

Patricia L. McCarney and Richard E. Stren (eds.) *Governance on the Ground. Innovations and Discontinuities in Cities of the Developing World*. Baltimore and London: John Hopkins University Press, 2003. x + 288 pp.

Michael Carley, Paul Jenkins and Harry Smith (eds.) *Urban Development & Civil Society: The Role of Communities in Sustainable Cities*. London and Sterling, VA: Earthscan Publications, 2001. xv + 230 pp. £ 14.95 paperback

Urban development has been an important reality of the last century, and will continue to be so in the present one. Almost all population growth in the next three decades is projected to be in urban centers, and it is especially the developing world that is rapidly urbanizing, partly in the form of megacities. While there was only one megacity in 1950 with a population of over 10 million (New York), there were fourteen megacities in 1995, out of which ten were located in the developing world (Stren, in *Governance on the Ground*: 2). Another nine, all in developing countries are projected to emerge before 2015. There is, hence, sufficient reason to study processes of urbanization, and its challenges in terms of governance, sustainability, equity and liveability.

Both books under review here do exactly that. Although the introductions give some demographic data, their emphasis is not on the expansion of urban centers per sé. Both books are edited volumes focusing mainly on urban governance in developing countries, but they are different kind of collections. *Governance on the Ground. Innovations and Discontinuities in Cities of the Developing World* is written mainly (but not exclusively) by anthropologists and political scientists, and ‘complexities’, ‘discontinuities’, ‘disjunctures’ figure in many of the papers. The book is the result of a research project (GURI, the Global Urban Research Initiative) in which researchers from many different parts of the world participated. *Urban Development & Civil Society: The Role of Communities in Sustainable Cities* is written mainly by planners, researchers and consultants, all affiliated with the Edinburgh-based Centre for Environment and Human Settlements. Its targeted audience is not only academic, but would consist also of practitioners—especially those who want to learn from experience and reflection. As *Governance on the Ground*, also *Urban Development and Civil Society* cautions against drawing easy conclusions and states that there are no universally right and easy answers.

*Governance on the Ground* is only one of the products of a research endeavour that lasted over ten years, and involved hundreds of people in different capacities across the world. The book has two introductory chapters. The first, written by Richard Stren narrates the historical trajectory of the project and the content of the book; the second, by Patricia McCarney, is about governance, and discusses the GURI understanding of governance against the background of other understandings. The World Bank, according to McCarney, looks at governance mainly as ‘governments creating enabling environments’. US political scientists, on the other hand, have emphasized issues of accountability and democracy. The GURI team, and this book, move away from these broad and state-centered definitions, and see governance primarily as the *relationship* between civil society and the state, particularly as it is expressed at the local (in the book: urban) level. This conceptualization leads to a focus on civic associations, social

movements, community groups, illegal operators etc. McCarney proceeds with a discussion about two 'disjunctures' in this governance relationship: one between building competitive global cities, on the one hand, and improving the lives of the urban poor, on the other; the second between formal state structures (including decentralization legislation) and (informal) urban civil society arrangement. I found this an interesting chapter, and a good substantive introduction to the rest of the book.

The remaining part of the book consists of eight chapters, all describing case studies from the Middle East, Chile, Brazil, India, Southeast Asia, Bangladesh, Southern Africa and Mexico/Colombia. The chapters analyse various instances of municipal policy making and local participation. Most of these chapters deal with more than one city. In some papers, the choice of cases seems rather arbitrary and not linked to a particular question. The paper about urban spaces and actors in the middle East, by Seteney Shami, for instance, is a rather open-ended description of various governance dimensions in different cities. Similarly, Om Prakash Mathur's paper on fiscal innovations in India describes three different initiatives in three very diverse cities in India. Other chapters, however, attempt to do a more systematic comparison in order to answer a clear research question. Renato Raul Boschi analyses success and failure in urban management in two cities in Brazil, and understands the differential results in terms of differences with regard to various types of resources, and in particular social capital. Emma Porio's chapter on housing policy aims to understand the different ways in which four southeast Asian countries have responded to a new international policy framework (i.e. UNCHS's enabling strategy). Altogether, the diversity in papers is considerable. Although there is a conceptual unity, as explained in McCarney's paper, there is large variation in the topics and methodologies.

By contrast, *Urban Development & Civil Society* is surprisingly uniform and coherent. This is partly the result of the fact that this book does not only have two introductory chapters: it also has two final chapters written by the editors. In addition, several chapters follow a similar format, with sections on state, market and civil society, and with historical contextualisations of the case. Uniformity is further achieved by standardization of the well-designed maps.

The first chapter by Michael Carley focuses on the various challenges for urban development in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, related to urban growth, poverty, sustainability and democratic participation. The second chapter, by Paul Jenkins and Harry Smith, introduces and discusses the key themes of the book, i.e. a) the need to distinguish between various interests of the state, the market and society; b) the role of institutions, and c) the relationship between the local and the global. These introductory chapters are followed by eight case studies, pertaining to Africa (Mozambique and south Africa), Asia (Lahore, Pakistan generally, Manila and Beijing), Costa Rica and the UK. About half of the papers focus on housing policies. All case studies deal with the contribution that community organizations or NGOs (can) make to urban development. This is also the topic of the last two chapters, which try to synthesize and make a typology of different kind of state-civil society relationships. Not surprisingly, the editors argue that civil society organizations should get a larger role in urban management. One of the

limitations of the collection is, however, that it only includes cases of (relatively) progressive community engagement, and does not deal with socially regressive, sectarian or elitists forms of civil society engagement, in which case it is hard to disagree with the political message of the book.