



GOVERNANCE AND LEGAL STRUCTURES

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There are four key topics that *Urban Age* has raised about city governance in New York, London, Shanghai, Mexico City, Johannesburg, and Berlin: the fragmentation of the metropolitan areas in which the cities are located; the organisation of the cities themselves as vehicles for the provision of governmental services; the impact of the concept of being a ‘global city’ on city decision making; and the role of privatisation in city planning and service delivery.

- None of these cities is large enough to encompass its entire region, and none is ever likely to do so. But that doesn’t mean that the region is already the ‘real’ city. Since no regional political organisation exists that can react to, and help direct, public or private decisions, the fragmented municipal governments – along with the national and (for some cities) state or provincial governments – make the necessary policy decisions. The question is whether and how to change this.
- The cities themselves can be seen not just as too small to be effective but also too large. Most, but not all, of them subdivide the city government to deal with local matters. But the organisation of these boroughs, districts, and sub-regions differs radically, and the question is how best to set them up. This issue and the need for regional thinking are not unrelated topics. The empowerment of a region with millions (in Shanghai tens of millions) of people would not allow for meaningful democratic participation by local citizens. The current boundaries of the principal cities are themselves inadequate to this task. Sub-city governments, by contrast, can enable citizens’ participation in the daily governmental decision-making that affects their lives.
- How does one understand the impact of their global city status on the power of these cities? More precisely, what is the role of the city government in producing, or at least furthering, becoming a global city? There is little doubt that government officials in all of the cities now seek to promote their global

city status. But none of them can easily control such a development, let alone rethink or redirect city policy away from such a goal. Yet many city residents have no connection to the global business network or even to the neighbourhoods where it is located. And traditional city services (education, sanitation, housing, policing) have to compete for resources against those seeking to support the global city policy from a limited city budget. Should the national (or state) governments delegate greater power to these cities to revise their current global city focus?

- The city efforts to promote being a global city are but one example of the trend towards privatisation in these cities. Perhaps the most significant illustration of this trend is the current emphasis on ‘governance’, rather than government, as the vehicle for public policy decision-making. This emphasis and the focus on being a global city reinforce each other. Governance imagines ‘stakeholders’ being ‘at the table’, working with city officials and others to formulate policy through consensus. It’s unimaginable that representatives of global business enterprises will be excluded from such a meeting. It’s quite imaginable, on the other hand, that there will no one there from the floating population, the informal economy, or representing the poor newcomers who have recently immigrated from another country. Given the embrace by city officials of a globally oriented policy, the invited stakeholders can easily think that the overall direction of city policy is uncontroversial – indeed, is a worldwide phenomenon that no one in the room could conceivably resist.

The issues of privatisation and of the fostering of the global city are intimately connected with the first two topics listed above: regional planning and sub-city democracy. The latter two topics focus on the nature and power of government institutions, not on privatisation or public-private structures of governance. Making government work better, and making it more responsive to its citizens, strengthens the role of

government as it seeks to develop a ‘partnership’ with private and non-profit institutions. Creating regional and sub-city structures is one way to do so. A change in the current method of governing cities can thus have an impact, not only on government but also on governance – on the role of democracy in the world’s major cities. If public-private partnerships are the wave of the future – at least, the wave of the near-term future – it is important to re-invigorate the ‘public’ half of the arrangement.

Doing this in the six very different contexts we have examined would be carried out by six different policies. Some cities encompass a sensible subdivision of their region (London, Shanghai) and some don’t (New York, Mexico City, Berlin). Some are controlled directly by the national government (Mexico City, London), some by state government (New York), and some are simultaneously cities and states (Berlin, Shanghai). Some have subdivisions that may be too powerful (London), some that may be too weak (Mexico City, Berlin), and some don’t have effective subdivisions at all (New York). Some have vigorous democracies and one (Shanghai) does not have an elected government. It’s possible to outline a subdivision and regional structure – and a conception of city power – in general terms. But their application in each of these contexts will differ enormously. The same can be said about governance and the focus on being a global city: New York and London, on the one hand, and Mexico City and Johannesburg on the other, are not similarly situated on either score. And Berlin and Shanghai are not comparable to any of the other four – or to each other.

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