in relation to our case – they remain very abstract when they propose that the reign of the multitude eventually could replace the reign of the Empire, with all its existing structures and systems, from the capitalist exchange of commodities to representational



democracy. What would this mobile, nomadic, fluctuating, constantly power-shifting “organization” look like?<sup>3</sup>

Much more promising would it be to view the power play between the Empire and the multitude as mutually developing. What if postmodern administration in fact gains from engaging with the multitude, being able to create new types of welfare, city development and self-understandings by taking seriously the resistance of the homeless and the young? And what if the homeless tent becomes something other than just a place of (self-)destruction in and through the engagement of “anarchist” public employees as well as engaged citizens and interested aldermen? What we will focus on and discuss in these concluding pages is this possibility of a shared field between postmodern administration and civil forces; not necessarily a harmonious field, but a field of conflict, battle, *and* new ideas and visions. To do this, we will address Hardt and Negri’s description of what they call “imperial administration”.

The way Hardt and Negri approach the question of imperial administration relates to their overall analysis of the Empire, and thus they contend that one can no longer use “rationalist” approaches to state administration, such as the classical approaches of G.W.F. Hegel or Max Weber. If traditional/modern sovereignty was based on transcendence (the transcendence of “the Prince, the state, the nation, or even the People” (Hardt and Negri 2001: 325)), postmodern sovereignty is immanent; it belongs to the immanent plane of capitalist exploitation and expansion. This transition was, as they present it, detected in a first form by Michel Foucault who analyzed the passage from sovereignty to “governmentality” (analyzing European rule in the seventeenth and eighteenth century), but is today culminating in postmodern, globalized capitalism. In this situation, the disciplinary institutions, which mediate between state and civil society, are gradually challenged by capital (ibid.: 329). To give just one example, in the institution of the school the classical/modern concept of “*Bildung*” is replaced by the postmodern concept of “competences”; that is, capacities that work well with personal development in a specifically capitalist setting. In short, discipline disappears in favor of a situation where “[r]ule is exercised directly over the movements of productive and cooperating subjectivities; institutions are formed and redefined continually according to the rhythm of these movements; and the topography of power no longer has to do primarily with spatial relations but is inscribed, rather, in the temporal displacements of subjectivities” (ibid.: 319). To be sure, however,

this does not mean that administrative power disappears, but that it changes. Administrative power today does not work according to the simple principle of discipline; rather it curiously splits into a mobilizing and a controlling side. We move from a society of discipline to a society of control (ibid.: 329). Here, we find what we have tentatively called the schizophrenia of postmodern administration. On the one hand, administration cannot just “objectively” manage the institutions of society, such as the institution of the welfare system, because welfare today is (also) thought of in “subjective” terms of co-creation and networks – the mobilization and animation of productive flows are important tasks for an administration. On the other hand, however, we are at the same time witnessing that the paradigms of evaluation and output management have never stood stronger. As theorized by Foucault scholar Mitchell Dean, modern government/governmentality consists of both “technologies of agency” and “technologies of performance” (Dean 1999: 167). Postmodern administration lingers between mobilizing citizens and treating them as equal partners, but still constantly controlling them (and its own methods), from tests in kindergartens and schools to constantly checking on and managing very tight welfare budgets, etc. “Innovation” here functions as a perfect mediator between mobilization and economic control, in the sense that innovation is about new solutions and visions, but new visions that always have the same result – cost reduction. It is as if administration today thinks of itself as an open and dynamic system, according to the terminology of NPG, whereas, in its very function, it still to a very large degree adheres to NPM.

Facing this new mobilizing/controlling power one could ask, however, what the classical administration would have done with the homeless tent. Would it even have considered listening to the users of the tent? Would it not simply have removed it? What is interesting about NPG is, as we said above, that it becomes marginally open to something outside of it, and accordingly it has some kind of fragility inscribed into it. We are definitely not in the situation where the multitude can take over power (once again, what would this power look like?). But maybe we are in a situation where what can be effected is some kind of change of public administration/bureaucracy. In other words, what if the new and more open relation between public administration and initiatives from below opens to the possibility of another kind of administration?

There is today, we claim, a deep confusion in the field of public administration. When a public administration sets out to co-create and mobilize its citizens, it proceeds blindly. It works

hard to set up frameworks for citizen engagement, but it can never be sure if this engagement will actually emerge. The same kind of confusion emerges when citizens suddenly act and create in illegal and provocative ways, such as setting up a tent at Godsbanen. A figure like the anarchist public employee, our informant, is very interesting here. He is, of course, a traditional project manager, first in charge of Håbets Allé and then also the homeless tent. But he is also something more. For example, the simple task of finding this person in the system of the Aarhus Municipality took some effort, when we first wanted to contact him; it took several phone calls before someone finally managed to direct us to his superior. Is he then not some kind of “comprise formation” in the Freudian sense on behalf of the municipality? The municipality know that they have to do something about the homeless tent; they may even know that they – as an open, dynamic institution – have to react in a positive way. But they do not want to know about the details. Our anarchist public employee does, for all we know, a very fine job with the users and puts a lot of energy into it. Yet he also operates in a very strange grey zone between the legal and the illegal, between the authorization of representational democracy and the authorization of the very cause of the marginalized, or, in the spirit of Hardt and Negri, the radical democracy of the multitude.

In conclusion, it seems that postmodern bureaucracy, in that it rules “directly over the movements of productive and cooperating subjectivities”, stands at the brink of something genuinely new. The question it has to ask itself is precisely: *What counts as productive and cooperating subjectivities?* Should it listen to the (capitalist-economic) voice of the Empire and consider Godsbanen as an area of capitalist development, with a mixture of money spending students, friendly and harmless cultural production, and big company domiciles charging big rents? Or should it listen to the voice of the multitude, which brings a completely new perspective into the picture – where homeless and punkers come to play a central part in city development, where we get Håbets Allé with its small, social-economic enterprises, “Poverty Walks” guided by homeless and former drug addicts, a Universitas Convivencia with the prospect of street level education, and so on? The big challenge that postmodern administration faces is that new administrative solutions may not be restricted to processing the same kind of productivity and value that we know, but that they could involve new multitude-based social, cooperative types of value.

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<sup>1</sup> We have conducted two semi-structured research interviews with our informant. In early 2014, our informant was hired by the Aarhus Municipality in order to facilitate the users of the homeless tent. We have used him as a source of "historical" information about the individuals and groups around the tent. Based on a critical hermeneutic tradition, we have also approached our informant's self-descriptions, as well as his descriptions of the phenomenon of the homeless tent, in this way constructing the possible meaning he puts into his work, as well as the meaning he (and through him, the municipality) puts into the phenomenon of the homeless tent. We have thus been interested in our informant, not in the sense of knowing about his personal background and motives, but rather in figuring out the space of meaning he occupies in the context of the case, as well as the way he reasons about mediating the rationales of the group of homeless with the rationales of the municipality.

<sup>2</sup> Freetown Christiania is a self-proclaimed autonomous state in the state of Denmark. It has functioned as such since 1971 (although never recognized fully by the Danish state), but throughout the last decade it has been under considerable pressure, initiated by the Danish right-wing government ruling from 2001-2009 who wanted it "normalized".

<sup>3</sup> We are not alone in this critique of Hardt and Negri. As Slavoj Žižek has remarked, the crucial question for Hardt and Negri regards precisely a "multitude in power" ("One should shamelessly ask here a naïve question: what would "multitude in power" (not only as resistance) be? How would it function?" (Žižek, 2006)).

