Book Review

Richard C. Feiock, ed.
Metropolitan Governance: Conflict, Competition and Cooperation.
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by

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Max Weber famously defined bureaucratic governance as rational and legal. V. I. Lenin promised that, after the revolution, the governance of people would be replaced by the administration of things. Both notions were wildly optimistic. In each version of the modernist utopia, politics is replaced by a system of administration to which each will contribute according to their tax forms and from which each will receive according to well defined public policy.

In the contemporary version of a healthy democracy, the rational and legal administration of things is carried on within the context of an ecology of games in which competing interests vie with one another for their share of the authoritatively allocated values deemed necessary to achieve individual and collective prosperity within a market economy. Success is defined as a state of relative equilibrium in which no voice goes wholly unheeded, no interest is permanently ignored and interest groups are transformed into stakeholders whose commitment to the distributive system is rewarded with policy pay-offs ranging from tax breaks to small businesses to subsidies for rent or day care places. Social services are provided and social obligations are met in the cheerful give-and-take of a moderate pluralism.

When observing and assessing this vision of the polity, the most obvious locus of inquiry is neither the national state nor the large components of a federation but the city. Just as democracy was first formally discussed in the ancient Greek polis, so contemporary municipalities are the best places to witness what has become of the sort of participatory democracy that has been praised from the echoes of Pericles' far-famed funeral oration to the present day.

In the 1950s and 1960s there occurred within the domain of professional political science a robust debate between those who affirmed that competition among organized interest groups ensured the maximum possible degree of social justice and those who insisted that the apparently amiable distribution of public goods among citizens and organizations amounted to nothing more that a thin veneer masking a fundamentally inequitable set of political arrangements in which identifiable political and economic elites dominated ordinary citizens and oppressed minorities, the marginalized and the underclass. No matter how much the decision-making process seemed to be open to involvement by people regardless of class, gender and ethnicity, dissenters insisted that the rulers maintained exclusive power over the rules; everything else was "hokum."

The pluralist illusion was severely damaged, especially in the United States, by riots and minor

rebellions as the systemically disenfranchised pushed their way from the obscurity of powerlessness onto the political stage. Racially and economically disinherited citizens made it plain that the good, gray and predictable (and predictably hypocritical) political process was vulnerable to angry attack. In the end, however, accommodations were made, bitterness was bought off and a new rendering of liberal democracy was put in place.

Whether in the form of fiscally restrained new public management or in the exaggerated commitment to public safety (amply abetted by the rhetorical flourishes of the "war on terror"), a new corporatism has emerged and the voices of dissension are once again muted.

In his anthology, *Metropolitan Governance*, Professor Richard C. Feiock of Florida State University brings forward the views of scholars whose fundamental approach to municipal government is neither to debate the efficacy of pluralism nor to advance an ideological commitment to the new public management and the neoliberalism that sustains it. Instead, they express a firm dedication to empirical analysis and what might well be called a problem centered focus.

Of special importance to most of the contributors are the factual parameters of city politics, in some cases including the question of literal boundaries and how drawing them in different ways can completely transform local government. This is not unimportant, for the transformation of urban government into broad regional arrangements based, for example, on the demographics of massive extra-urban residential and commercial development is an undeniable factor influencing the structure of governance and the means which must be adopted to solve what are seen as eminently practical problems. A recurrent theme is the difficulty of managing the supersuburbs (populations of 50,000 or more in municipalities close to a major city), of which the United States has 245 – the largest being Aurora, Colorado with a population of 276,393, Hialeah, Florida (226,419), Plano, Texas (222,030) and Glendale, Arizona (218,812). Area-wide solutions to transportation and infrastructure seem to demand consolidation, but centrifugal factors – not least of which are local community identities – remain to be taken into account.

To examine how competition and cooperation work in these settings, somewhat abstract analytical techniques are employed. Game theory, for instance, plays an important part in Annette Steinacker's approach to strategies for metropolitan cooperation. Using an "iterated" version of the "Prisoner's Dilemma" and "Bargaining Games" as the basis for understanding institutional behavior, she effectively dehistoricizes and decontextualizes political life. Likewise, using multivariate analysis to assess the capacity of economic development strategies to attract private sector investment, Martin Johnson and Max Neiman evaluate competing methods of "courting business." Finally, tying data about parental satisfaction with "charter schools" to notions of social capital and community building, Mark Schneider and Jack Buckley conclude that the profusion of charter schools helps to "open up space for citizens to develop attitudes supportive of trust and ultimately … for broader democratic participation." Whether the public good is served by any of this is a question that seems unasked. No doubt gate-guarded communities also build a sense of social security.

Though the prevalence of the gaming metaphor is annoying, Feiock is plainly on to something. Large concentrations of population in huge metropolitan regions do offer significant challenges to theorists

and practitioners of municipal politics. Tension between those who seek greater centralization in the name of efficiency and those who prefer decentralization in the quest for community responsiveness is just one of the major issues that confront authorities and citizens alike. As well, funding of local administrations which are often being compelled to deal with increasingly onerous burdens without adequate fiscal support from larger levels of government present serious institutional problems. These and related matters (for example, Elaine B. Sharp's insightful analysis of metropolitan structures and the control of the sex trade and attendant "moral" issues) are addressed in interesting ways.

In the end, however, the overall impression is given that the goal of this book is to assist in achieving the Weberian-Leninist dream of a rational, legal administration of things. I, for one, think that there is something more to politics than this and that, at some point, new and currently unexpressed or suppressed interests will shake up the well considered "roadmap" to the good society. We have experienced significant adaptations in the past and, when we have, the intellectual "paradigm" that was safely in place to monitor stability proved as transitory as the political arrangements they were meant to interpret. Does anyone remember "structural-functionalism" and "systems theory"?

Theoretical approaches and the actions they are meant to explain involve the identification of problems and the analysis of the customs and institutions that people use to solve them. We are all familiar with such "normal science," as it is carried on from time to time. The point is that time can be short and unanticipated situations and participants have the capacity to redefine abruptly what count as problems rather than merely engage in the attempt to solve the ones that privileged "stakeholders" have successfully placed on the formal administrative agenda.

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Howard A. Doughty teaches in the Faculty of Applied Arts & Health Sciences at Seneca College in King City, Ontario. He is a graduate of Glendon College and holds postgraduate degrees in Political Science from the University of Hawaii and York Univerity as well as in History and Philosophy from the University of Toronto. He has been Book Review Editor of *The Innovation Journal* since 1998, and was the editor of *Bridges: Explorations in Science, Technology and Society* (1986-1991) and *The College Quarterly* (1992-1997), where he continues as Book Review editor as well.