

Governing Megacities in Emerging Countries. Dominique Lorrain (Ed). 2014. Farnham: Ashgate. 314 pages. £30.00. ISBN: 9781472425874.

As it became passé to talk about 'over-population' as a crisis of the developing world, the problem has been reframed in various ways including in the response to climate change (Adams 2003). The crisis of megacities is one such reframing. Although Dominique Lorrain and his co-authors conclude that 'governability' is not inversely proportional to the population of the cities they investigate, the book is driven by the theme of cities so large that a summary of statistics about their residents is sure to awe, Mike Davis (2006) style. Where Davis (ibid) was putting forth an apocalyptic critique of capitalist development and a neoliberal restructuring of economies around the world, Lorrain et al attempt to establish that over-arching structural critiques have no place in engaging with the intense complexity of such cities.

They do so by elaborating on the mechanics of running four megacities – Shanghai, China; Mumbai, India; Cape Town, South Africa; Santiago, Chile. These cities, they premise, are fundamentally different in their development from 20th century Western urbanism, which was based on a history of industrialisation, access to capital and a stable institutional evolution. Third world megacities, not having that kind of background, face a unique set of problems, the authors argue. In fact, the one advantage these cities do have is the possibility of learning from urbanisation experiences before them, in the developed West. The authors stay true to this claim as they take the structural adjustment-based urbanisation of those cities at face value, implicitly embracing the neoliberal forms of urban development that Davis critiqued.

To be sure, they do not endorse private or public or any one kind of institutional actor or ideology. Neither do they always approve of the learning acquired from the first world through international development agencies, consultants, the World Bank etc. They are quite pragmatic in dealing with each initiative, whether local or World Bank-initiated or politically

motivated, only on the basis of whether it works or not. But, they do not question the knowledge or the basis on which the projects are to work – like full cost recovery for infrastructure provision, which is not necessarily how welfare states fund their schemes (Swyngedouw 2009).

The book takes urban technical networks – the city's 'bone structure' (p. 2) – as the starting point for investigation because rapid growth in economic activity necessitates material infrastructure, to which institutions are forced to react and act. How four cities across the world deal with the problem of spatial development preceding infrastructure building forms the book's chapters, with each chapter handling one city by different authors. The chapters, instead of focusing on a single project or policy, attempt to assess a whole trajectory of urbanisation in the past 30-40 years – the period when market reforms were initiated in those cities. Market capitalism, in each of those cases, is accompanied by local macro-political changes – the rise of Hindu religious fundamentalism in Mumbai, end of the Apartheid regime in Cape Town and a military coup d'état in Santiago. Shanghai, as in popular narratives, doesn't seem to have any political specifics. Perhaps because of that, in the final verdict, it is the relatively more 'governable' city.

The Shanghai story is one of reform of many state institutions towards a more efficient and effective governance structure. Any defects found in the system are traced to insufficient reform – like infrastructure charges not being high enough for high income groups (p. 71). The reforms, Lorrain says, weren't initiated out of any rationality but as a pragmatic response to arising needs. But, what is governmental rationality if not a pragmatic approach to governance as a balance between that which is essential, efficient and legitimate? What is interesting about the Shanghai case is the use of common property land as a state resource to finance infrastructure development in the transition to a market economy. However, it is not clear how land values increased dramatically before infrastructure development, if those technical networks are in fact what attracted global capital. As the book tries to touch upon a wide range of developments in four entirely different cities, such questions are frustratingly

left unexplored, as are phrases like 'interest groups' or 'elites' which remain vague, flexible categories employed across cities, primarily to explain people and claims standing in the way of a rational development process.

In Mumbai, competing interest groups slow down the governance process, Marie-Hélène Zerah argues. Developing a nuanced critique of community participation as a way to allocate resources and jobs between the formal and informal spheres of governance, she deduces that it could indeed be called 'community privatisation' for it represents more of public responsibilities being devolved to private individuals rather than any ideal form of self management (p. 130). Surely, competing claims and power relations are as much a part of the governance process as the building of technical network is? Is there any city at all that can be said to be structured entirely on a calculative basis and how does rationality become the standard to assess 'governability'?

In Cape Town, the focus is on how integration of a segregated city is sought to be achieved through universal provision of services and municipal administration. Oddly, race is subsumed under economic categories in this discussion and the introduction of differential pricing or prepaid meters in poorer neighbourhoods become acts of shielding the poor from potential debt. Even implementing affirmative action in the city government, Alain Dubresson and Sylvie Jaglin argue, subjected the administration to 'transformation fatigue' (p. 190). For whom and to what end was the administration being effective and how did affirmative action disrupt that? Technical networks, instead of being the means to explore governance, seemed to have become the ends themselves.

There is a more nuanced approach to micro-political mobilisations in the chapter on Santiago, partly because it has clearly set out phases of development and so, there is more room for the Géraldine Pflieger to explore micro-politics. Urban development and neoliberal reforms, she argues, were the first steps that the military regime took towards its legitimisation soon after the coup d'état in 1973. If in Mumbai it was too much local politics

and power, in Santiago it is too much centralisation of power and planning authority. So, while it wasn't neoliberalism that contributed to 'splintering urbanism' (Graham & Marvin 2001) in Santiago, lack of empowerment at the local level lead to social fragmentation. In response, there were community mobilisations, among which the author makes a careful distinction drawn between urban movements and merely NIMBY (Not In My BackYard) behaviour.

In their conclusion, the authors assert that these cities are indeed governed, which comes as a surprise given that governance is a fairly broad term encompassing all manner of managing the affairs of a spatial entity and its people. One wonders if there are at all places in the world today that can be said to be not governed. The authors' statement follows from their image of these cities as 'violent' spaces in their intensity of 'growth rates and human masses' (p. 269). It is not surprising that they were overwhelmed by the urban phenomena they encountered because they started out with the assumption that in the first world, where everything is already available, writers can concern themselves with the creative class whereas in the emerging second world, the 'intensity of forces' is different. This 'othered' approach bunching large cities of the developing world together based on their material needs has not offered any paradigmatic learning for the questions posed. The usefulness of 'megacities in emerging countries' as a category for academic inquiry is very much open to debate.

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