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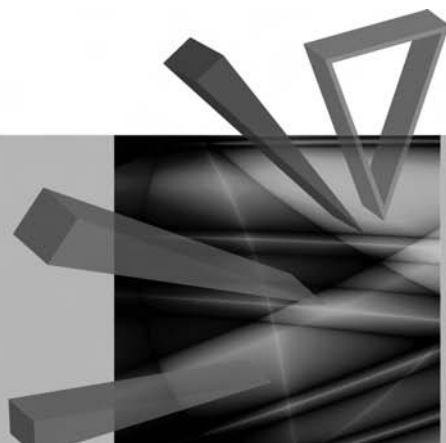
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LOCAL GOVERNANCE'S CAPACITY TO DIRECT ITS OWN PATH OF SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT¹

Summary: In this paper, some factors influencing local governance's capacity to direct its own development are discussed. This capacity is weakened by globalization processes and weakening of the nation state. It creates opportunities for powerful global stakeholders to force their economic interests, which poses a threat to sustainable development. It is argued that large urban areas, integrated in the global economy, with a high level of institutional capital as well as economic and political power, are most likely to be able to influence their own development path. However, strong self-organization may empower less developed areas. In this context, the importance of multilevel governance is discussed.

Keywords: local governance, sustainable development, capacity building, institutional capital, institutional governance.

1. Introduction

One of the fundamentals of the European Union (EU) policy is so-called subsidiarity principle, which means that policy should be designed, created and implemented at the administrative level as close to the citizen as possible where this can be done most effectively and efficiently [1]. While much discussion seems to focus on those competencies which should be transferred from the level of the nation state to the EU [17], an implication is that local governance should be empowered in order to give citizens as much opportunities and competencies as possible to direct their own path of sustainable development. This is not only in accordance with theories of development as a process of expanding human freedom and creating capabilities for human beings to have good life [25; 29]. Local governance may, under certain conditions, also be more effective in sustainable management of local environmental resources and ecosystems as well as the management of certain local public goods (e.g., local infrastructure, water protection, fire brigade) [20]. Furthermore, at the lowest level people possess most information on local problems, needs, etc. [4; 13; 20].

In this paper, some factors influencing local governance's capacity to direct its own sustainable development will be discussed. For analytical reasons, local

¹ This article is based on [32].

governance is assumed to concern the lowest administrative level in a country. Elementary for the capacity to govern is institutional governance, creating opportunities for good governance² [22]. Institutional governance concerns different types of organisational structures which are involved in policy making and institutional change. It may be interpreted as a kind of management system for all sorts of property rights regimes at different levels of administrative and territorial scale. In the context of multilevel governance,³ it takes a broader perspective than traditional approaches to public administration. It not only embraces multi-stakeholder involvement and organisational structures lowering political transaction costs⁴ of policy making and implementation, but also reduces the transaction costs for individuals to participate in social and economic life, in turn increasing capabilities for empowering weak stakeholders. The reduction of transaction costs includes a wide range of issues, such as enforcement costs of contracts by way of efficient judiciary, information costs of identifying ownership rights by land registers and information costs of assessing environmental quality by different kinds of environmental agencies, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), etc. Efficient institutional governance is about the involvement of a wide range of stakeholders in an open and transparent process of design, implementation, interpretation, enforcement, maintenance and change in society's rules of the game with the aim of creating capacity and capability for entering a path of sustainable development (i.e., institutional capital) [22].

2. Local governance's capacity to govern

As institutional governance determines the capacity to enter a path of sustainable development, an important issue for local governance is whether at higher levels of administration institutional governance is efficient, creating the conditions for good governance. When higher levels of administration and structures of institutional governance are weak or missing, like in the case of global governance, this creates opportunities for strong stakeholders and interest groups, such as highly developed countries, multinational enterprises (MNEs), international organisations, criminal networks, etc., to force their own interest while weakening local governance's capacity to govern [27; 28]. In the situation where institutional governance malfunctions at higher levels, there may be difficulties with providing public goods.

² EU principles of good governance are characterised by participation, accountability, effectiveness and coherence [8].

³ Multilevel governance has been defined as “[a] system of continuous negotiation among nested governance system at several territorial tiers – global, regional (e.g., European), national, subnational, local – which are enmeshed in territorial overarching policy networks and are the result of a broad process of institutional creation and decisional reallocation that has pulled some previously centralised functions of the state up to supra-national levels and down to sub-national levels” [31].

⁴ These costs consist of the fixed “costs of setting up, maintaining and changing a system's formal and informal political organisation [10]” and the variable costs of the policy function of institutional governance.

The examples are a common market or a monetary union which facilitate social and economic life [2]. Lower transaction costs of law enforcement as well as institutional stability reducing uncertainty resulting from, e.g., efficient judiciary as well as lower information costs of using the market resulting from the efficient functioning of different structures of institutional governance are also featured by non-excludability and non-rivalry in use [9; 23]. The efficient provision of such public goods by higher levels of administration strengthens local governance's capacity to direct its own sustainable development.

In the process of globalisation, the nation state has been weakening while in the EU the competencies have been transferred to the European level. Domestic policy seems to be less and less able to influence the issues of social exclusion, income and wealth distribution, environmental problems, etc. The reasons for this are capital mobility and "loss of control over transnational capital [19]," globalising financial markets and fear of loss of international competitiveness. There seems to be a tendency that large urban areas, which are important nodes in what Castells [7] calls the network society, strengthen international co-operation networks, contributing to the weakening of the nation state [15; 21].

Large urban areas may become more powerful than nation states and are the location of strong global players and stakeholders. A question is what type of urban area is most likely to determine its own development path and to carry out necessary economic, social, environmental and institutional change, while being able to influence national and global policy and rules. Some characteristics of such an urban area will be discussed here [7; 14; 24]. From the economic point of view, production and so-called import replacement plays a crucial role [14]. Development is based on change in the structure of imports and exports. While imports of certain products are replaced by own production, demand for other imported goods increases due to innovation and technological development. In this way, an active economy is created, opposed to a passive economy which does not create "economic change [by itself] but instead respond[s] to forces unloosed in distant cities [14]." This is related to the capability and willingness to change, i.e., the level of institutional capital.

The capability to be a driving force in change is likely to be stronger in administrative centres with a wide range of structures of institutional governance such as parliament, administrative units, public information collection, headquarters of NGOs and multinational enterprises (MNEs), etc. This, in relation with developed education as well as scientific and research & development activities, makes it an important node in business and political networks and is able "to create synergy on the basis of knowledge and information, directly related to industrial production and commercial application [7]." Furthermore, outward investment of MNEs may increase economic power and the dependency of other areas.

Another issue is the market function of urban areas, in which physical infrastructure plays an important role [26]. Its economic power is strengthened by the fact that such a city is a market for goods, services and innovation while attracting

labour from other areas in times of economic expansion. Being a centre of international trade, banking, insurance and, in particular, financial markets is likely to make such an area a salient stakeholder in the globalising economy. Its market function is enhanced by the provision of different transaction cost reducing services such as consulting, legal services, marketing, logistics, management of information systems, etc. [7]. Furthermore, schools, hospitals, cultural and religious functions not only make it an attractive location for living and tourism, but also directly and indirectly support the development of capabilities and human capital. This human capital, in turn, is needed for maintaining the innovative capacity of the area.

While large urban areas seem to become more and more disconnected from their national hinterland [14], it is likely that their position is strengthened when being located in a highly developed country (HDC) with relatively strong institutions and efficient institutional governance. The logic is that HDCs with economic and military power are likely to support economic aims of the agglomeration, in particular when being an administrative and financial centre. The importance of strong national institutions can be explained by imagining the opposite case. When, e.g., property rights and competencies are poorly delineated and/or enforced, policy making becomes more cumbersome and influenced by interest groups, poorly developed science and informational services, etc. In such a case, local governance itself is likely to be negatively influenced.

A threat to sustainable development is that in the process of globalisation economic interests are likely to prevail, while global environmental and social policy are only slowly developing. The argument of international competitiveness causes that national and regional environmental policy is weakened [16], while, as mentioned, social issues are more difficult to solve [19]. Thus, while large urban areas, in particular those located in HDCs with a high level of institutional capital, may possess most capacity to direct their own development path, there are many factors threatening the sustainability of this development. There seems not only to be a tendency in increasing the dependency on economic growth as people get used to a certain level of growth [11], but also a belief that economic growth and technological advance will solve social and environmental problems [12; 22]. Furthermore, the international position of a country or region, among other things, depends on its production capacity and military power, which should be strengthened as otherwise an outside enemy may challenge the existing institutional structures [30]. This inherent aim of growth is likely to be strengthened by MNEs and other stakeholders having goals of economic or power expansion.

A wide range of stakeholders (including managers, bankers, business networks, pension funds, investment funds, etc.) operating on the global market mainly aim at economic gain and are connected through the global financial system. They are elements of the "faceless collective capitalist, made up of financial flows operated by electronic networks [7]." It is often difficult to identify the exact owner, e.g., due to inter-firm ownership and development of different business networks. This makes

business not only less transparent, but also more difficult to be held responsible for their actions. Added to this, while much business operates on a transnational scale, transnational institutional governance does not really function, worsening the mentioned problem. Local governance's capability to govern is also weakened by the development of international criminal networks. The logic is that when legal business becomes global, this will certainly be followed by illegal business [7].

In the context of globalisation, as already mentioned, it may be the import-replacing city, being an administrative centre while functioning in a strong national institutional environment and having significant economic potential, being most able to direct its own development path. However, this does not mean that there are no opportunities for areas not fulfilling these conditions to have capacity to govern. Although often national economic policy and social welfare programmes are important elements in the socio-economic development and resilience of poorer regions [3], the importance of the family and neighbour helps the income transfer as well as local society and the parallel economy helps absorbing of unemployed, in particular in smaller cities (5.000 – 100.000 inhabitants) where it should not be underestimated [19]. Thus, social relations and social capital may create economic and social resilience. Also, when possessing a high level of institutional capital, local society may be very well able to solve locally-specific environmental problems [20]. When local institutional governance is efficient, locally-specific problems may be solved while facilitating political lobbying at a regional or national level for support [19].

An efficient institutional governance may be related to the self-organising capacity of a local society. The idea is simple. When people can do something themselves, they are not dependent on higher levels of authorities for their own development. While this may be obvious, the issue seems often to be overlooked in development strategies, as self-organisation is based on informal arrangements and rules [19]. While a government structure may be needed for the provision of public goods, this does not mean local governance is not able to participate in the process. The argument for government provision is the so-called free-rider problem appearing when users cannot be excluded and non-rivalry in use exists. However, the process of provision of a public good contains many stages, in which different levels of administration as well as local society can be involved. Ostrom et al. [20] distinguish: design, finance, construction, operation, maintenance and use. Which levels of administration should be involved depends on the type of good and the stage in the process of providing the good. Following Ostrom et al. [20], different types of public-private partnerships can be used, going beyond the traditional state-market dichotomy. It is so first of all because the state is not a single unit, but embraces different administrative levels involving a wide range of stakeholders. On the other hand, the simplified vision of the market does not take the importance of civil initiatives, associations, NGOs and other elements of the mentioned self-organisation into consideration. Furthermore, the notion of private property as a basis of the market seems to overlook that in reality a wide range of property rights constructions

exist with different legal forms [10]. For example, a common property in the form of communal ownership or even partnerships appears more often than assumed, as it concerns different types of co-ownership [5; 6]. This implies that "one fits all approach" cannot be applied, and that each case should be analysed separately.

It will be tried here to explain the importance of analysing the different stages of provision of public goods in a multilevel governance context, while taking the different aspects of public-private partnerships into consideration by way of a simplified example. The example, based on Ostrom et al. [20], focuses on a small local community which, following the logic of the argument of this paper, is likely to have the least capacity to direct its own development path due to a lack of economic and political power. On the other hand, a strong self-organising capacity and a high level of institutional capital may increase local governance's capacity for development. Important in this context may be what Moulaert [19] calls an Integrated Area Development Model. It is about increasing income for the poor, including the socially excluded and integrate "deprived groups into the labour-market and into local production systems (construction of housing, ecological production activities, urban infrastructure development, social services, SME for manufacturing and trade) [18; 19]." Grass-root initiatives and civil participation not only makes local knowledge available. The engagement in the creation and management of local public goods, besides increasing commitment, may also contribute to sustainable economic activity and social resilience. Furthermore, independent finance, quality of local authorities expressed by human capital in politics and public administration as well as the ability and willingness to cooperate with stakeholders and other administrative units improve institutional capital [19].

Now let us take the example of water protection. In the case of rivers or seas, such infrastructure often only makes real sense when covering a large part of the river basin, implying the involvement of more administrative units. However, like with irrigation and other water management systems, local conditions may exist making such local infrastructure possible.

While the design of water protection may require specific knowledge which trained engineers may possess, Ostrom et al. [20] emphasise that local knowledge on, e.g., climatic and geographical conditions is essential for success. Long-term experience gained by local people may be more reliable than general statistical averages for a larger area, not showing locally-specific, exceptional and extreme data. Furthermore, involvement in design may also create knowledge among local stakeholders, necessary for maintenance and repair. In particular less developed areas may need financial support for construction. However, when local resources are used for construction, this not only creates positive socio-economic effects, but also facilitates maintenance. First of all, the materials and technology do not have to be imported from other areas (for which financial resources are needed), but also in-kind contributions from local population and firms having interest in the water protection may be obtained. This reduces the financial and technological dependency

on the administrative centre, while speeding up the possible reaction when a repair is needed or the water protection system is threatened by extreme weather circumstances.

While the example is a simplified one, it shows the importance of local society's capacity to organise itself for entering a path of sustainable development. Besides the mentioned effects, local involvement and governance may also make it easier to control the people managing the public goods, as the lines of communication are shorter and consequences may be more direct, like in the case of elected officials. Furthermore, it may prevent an area from becoming passive, waiting for a higher level of governance to do the job. Also, when being involved in the management of public goods, local governance is more able to influence rules of use, maintenance and further development. Thus, although less developed areas still have to rely on co-operation with other administrative areas and outside financial support, their capacity to govern increases.

3. Conclusions

While local governance's capacity to govern is limited, in particular to globally integrated large urban areas characterised by a high level of institutional capital and economic, financial, administrative and political power, being innovative and able to replace imports, it is most likely to be able to influence its own as well as others' development. Strong local self-organisation and higher levels of administration efficiently providing public goods may empower less developed areas. In the process of globalisation, with a lack of global institutional governance, developmental processes are likely to be influenced by strong economic stakeholders from economically and militarily developed countries, as well as criminal networks. Their short-term focus on economic aims is likely to conflict with social and environmental aims. While this negatively influences the quality of life of weaker stakeholders, it may threaten economic sustainability in the long-run due to negative impacts on human and natural capital.

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ZDOLNOŚĆ SAMORZĄDU TERYTORIALNEGO DO KIEROWANIA WŁASNĄ ŚCIEŻKĄ ROZWOJU ZRÓWNOWAŻONEGO

Streszczenie: W tym artykule przedyskutowano niektóre czynniki wpływające na zdolność samorządu terytorialnego do kierowania własną ścieżką rozwoju zrównoważonego. Zdolność ta jest osłabiona przez procesy globalizacji oraz osłabienie państwa narodowego. Stwarza to możliwości dla silnych globalnych interesariuszy, żeby przeforsować ich ekonomiczne interesy, co zagraża zrównoważonemu rozwojowi. Autor stawia tezę, iż przeważnie wielkie aglomeracje, które są integrowane w globalnej gospodarce, mają wysoki poziom kapitału instytucjonalnego oraz siłę ekonomiczną i polityczną, dzięki którym są w stanie wejść na własną ścieżkę rozwoju. Jednak umiejętności samoorganizacyjne poprawiają zdolność do kierowania własnym rozwojem w mniej rozwiniętych obszarach. W tym kontekście omówiono istotę wielopoziomowego współrzędzenia.

Słowa kluczowe: lokalne współrzędzenie, rozwój zrównoważony, budowanie zdolności/potencjału, kapitał instytucjonalny, instytucjonalne struktury współrzędzenia.