Review of: "Corralling a Chimera: A Critical Review of the Term Social Infrastructure"

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Potential competing interests: No potential competing interests to declare.

Thank you for the opportunity to review this manuscript. Qeios is a novel review format for me --- I don't think I've ever done one of these open reviews for an open-access paper.

This manuscript, "Corralling a Chimera: A Critical Review of the Term Social Infrastructure," does an important service in compiling and reviewing a somewhat large body of literature that employs the term "social infrastructure." As the authors write, this term does have many different connotations or uses, and so more definitional precision would be useful, if we want to operationalize this concept more effectively in our research.

At the same time, I could see a few areas for improvement or further refinement of the analysis.

First, I think that the analysis could be more deeply historicized. By this I mean it's important to recognize the historical context for the usage of "social infrastructure" (SI) --- i.e., how do political-economic structures (or regimes) shape policy discourses at the national level (in particular)? For example, a late-socialist political context (like that of Poland in the 1980s) is different from, say, a social-welfare-state model (like that of Japan in the 1970s), and those contexts affect the way researchers would understand SI. These researchers are not doing their work in a timeless vacuum, but in specific political-economic contexts.

Relatedly, I would say that the recent re-emergence of "social infrastructure" as a popular term (really, starting with Eric Klinenberg) is a reaction, in part, to the "hollowing out" of the public sector and the neglect of public spaces under neoliberalism, in the Western world. To me, that's the overarching political-economic story of the last four decades, the rise of neoliberalism and the reaction to it. While it's true that neoliberalism can often be employed too casually or thoughtlessly as a causal mechanism, the total absence of neoliberalism in this article is a bit odd.

Also consider the notion of the "epistemic community" as a way of organizing changing ideas around the term "social infrastructure." That is: "a group of people with shared knowledge, expertise, beliefs, or ways of looking at the world: for example, 'the scientific community', a group of professional specialists, or a school of thought" (definition from Oxford Reference). Another way to put it: I think it would be beneficial to "trace" the use of the term, over time, within specific epistemic communities (e.g. political scientists, or urban sociologists, education theorists, transportation planners, or what have you), by following the bibliographic chain and tracking the scholarly conversation in those areas. Even though you've brought together references to social infrastructure in categories like "health care" or "transport," these don't really entail epistemic communities. Instead these are researchers from various and disconnected epistemic communities who

happen to be using SI in domains like health care, education, or transport.

The last paragraph of the "Discussion" section makes an important point, that the concept of "social infrastructure" has recently been applied as a kind of resource that can help mitigate against shocks or natural disasters. This is true enough. But I think a more thorough discussion of Klinenberg's "Palaces for the People" should acknowledge that he developed this concept, at first, as a way of explaining why some communities are more resilient in the face of crises like natural disasters. If I'm not mistaken, Klinenberg began toying with the term "social infrastructure" in the aftermath of Hurricane Sandy and in the specific geographical context of the New York metro area; he pointed out (in a 2013 New Yorker article, "Adaptation") that while Sandy was a harbinger of future climate-change-driven disasters, there was too much policy emphasis on improvements to physical infrastructure, and relatively insufficient attention to SI. Prior to that, even in "Heat Wave," or in his writing on the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, he was clearly talking about SI even though he used other terms like "social ecology." And again, he was arguing that neoliberalism (basically) had diminished investment in what had been seen as public goods, shrunk the public sphere, and frayed the social fabric. Moving towards resilience means rebuilding social infrastructure.

Anyway, I think you're on the same wavelength as Eric Klinenberg, i.e. you favor a more restrictive definition of SI that is similar to the one he uses. But, the genealogy and legacy of his innovative ideas needs further exploration. I think his way of using SI is almost paradigm-shifting, making prior uses of SI seem antiquated or irrelevant. If I'm wrong --- i.e., if you think EK is not a paradigm-shifter --- it would still be important to trace the genealogy of his concept --- who are his forebears, peers, interlocutors in his epistemic community?

I hope you'll find these comments useful, and please email me if you want to follow up. Good luck with all your future research.