

Good governance and urban planning

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Abstract

This paper locates 'good governance' within the broader analytic concept of governance, and applied it to the governing of urban land use – that is, to urban planning. It identifies parallel shift in town planning and political science from clear hierarchical models of governing to complex, interactive models in which 'government' is an outcome of continuing activity among a range of participants. This points to the importance for urban planning of constituting locations for interaction and the construction of shared meanings and commitments, a process termed by Healey 'collaborative planning'.

Planning and the governing of urban land use

Urban land use has always been governed, in one way or another, in that 'the management of organisation of space, and land and property rights and the provision of urban services' has always been a concern of public authority (Healey 1997: 8). A pottery fragment from Babylon in 2000BC bears the words 'If a man wishes to build a house and his neighbour ...' - perhaps the first record of a development control rule. (Dawkins 1986) Public authority has always been involved in governing land use.

The question is how this is done. Usually, the involvement of public authority was a continuing, responsive process, in which problems and opportunities were addressed as they appeared. The expansion of urban areas into the surrounding countryside during the nineteenth century, and the growth of new towns around industrial sites, together with an increasing faith that '[s]cientific knowledge could provide an objective basis for identifying present problems and predicting future possibilities' (Healey 1997: 9), encouraged the development of a more 'proactive' approach to the governing of land use, and of the emergence of 'town planning' as a specialist occupation and body of knowledge. This was focused on the physical development of urban areas - the provision of infrastructure, the optimum use of land, the segregation of uses, etc. - and gave rise to plans, codes and regulatory systems.

The expectation that scientific knowledge could provide an authoritative framework for governing urban land use was not fulfilled. The rationales of planning were contested and the rules which enforced them were disputed and evaded. The showcases of planning were the 'green fields' sites like Canberra where there were no existing uses, few organised interests, and no landowners. So there was an underlying question about how 'planning' would relate to the other forces governing the use of urban land, such as the existing pattern of usage and expectations, the interests of corporations, local councils, traffic managers and infrastructure providers, and the workings of market forces. The empirical account might show a pattern of governing urban land use in which 'planning' played little part (see, for instance, Painter 1967). There was a sense that a more extensive map of the process was needed.

There was also an erosion of confidence in the assumption on which planning had been built - that systematic thought could anticipate and resolve the issues on which government would be needed. The outcomes of planning (e.g. in relation to class and allocation) were disputed, and planners themselves debated their role in relation to social and political processes, with planners like Davidoff (1965) and Gans (1969) arguing that the planner could not be a detached scientist, but needed to be an advocate for the weakest participants in the game. It became clear that variables such as 'externalities' were socially constructed, and that zoning rules were not sufficient to prevent intense and highly-disruptive disputes about land use. Moreover, the NIMBY ('not in my back yard') phenomenon showed that there were some facilities whose utility was not questioned but which would be resisted no matter where they were located.

So there has been an erosion of confidence in the capacity of town planning to deal with the governing of land use. Writers like Healey (1997) argue that thinking about planning needs to take an *institutional, interpretive and collaborative* approach, not seeking to generate and apply a knowledge which is separate from the participants, but to understand how they are located in the social world, how they understand themselves and their world, and the webs of relationships through which they organise their lives. In other words, the governing is not to be understood as something imposed upon them, but as something which they construct (and which the planners facilitate). This realignment of thinking about planning meshes with the realignment of thinking by both practitioners and observers which is captured by the term 'governance'.

Governance as an analytic approach

These developments in the understanding of the governing of land use are paralleled in the increasing use in political science of the term 'governance' instead of 'government', and by the more specific concern of agencies like the World Bank to promote 'good governance'. But the term has been used in widely different senses by different writers, and there is little agreement on the terms of the debate. 'Because the term has a strong intuitive appeal, precise definitions are seldom thought to be necessary by those who use it.' (Lynn *et al.* 2000: 234) Sometime it is used as a synonym for the whole process of social order: Peters and Pierre (2000: 15-22), for instance, see the commonly-recognised archetypes of market, hierarchy and community as sub-sets of governance (and add a fourth, 'networks'). Healey also takes a broad view, defining governance as 'the management of the common affairs of political communities', and argues that it

involves much more than the formal institutions of *government*. It may occur in informal arenas too ...[involving] less visible, informal power ...[which] is not just behind-the-scenes manipulation. It is also embedded in the thoughtworld of the powerful. Governance processes themselves generate relational networks, which may cut across or draw together and interlink the relational webs of the life of households and firms. (Healey 1997: 59).

Reviews of the use of the term have tended to document the variety of uses without resolving the differences. For instance, in the introduction to his book *Debating Governance*, Jon Pierre (2000) identifies three different ways in which the term can be used, but his first three authors identify five, two and seven distinct usages. Rhodes (1997) identifies seven uses of governance:

- as corporate governance, relating to companies
- as the New Public Management, with its focus on 'steering rather than rowing'
- as 'good governance', a reform agenda of the World Bank and other bodies
- as international interdependence generating new modes of governing
- as a 'socio-cybernetic system' involving both public and private actors
- as the New Political Economy, focusing on mechanisms of coordination
- as a way of governing through networks

While there is much diversity, there are common themes running through most of these uses, and rather than simply cataloguing the variations, it is more fruitful to identify these common themes and the issues that are raised, to locate 'good governance' in this broader concern with governance, to clarify its relationship to the idea of 'government', and finally to explore the relationship between the practice of governing and the constructs which are applied in its analysis.

The main elements of governance

We can identify three main themes in the governance approach.

- Its focus on the *complexity* of government. It is seen as consisting of 'multiple agencies, institutions and systems' (Jessop, quoted by Rhodes 2000: 59), linked by complex patterns of interaction, and marked by 'increasing problems of coordination' (Pierre 2000: 4).

- Consequently, there is a focus on *alternatives to hierarchy*: how can these complex patterns of interaction be ordered when authoritative direction is not always available? Two different approaches can be taken (Lynn *et al.* 2000: 235):

- identifying systems of *rules* - e.g. the 'public choice' and 'transaction cost' approaches (see e.g. Larmour 1997).

- identifying alternative organisational forms, notably *networks*, which are seen as having emerged to replace hierarchy. (see surveys by Borzel 1998, Agranoff and McGuire 2001).

- This is seen as a *change*, in both practice and theory. 'Over the past two decades the practice of public administration has moved away from a monocentric understanding of the nature of policy-making and implementation towards a plurocentric one.' (Brans 1997: 389). The concept of governance, it is argued, has emerged as an appropriate term for this changed practice.

Good Governance

The term 'good governance' originated with the World Bank, and while it emerges from the debate about the complexity of governing that we have been discussing, it also reflects specific strategic concerns of the Bank, and specifically, the charter provisions prohibiting the Bank from concerning itself with political considerations. The Bank was concerned at what it saw as widespread failure on the part of governments, which it saw as often ineffectual, frustrating private investment without deriving any public benefit, unable to maintain the rule of law, and operating primarily for the benefit of an inflated bureaucracy. But because of the constraints in the charter, it described its campaign as the pursuit of 'good governance'.

To some extent, 'good governance' is a political program on the part of the Bank and its allies, who seek to create 'an effective political framework conducive to private economic action' (Hirst 2000: 14). It calls for an efficient public service, an independent judiciary and the enforcement of contract, accountability for the expenditure of public funds, responsibility to the legislature, respect for human rights - all perfectly defensible as goals (though open to the objection that this is simply rewriting as a set of requirements for others what Westerners like to think are the characteristics of their own system), but not having much connection with the broader debate on governance. But it has placed on the agenda some key issues for debate, including -

- the appropriate extent of government action, challenging the Keynesian orthodoxy of the 60's and 70's which assumed a major role for government;
- the utility of market forces, both to determine investment, and in some cases, to be used within government (e.g. setting 'market prices' for services provided by public agencies);
- the importance of institutions, not only organisational forms and procedures, but also the norms, practices and codes of conduct that shape practice in government, the market sector and the community;
- the stress on universalist and rule-based (rather than ad hoc and partisan) regimes of practice: the rule of law, the prevention of corruption, and transparency in government;
- the pursuit of efficiency in government, both by focusing on outcomes rather than process, and by reducing costs.

Governance as part of a broadening understanding of governing

The emergence of governance as an analytical approach has expanded our understanding of governing by focusing attention on its interorganisational dimension, the way in which it draws together multiple organisations and multiple frameworks of meaning to constitute a regime of rule. This desire to go beyond 'the philosophical and constitutional images of the sovereign state' in the analysis of government is also reflected in the growing interest in 'governmentality' deriving from 'an expanding research program devoted to the study of rationalities of government in the modern West and loosely based on some of the later work of Michel Foucault (Dean and Hindess 1998: 2). This approach shares with the governance approach the recognition of the organisational complexity of the process of governing.

To the extent that the modern state 'rules', it does so on the basis of an elaborate network of relations formed among the complex of institutions, organizations and apparatuses that make it up, and between state and non-state institutions. (Rose and Miller 1992: 176)

In this perspective, government is not 'a definite and uniform group of institutions', but

... an inventive, strategic, technical and artful set of 'assemblages' fashioned from diverse elements, put together in novel and specific ways, and rationalised in relation to governmental objectives and goals. (Dean and Hindess 1998: 8).

This approach stresses that an important aspect of the process of governing is the way in which situations come to be seen as 'problems', needing to the governed.

... problems do not exist in themselves. They become known through grids of evaluation and judgment about objects that are far from self-evident. ... the study of government involves the examination not only of normative principles derived from political philosophy but also of the expertise and know-how of policymakers and specialists of various sorts, including academics, economists, accountants, psychologists, bureaucrats, social workers, law enforcement officers and so on. Government exists in the medium of thought, of mentalities and rationalities of government. (Dean and Hindess 1998: 9)

So the analysis of government needs to ask about the ideas people hold about what are problems and what can be done about them.

[studies of government] seek to interrogate the problems and problematisations through which 'being' has been shaped in a thinkable and manageable form, the sites and locales where these problems formed and the authorities responsible for enunciating upon them, the techniques and devices invented, the modes of authority and subjectification engendered, and the telos of ambitions and strategies. (Rose 1999, 22)

This makes inquiry into government very wide-ranging, focusing on the 'rationalities' of government, and the constitution of governable subjects, as important elements of governing, and the way that governing is 'made up' from a diversity of practices and 'technologies' of government.

Applying 'good governance' to urban planning

The discourse on governance addresses one of the major problems of 'practical theorising' which confronts land use planners: the discrepancy between the formal map of government and their experience of it. Plans are proposed, accepted by governments and promulgated, but their provisions are not conclusive: they meet with indifference, if not resistance, from governmental bodies of various sorts, sometimes with support from non-governmental bodies. Statements like 'land use is regulated by government' appear not so much untrue as inadequate. The authority of government seems to be dispersed among a number of agencies; government constitutes plans, but also opportunities to resist them; government holds authority, but it seems to need to negotiate with land users about the way in which this authority will be exercised. These characteristics, which seem problematic on a conventional map of government, are more comprehensible in a discourse of governance, which recognises the diversity of bodies playing some part in the governing of the way that land is used.

The governance approach directs attention to these diverse bodies and the ways in which they relate to one another and produce 'government'. It is concerned with organisational forms and the relationships between them - with networks and networking - but also with the underlying structure of shared meaning and values through which these relationships are sustained. It seeks to build up an understanding of the structures and practices which are there, rather than take refuge in formulations about 'obstruction' or 'lack of political will'.

In this respect, the governance approach builds on the same themes as writer in the interpretive school of land use planning, such as John Forester (1989, 1993) and Patsy Healey (1996, 1997). Healey points to the need to locate the values and aspiration of planning within specific structures of governance.

A sensitive grasp of specific governance forms and styles may help explain why some aspects of planning work which are seen as important elsewhere are difficult to introduce (for example, open strategic debate on policy issues). ... 'Reading local political culture'; means going beyond the surface of both formal politics and informal power games and into the embedded cultural practices which structure routines and styles, and flow knowledge and values around the political networks. (Healey 1997: 240)

An awareness of this dimension of the process of government has always been part of the 'tacit knowledge' of both practitioners and researchers in the land use field, but they have lacked the conceptual framework in which this knowledge could be located. The governance perspective offers this conceptual base, and has the potential to expand our understanding of the governing of land use. At the same time, the land use case,

which has been the subject of so much professional attention and scholarly research, has the potential to sharpen our awareness of the utility of the concept of governance.

The literature on good governance does not seem to have given much attention to what 'good governance' would mean for urban planning. In many ways, urban government, particularly in the Third World, looks like a classic case for the application of the 'good governance' prescription:

- multiple government agencies with poor interconnection
- government major provider of services, but often inefficient monopolies
- extensive but uneven regulation
- conflicting agency agendas producing regulatory stalemate
- frustration of development opportunities
- widespread evasion of regulation
- considerable scope for corruption

The 'good governance' answer seems obvious: less government, more market, and better policing. That is, reducing the extent of government 'intervention', with less regulation (whether by town planners or anyone else), and privatisation of service provision, and hence less opportunity for corruption. But at the same time, there are few who would argue that the unrestrained play of market forces will produce better outcomes. The infrastructure of urban life - the transport links and utilities - is a collective benefit, and it cannot be assumed that it will emerge from Adam Smith's 'invisible hand'. While entrepreneurs may be interested in providing some parts of it, such as profitable toll roads, even these depend on the regulatory power of the state. And ultimately, the market value of urban property reflects not only what an owner can do with it, but also how it is affected by the externalities of other landowners - that is, on the structure of rights and regulations that constitutes not simply town planning but also property law itself.

It is recognised, too, that there is a difference between individual interests and collective interests. Urban life offers many examples of the Tragedy of the Commons (Hardin 1970). Individuals want to drive their cars to work because it is faster and more convenient than public transport; because so many do this, there is heavy congestion and drivers spend hours in traffic jams, adding to urban pollution; if half the drivers left their cars at home and travelled by public transport, both car drivers and public transport passengers would be better off, but for one driver to do this would make no difference. Banning two-stroke cabs (Bangkok's *tuktuks*) would make a significant contribution to reducing air pollution (a collective benefit), but at the expense of one of the poorest groups of urban workers.

And what is frequently cited as the major institutional problem in urban planning - the division of the machinery of government into distinct functionally-specialised agencies, responsible for roads or policing or air pollution or transport, etc. - is aimed at maximising their operational efficiency. And both the 'managerialist' reforms of the 1970s and 1980s and the more market-oriented reforms of the 1990s have stressed maximising the managerial autonomy of these agencies and not subjecting them to 'red tape'.

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