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GOVERNANCE AND URBAN ORGANIZATION: INTEGRATED DECISION-MAKING

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Introduction

1. The urban fabric is the product of historical processes involving constellations of actors who- although defined by different cultural contexts - belonged to one of three spheres: civil society, market or State. Thus cities were created by decisions and actions taken by national or local governments, banks and firms, and citizens and citizens' associations. Urban planning tried to improve coordination and to regulate land use and building performance. But without involving all stakeholders in decision-making, and without any consensus among them all, the urban fabric was anything but the product of a rational, comprehensive plan. Sustainability was not an issue and liveability was less important than the concentration of capital, wealth or workers. The environment was spoilt, natural resources were devastated and space for recreation and pleasure became scarce. The poor became, and they still are, concentrated in areas with unequal opportunities:

Cities are poles of attraction for wealth and poverty, for the urban gentry and for the under-privileged populations. This bears the expression of two generally contradictory requirements: involvement in world competition and maintenance of social cohesion. It creates tensions which must be managed at the urban level and within the metropolitan territory.¹

Thus, the division of cities into areas of included and excluded citizens has become a cornerstone of the vast literature on segregation in cities, and a major concern of policy makers at all levels.²

2. To fight social polarization and related cultural and political fragmentation, new modes of urban policy emerged, commonly summarized under the label *urban governance*. Urban governance suggests a broader-based involvement of relevant partners. It aims to coordinate all stakeholders in private/public partnerships, open all decisions to democratic debate, and seek efficiency through consensus. Thus, normatively, urban governance signals a strategy for overcoming social polarization and political fragmentation, and making the city an inclusive organization, where actors representing local government, private business and voluntary organizations work hand in hand to create a city that is both sustainable and liveable.

3. Needless to say, urban researchers have to beware of being too influenced by the strong ideological load of this broad rhetorical commitment. Thus, evaluating the real effects of the governance approach is a demanding task. However, although the state of research does not allow for firm conclusions on the efficiency of urban governance as it is practised, it is possible to assess to what extent the paradigm of governance is being used in urban research in countries of the region as a tool for the transformation of urban planning and decision-making.

4. In addition to the introduction and a brief concluding section, the paper is organized in two main chapters. The first chapter identifies a common definition of *governance*, sketches the development from government to governance and highlights *partnership* as a special kind of governance. In the second chapter, six sets of questions are raised on the performance of urban governance.

I. URBAN GOVERNANCE AND PARTNERSHIPS

A. From government to governance

5. Current policy debates usually refer to urban politics in terms of development "from government to governance". A starting point is the British Westminster Model, characterized by the following traits: parliament and city council as focal points of sovereignty; strong cabinet and city government; strong public administration; accountability through elections; political parties as crucial links in the policy process; and representative democracy as a normative point of reference. With due modifications this chain of accountability also serves for semi-parliamentary and presidential systems. So leaving aside national particularities, the government model can be described as an administrative "tube system", where the demands of the electorate are aggregated by parliament, and packaged and transmitted by the government to the administration as the loyal servant of the public interest. Although weak links in this chain were acknowledged by both social scientists and the public, the model was long accepted as a fairly good picture of how policy was and should be made.³

6. In the 1980s/90s "demand overload" and the "fiscal crisis of the state" caused severe problems for central and local government, i.e. there was "ungovernability".⁴ Local governments in the countries in transition were burdened with new responsibilities without receiving the necessary resources. In addition, globalization in its various aspects eroded the ability of central and local governments to govern in the usual, linear way. Reality became more complex, diverse and uncertain. Politics responded by becoming more flexible, differentiated and fragmented, at

the same time arousing attempts to create coordination through new policy networks and coalitions. In other words, there was *governance*.⁵

7. In the governance era the State is no longer a centre for authoritative policy-making. It is too small to address the big problems, and too big to solve the small ones.⁶ We are faced with a situation where individuals, groups, governments and other political subjects are caught in a network of overlapping responsibilities, where it is very difficult to recognize the appropriate sites of politics and democracy. Consequently, urban governance is not confined to one particular geographical site. It is a multidimensional (multisectoral, multi-actor and multilevel) phenomenon. For example, international and national urban policies and programmes together with non-public and neighbourhood activities must all be taken into account when analysing policies affecting a particular city, town or smaller community.

B. The urban partnership

8. Although governance may appear in different forms, in an urban setting it is commonly conceptualised as some sort of policy network. As stated by Rhodes:⁷ "Networks are the analytical heart of the notion of governance in the study of Public Administration". In everyday political language different kinds of policy networks often appear under the label 'partnership'. Formally, partnership has been defined as:

- Two or more actors, at least one of which is public;
- Each partner is a principal, i.e. has a good deal of latitude for action;
- There is an enduring relationship among the actors involved;
- Each partner contributes material and/or immaterial resources to the partnership;
- Responsibility for the outcomes is shared.⁸

9. However, in practice, partnerships appear in several variants. Sometimes a particular unit of local government gets together with private companies and/or voluntary organizations to develop a policy for solving a particular problem. This coalition may be just an ad hoc arrangement for one particular occasion (issue network) or it may be an element of a long-term strategy for a set of actors interested in a broader policy area (policy community). At others, policies in a town or city may even be identified as the processes and outputs of an enduring urban regime, dominating over several policy areas. Thus, when we encounter the term partnership in current political practice, we should treat it as an object to be analysed rather than an analytical concept in itself.⁹

10. Looking broadly at policy-making in cities in the ECE region one is struck by the co-existence of more or less contradictory strategies indicating the presence of parallel, and sometimes competing, partnerships or coalitions of actors and interests. Thus we seem to be facing a situation where urban governance is increasingly fragmented and dispersed, either to a myriad of partnerships created in a more or less ad hoc manner, or to competing coalitions promoting economic growth, ecological sustainability or social inclusion and justice. Is it at all possible to find cases where policies for economic efficiency, ecological sustainability and social justice are effectively coordinated?

11. Real-world partnerships can be regarded as arenas where different actors and interests meet in conflict or in consensus. Sometimes these negotiations lead to compromise, sometimes

they are just superficial, hiding outcomes that one-sidedly favour one partner, sometimes the partnerships end up in rhetorical declarations with no tangible results. Some partnerships are narrow, exclusively used by actors and interests that are already privileged, whereas other partnerships include groups which are commonly marginalized. Each partnership must be analysed on its own terms. There is no universal answer as to the effects of partnerships, neither in terms of efficiency, nor in terms of democracy. In addition, one should not underestimate the methodological problems when it comes to assessing the outcome of partnerships in practice. Thus, evaluation done by scholars standing close to the sponsoring partners sometimes seems to have exaggerated the positive outcomes.

12. Partnerships in urban governance, so far, have commonly appeared as a phenomenon with a strong normative flavour, something like a universal tool to solve any kind of urban problem. However, systematic comparative studies of various forms of urban governance concerning particular issues (e.g. "social inclusion" or "ecological sustainability") in different national and local contexts are now emerging. Thus we are moving from proclaiming partnerships as "good governance" to describing, explaining and normatively assessing the kinds of governance we have in real life.

13. The way cities are governed, and the way urban societies are organized, is critical to the planning and development of sustainable and liveable areas. Urban planning using the traditional government model is too rigid to meet the new challenges. It is both inefficient and devoid of democratic legitimacy. Thus important reforms have taken place to integrate different levels and sectors of government, while at the same time giving more responsibility to economic partners, especially business leaders, and to civil society, mainly non-governmental, voluntary associations.¹⁰

14. Partnerships also create a new relation between research and practice. Research is now much more than the accumulation of knowledge, facts and patterns of action. Research itself has become one of the partners, helping to manage the process by continuous evaluation, by choosing pertinent information, by shaping communication between the partners, and especially in relation to citizens. How do researchers in different countries relate to this issue? What methodologies do they use? The question of who commissions research is important. Is research still commissioned mainly by public bodies or is it also open to private partners? Do voluntary associations and civil society have access to research as commissioners, rather than just as readers of research done for more powerful partners? Research tries both to describe and to influence the rules of equity which characterize partnerships. The countries in transition are discovering new models of cooperation, including the idea that regulations that have been agreed in consensual decision-making processes are more effective than imposed norms and rules. The countries in transition can get faster access to these experiences through comparative research. Are partnerships for research between countries in transition and Western countries as easy to build as partnerships for training and teaching?

II. PARTNERSHIPS AND URBAN PLANNING

15. Despite many differences in national political culture and sector-bound policy content among European countries, there are probably some elements common to partnerships and urban

governance. To find out what is similar and what is different, we would like national respondents to reflect and comment upon the following six sets of questions.

A. Policy targets and configurations in urban governance

16. We are particularly interested in three kinds of policy initiatives: (i) ecological and environmental policy, including measures to tackle urban sprawl and reduce energy consumption; (ii) area-based initiatives to combat urban poverty and strengthen social inclusion; and (iii) city action to create private and public partnerships for urban development and a common urban vision.

17. *Urban eco-governance* is located within the framework of national legislation and policies. It is hard for local government to argue for and implement ecologically sustainable policies when national policies are moving in a contrary direction. Energy, traffic and infrastructure are areas where national policies often seem to impede or contradict ecologically sustainable development. In many countries local government is a crucial actor when it comes to sewerage and waste treatment, recycling, green public purchase, green consumption, green accounts, etc., and thus it may initiate and support citizens' initiatives leading towards sustainability. However, its scope of action is narrower in energy, traffic, heavy infrastructure, environmental protection and agriculture. Here business interests, the central State and extra-national actors, such as transnational companies, carry much greater weight, even when they act through local partnerships with public bodies.¹¹

18. *Socio-economic governance* favours social inclusion, and is organized through area-based initiatives in distressed urban areas. These have often been chosen through national decision-making processes, in which local initiatives might have been considered. Attempts have been made to mobilize firms for the creation of new jobs, and to organize training and access to jobs. Other measures have been taken in the field of education, culture, and generally to empower inhabitants. Urban research has been associated with policies to design and evaluate experimental schemes. In some countries, local partnerships still link mostly public bodies, with few openings to private partners or representatives of the people. The national respondents to our inquiry are requested to highlight these differences and try to explain them.

19. In the new international philosophy of development and the struggle against poverty, concepts like "capacity building", "empowerment", and "enabling the excluded groups" have become commonplace. But what has really been achieved in the different ECE countries? Are these widespread concepts used in all situations, or do they need specific conditions to operate? What are these conditions? Are there differences between neighbourhoods in the same town in the conditions for the effective use of these concepts?

20. *City-based governance*, i.e. governance in favour of city competition and economic prosperity, is another important field to document. City-based governance has been implemented in visionary strategies associating many stakeholders, trying to produce a shared image of the city and actions to improve it. Researchers have worked to put proposals to inhabitants, to test hypotheses in inquiries, to synthesize results and to manage public debates.

21. What experience do researchers have of this new strategic approach? Some agree with, and others ignore, this new position for research, in some countries called "urban marketing", and in others "advocacy planning" or "advocacy research". This means that relationships between researchers and local government and other actors may differ from one national context to another. What is the trend in each country?

22. • *In which policy areas are partnerships most common, e.g. in urban and regional development policy, in policies directed at distressed neighbourhoods or in policies promoting ecological sustainability?*

• *Who are the actors generally involved in partnerships trying to solve particular problems, e.g. lagging economic development, social segregation or environmental pollution, in towns and cities in your country?*

• *Are the partnerships organized the same way for different issues?*

• *What are the relationships between partnerships and governments at the national, regional and local levels? How can research help to solve vertical and horizontal conflicts?*

B. Inclusion and exclusion in partnerships

23. Experience from some countries suggests that there are two main concepts of partnerships at the moment: one focused on associating private and public-sector bodies, and the other on coordinating public bodies from different levels and sectors. Neither seems to be as inclusive as the search for consensus would require. Some groups are excluded from partnerships, irrespective of their proportion of the population. Youth, for example, are commonly not represented. Perhaps the authorities do not regard youth as stable enough to deserve representation? Ethnic minorities, who in some towns constitute quite a large proportion of the population, are generally excluded too, sometimes with unfortunate consequences for the legitimacy of local authorities. However, women have strengthened their representation in governance lately, either by their own efforts or with support from specific measures decided by the authorities. Following the Rio Declaration and Agenda 21, the inclusion of as many groups as possible in society is recognized as one of the main conditions for sustainable development.¹² However, each country has its own approach to this question due to specific historical circumstances.

24. The question of business in partnerships calls for specific attention. Resources for any project will come not only from national redistribution, but also from local business support. However, globalization creates a new situation in which local firms are less local than ever, and dependent on decisions based on stock-exchange results rather than local needs. Previously planning was organized to gather workers for industries, nowadays planning strives more to attract industries and services by creating high-quality urban settings, high-level education opportunities and cultural amenities. This way of acting seems to have been profitable in the transition period from the industrial economy to the service economy.

25. In some countries, private enterprises deliver urban services, such as water, transport, energy and health, whereas in other countries this delivery is done by the public authorities. Sometimes delivery is by a combination of these models, private enterprise delivering the services according to rules set by local authorities. Finally, urban amenities can also be sold at market prices, with the public sector being concerned only with the delivery of a universal,

minimum level of services to the most disadvantaged citizens. In some European countries local amenities are delivered mainly by the public sector.

26. • *Do ecological, economic and social boundaries coincide or do these spheres overlap?*
- *How should constraints related to spatial boundaries be dealt with?*
 - *Which partners are in a position to make the necessary links?*
 - *To what extent do citizens in general, and commonly excluded groups in particular, participate in and have an influence upon partnerships?*
 - *Are voluntary groups concerned with specific issues or services, or do they participate in the common vision for urban development?*
 - *What kinds of conflicts are visible, and between which actors and interests?*
 - *What power relationships are involved in a particular issue and how are these relationships affected by new practices of urban governance, i.e. who are the winners and who are the losers, are win-win practices possible?*

C. Urban governance and the rise of individualism

27. There is a growing tendency for citizens to take judicial action against planning and urban projects, claiming to defend their rights, especially the right to private property. Supported by arguments taken from human rights texts and traditions, local property owners place major constraints on local public authorities preventing them from buying properties to build affordable housing, to create new public spaces, etc. Conflicts between local property owners and public authorities are especially vocal in countries in transition where the right to property is new and strongly defended, but they are visible in all countries, where they create difficulties for urban policy makers and planners.

28. • *How is this new political attitude of individualism addressed in your country?*
- *Are new owners able to take part in urban development actions?*
 - *Can their lack of experience be compensated for by support from public-sector professionals?*
 - *How does the partnership approach handle the conflict in property rights and land use between traditional values of planning and the new individualism?*
 - *How do local and national authorities deal with it?*

D. Partnerships and efficiency

29. Urban governance in general and partnerships in particular are commonly legitimized as being *more efficient* than traditional forms of government.¹³ The most common argument given in favour of partnership is its potential for synergy, i.e. the additional benefit gained when two or more partners act together to attain a common (or allegedly common) goal. The perceived synergistic effect of a partnership is that the whole is more than the sum of its parts.

30. Secondly, there is the budget enlargement argument pertaining to the objective of raising more money by pooling resources. This involves trying to get additional support from a third partner. This habit is now quite common, not least in the context of the European Union's structural funds. By showing a will to cooperate, two or more partners might gain additional

support from a central government or a supranational body, thus making their budgets larger than they would have been had each of them acted in isolation.

31. Thirdly, a partnership means spreading the financial risk among several partners. In case of failure, each partner will not be hit as hard as he/she would have been as if he/she had acted on his/her own. On the other hand, a successful outcome would be cheaper for each partner.

32. Fourthly, in a situation when there is strong pressure on the government to reduce public spending for both financial and ideological reasons, establishing partnerships could be a good opportunity to decrease demand on stretched budgets, whilst still meeting the expectations of citizens.

33. The final - but perhaps the most crucial - argument is that partnerships help bridge differences and dampen conflicts, thus making policy smoother and less costly. By bringing conflicting issues into a narrow circle of actors for negotiation, conflicts could be kept out of the wider public debate, thus fostering a consensual political climate and making policy more "efficient".

34. Of course whether a partnership is efficient or not in any of these respects is an empirical question. The time lag caused by the sometimes endless negotiations between partners, for example, may not be so efficient. However, the point is that the efficiency rhetoric is strong enough on its own to legitimize the creation of partnerships. Thus, the following questions could be raised with regard to efficiency and partnerships:

- *Are partnerships bringing more resources to ordinary local government action?*
- *Are partnerships a means of reducing local government spending?*
- *Do partnerships promote solutions reshaped by cooperation? Are these solutions more efficient?*
- *What are the views of elected representatives, businesses and the voluntary sector of partnerships and similar governance arrangements? Are partnerships sometimes seen as too time-consuming?*
- *At what governmental level - local, regional, central - are partnerships most common? Is it primarily a local phenomenon?*
- *Can research stay independent while assessing partnerships?*
- *What positive and negative effects on efficiency have you experienced with partnerships?*

E. Partnerships and accountability

35. Most observers seem to welcome the advent of governance, in general, and partnerships, in particular, as a more efficient way of meeting the challenges facing today's politics, especially local politics. Experience so far also seems to indicate that partnerships can often be efficient in several aspects. But what about partnerships and democracy? With the traditional government model, the issue of democratic accountability was not a problem. We knew who to praise when all went well, and who to blame when there was a failure. Accountability could at least be exerted in the next election. But what about partnerships in this respect?

36. In the partnership approach, implementation is left to coalitions including varying combinations of actors. Although many such coalitions may be efficient in terms of policy

synergy, pooling finance and other aspects, the consequences for power relations and democracy are more questionable. The policies pursued by more or less ad hoc networks are not necessarily synchronized or coordinated with national priorities. They are sometimes dominated by established corporate interests and strong bureaucrats, whereas elected politicians and marginalized groups have a much weaker position or are even excluded.

37. While traditional government, at least in theory, contained a chain of accountability ultimately leading to some kind of elected body like a parliament or a municipal council, partnership arrangements leave the question of accountability wide open. At best these arrangements may serve as positive complements to representative democracy, giving a voice to excluded groups in society. At worst partnerships may serve as more or less sophisticated forms of sustained elite governance.

38. The fact that the traditional mechanisms of accountability in representative democracy were never designed to cope with multi-organizational, fragmented policy systems has unclear normative consequences.¹⁴ Consequently, the question of democratic accountability in the policy process is a crucial one. Accountability is the bridge between participation and representation. Assuming that it is not possible for a citizen to take an active part in politics at all levels and in all sectors, power has to be delegated to elected representatives or appointed bureaucrats, who should all be accountable to the electorate. Of course, behind this ideal type there are normative assumptions. Firstly, in a representative democracy an overriding goal of government is to consolidate, develop and strengthen democracy as a system of governance. Secondly, in societies based on representative democracy this responsibility also includes the employed administrators, who have to prepare and implement the decisions taken by the elected representatives.

39. One major problem with the partnership approach is that it tends to limit participation in the policy process to elites that already have a strong position in society. Partnerships thus run the risk of becoming 'gated communities'. These communities then decide which actors are to be included, the roles of these actors and the rules of the game, and they also decide which issues will be included and which will be excluded from the policy agenda. Thus partnerships tend to substitute private governance for public accountability. The role of local government and its representatives becomes crucial in resisting such a development. Does representative local government have the will and capacity to uphold fundamental democratic values when it cooperates with various "partners" in diffuse, policy-making networks? The question highlights the fact that issues of accountability and policy-making are as relevant to government as to governance.

40. • *How, and by whom, is accountability claimed when policy-making moves from a system based upon representative popular government to a situation increasingly characterized by multi-organizational, fragmented policy-making?*

• *What role in the policy process do the elected politicians play in relation to the employed administrators and actors representing various interests in the market and civil society?*

• *Do the voluntary sector and ordinary citizens play an active part in initiating, creating and steering, or is their involvement more passively that of watching, and confirming the actions of politicians, administrators or partnerships?*

F. Governance and urban planning

41. Broadly speaking, post-war planning theory has moved development from the rational comprehensive model of planning via advocacy planning, towards forms of planning giving a stronger voice to lay citizens. Thus rational planning has become "collaborative" or "communicative" planning.¹⁵

42. The role assigned to the planner by planning doctrine has shifted over time, including such roles as coordinator, creative artist, expert, bureaucrat, administrator, negotiator, advocacy planner, facilitator and mediator. In practice, a planner may take on different roles depending on the context. Whether this change in planning theory also has its counterpart in planning practice is an open question, although there are bold attempts to make planning more inclusive as illustrated, for example, by many local Agenda 21 activities around the world.¹⁶ Planners probably take on new ideas selectively and gradually add to their repertoire of possible lines of action. Arguably, they have to be more flexible than before, prepared to adapt to different circumstances, sometimes using traditional, rationalist methods, sometimes negotiating with private business and other "stakeholders" and sometimes even trying to start a dialogue with ordinary citizens. Although these are forms of action that have always been used by planners, they are today integral parts of a more sophisticated tool kit.¹⁷

43. Communicative planning as commonly conceptualized includes a strong consensual element, which also reflects a current trend in democratic theory, where deliberative and discursive democracy have become the catchwords.¹⁸ At the heart of the deliberative model lies the idea that in decision-making everyone has to be heard, and a decision should not be made when it is perceived as fundamentally wrong. However, it should be borne in mind that adherence to deliberative democratic ideals does not exclude the recognition of conflicts in real-life planning and politics. On the contrary, the focus on consensus in planning practice is an expression of the need to handle these very conflicts.

44. A possible role for the planner, in a world where politics seems to become increasingly fragmented, is to act as a mediator between different groups. Thus, the planner may contribute to broadening the knowledge base for planning.¹⁹ Bringing different standpoints and arguments onto the agenda may clarify what is at stake, and lead to a better understanding of the nature of a conflict. Sometimes different opinions go back to fundamental differences of interest that cannot be resolved through discussion. However, sometimes contradictions may be less antagonistic than they first seem, and in these cases planners as mediators may help the process run more smoothly. Taking the extra time to negotiate a consensus may be efficient in the long run, eliminating conflicts that might otherwise arise during the implementation stage.²⁰

45. • *What are the predominant roles of civil servants and professionals in planning and how do they influence the planning process?*

• *Are civil servants and professionals keen on dialogue with other partners, and, if not, what conditions would have to be fulfilled to change their attitude?*

• *Is urban planning to be characterized as a rational, top-down activity, a negotiation between an exclusive set of stakeholders, or as a bottom-up, communicative process involving a broad set of actors?*

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