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A reconceptualisation of urban management (reflections on the book
A reconceptualisation of urban management: The administration of cities, their services, and their growth)

Introduction

The readers of *Urbani izziv* are well informed on various aspects of urban problems that are closely related to both the high number and density of the population in cities. My book *A reconceptualisation of urban management: The administration of cities, their services, and their growth* focuses on how these numerous problems are to be resolved. Douglas Yates (1977: 6) believes that urban problems are almost unsolvable because "the city is too decentralised to permit coherent planning and policy making" and is too centralised to support a responsive, flexible relationship between the city administration and citizens. The city administration's task of providing urban services for such densely populated and heterogeneous areas is extremely demanding, especially taking into account that citizens' needs differ, that issues of marginalised and poor groups should be addressed and that an environment attractive to investors should be created at the same time. Shabbir Cheema (1993) believes there are only two possible answers to urban problems: to reduce immigration pressures or to improve urban management. Urban management is often described as an approach towards solving complex urban problems (see,

e.g., Cheema, 1993; Bramezza, 1996; McGill, 1996; Werna, 1995; Van Dijk, 2006 etc.); however, this concept lacks a clear definition and a context. Thus the chief goal of my book is to enrich the urban management concept in meaning and empower it with tools.

What is urban management?

Urban management is closely connected to the new role of city governments in the neoliberal era (Davey et al. 1996). Edmundo Werna (1995) highlights changes in the political and economic framework of society that have influenced the development of urban management. He points out how the modes of production prevailing throughout the world were restructured, with associated changes in the regime of accumulation, an emphasis on the locality, and the increasing complexity and fragmentation of society. In addition, one has to consider welfare-state crises, as well as the wave of decentralisation and rising competitiveness between cities. These global changes have dramatically influenced urban development and, with it, the development of urban management. Urban management theory has its roots in local government reform and the geographical concepts of "urban managerialism" from the 1970s, but it "flourished

as an institutionalised concept in the mid-1980s, when it was championed by a number of key international donor agencies for the developing world" (Jenkins 2000: 137).

In the 1970s, when discussion on urban managerialism was dominated by Ray E. Pahl, Simon Leonard and Peter Williams, the concept was mainly discussed within the framework of urban sociology. This changed over time, moving urban management into a more interdisciplinary area. Because of its elusive nature, "urban management" was claimed by a number of disciplines (architecture, sociology, urban sociology, urbanism, political science etc.), each of which understood and defined the concept differently. Numerous authors have tried to define urban management (e.g., Stren, 1993; Dillinger, 1994; Davey, 1993; Mattingly, 1994; McGill, 1998 etc.), but a unified definition has yet to be achieved. Richard E. Stren (1993) suggests that, in fact, arriving at a concise definition of urban management has never really been attempted, in spite of comparative and analytical work in this area. According to Michael Mattingly (1994), a clearer notion of what comprises urban management is necessary for its further development. Aside from the interdisciplinary and

multidisciplinary approach, the lack of a definition of convergence has also resulted from confusing the term *urban management* with other related terms. Some authors (e.g., Churchill, 1985; Cheema, 1993; Bramezza, 1996; Clarke, 1991) equate the term *urban management* with urban governance. Pieter Meine Van Dijk (2006: 10) especially warns that urban management is not urban governance because "the first refers to the officials executing the policies, while governance in the case of local governments refers to more." In this context, Nirmala Rao (2007: 4) especially emphasises that "cities are governed *and* managed."

In this book I argue that the term *urban management* should be preserved and given substance. Because it has been on the academic agenda for decades, it would be unwise to let it die "within the rapidly changing international marketplace of development ideas" (Stren 1993: 137). Ideas like *new city management* (Hambleton, 2004), *integrated urban management* (Chakrabarty, 2001), *project management* (Mattingly 1994), *development or growth management* (Mattingly 1994) and so on could be all incorporated into this umbrella term. I also argue that urban management should be distinguished from New Public Management reforms because city administrations are under different constraints than state administrations. Calls for a leaner state have caused a decentralisation of numerous tasks that are now within the authority of the local (city) government. Providing local services demands financial resources that cities must raise. Intergovernmental transfers are mostly insufficient, and so cities have to compete in the market, which brings cities closer to a business environment. The prevailing argument of this book is that urban management is the required modern reform movement for city administration, and that its principles are different from other public administration reforms.

Reconceptualisation of urban management

(Re)conceptualisation should be understood as a modern approach towards city administration proactive functioning and, illustratively, urban management is presented as a balancing scale. Its chief concern is to maintain a balance between the stakeholders (the citizens) and the shareholders (the investors), protecting and giving voice to citizens while at the same time providing opportunities for investors. The basic balance between social and economic development should be pursued. To attract investors to the city, a specialised labour force and an efficient infrastructure should be provided; the labour force is mostly attracted by job availability and a high standard of living. Consequently, in order to attract investors, the labour force also has to be attracted, and vice versa.

The reader may wonder why I emphasise the proactive role of city administration/management because in modern democratic local government systems the local government holds legitimate power to adopt public policies and strategies for city development. Although I am neither challenging the democratic polity nor proposing technocracy in the city, I do argue that city administration/management should be given special attention and more power. The reason is that city administration plays a key role in city performance. Some cities perform better than others, and some suggest that the credit for success of the city should not be given only to politicians. Studies (see, e.g., Mouritzen & Svara 2002) show that cities with a more autonomous urban manager (the highest-ranking civil servant in the city administration organisation) perform better than others. Jordi Borja (1996) states that allowing the urban manager more autonomy will result in more successful and effective city leadership. As Walter Rauch (1998) and

James H. Svara (2003) discovered, U.S. cities with more-powerful urban managers invest more in long-term projects. For a city to become more attractive to investors and to highly-skilled labour, it must invest in long-term projects, but these are often hampered by the length of political terms. This implies that city administrators should assume more activities related to city development and long-term goals.

Outline of the book

The opening discussion serves as an introduction. Chapter One presents theories on city administration and city management. The reader is introduced to understanding how the city is perceived in administrative science and how this perception differs from other disciplines' conceptions. Also included in this chapter is argumentation on why studying city administration/management is important. Chapter Two focuses on the city as a subject of management: the static-structural approach toward the city and city polity. It identifies how legal provisions, structural limitations and system frameworks shape the subject of urban management and how an urban manager can define his scope of work. Chapter Three offers insight into the service provision function of the city. The lean state paradigm has caused the decentralisation of many public service provisions to the local level (and thus also or even more so to the urban level). Coupled with extreme population density and pressures for economic performance, this presents city administrations with an extensive workload. The chapter also offers an overview of reform theory and political theory, their confrontation on the optimal size of the city and how administration reform could help overcome the optimal size issue. Chapter Four documents the process of concept evolution and divides it into three eras: the era of managerialism, the era of agencies and the era of governance, which help

explain how and why the urban management concept remains elusive. The chapter closes with an argument on why and how urban management, new public management and urban governance differ because this differentiation is crucial for understanding development of urban management. The chapter offers a conceptual framework of urban management that is detached from empirical reality; the reader is presented with an illustrative model of the urban management concept that should be understood as a balancing scale. Although a conceptual framework is usually detached from empirical reality, the most persuasive basis for recommendations is empirical evidence. Therefore the last chapter presents an extensive study on urban management as an evaluation test of the proposed urban management concept. The conclusion tests whether, to what extent and how the proposed model holds merit.

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Biography

Irena Bačlija is an assistant professor at the Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Ljubljana (Department of Policy Analysis and Public Administration). Her research areas are urban management, urban governance and local self-government systems. She has authored and coauthored several publications. More information and her full CV are available at http://www.fdv.uni-lj.si/obvestila-in-informacije/imenik-sodelavcev/pedagogi/kartica/irena-baclija/.

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