

Chapter 9

Urban Governance, Democratic Decentralization, and Natural Resources

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to analyze the implications of democratic or political and administrative or fiscal decentralization in the downward accountability, participatory and deliberative democracy to shape the urban governance of natural resources, facilities, infrastructure, etc. The methodological and theoretical approach of the analysis is framed by the institutional theory and analyses the power relationships and interactions between national and local governments, authorities, agencies, politicians, and other actors within the urban democratic governance system, downward accountability, participative and deliberative democracy, etc. Finally, in the conclusion it is argued that some institutionalized democratic mechanisms and management practices can be implemented in the political or democratic and administrative or fiscal decentralization to improve democratic urban governance of natural resources and environmental and urban green areas.

INTRODUCTION

Democracy decentralization reforms in most of developing countries provide the framework for analyzing the development of democratic local authority and democratic local governance. Centralized states and systems have failed to provide basic services

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-5225-9562-5.ch009

due to inefficient infrastructure, lack of transparency and accountability and high levels of corruption. The Latin America's state formation was the result of a struggle between metropolitan, regional and local economic elites and oligarchies (Del Río, 2004; Faletti, 2004; Selee, 2004) until the period of 1980s and 1990s when appeared a strong process of democratic decentralization.

Since the mid-1980s, decentralization reforms and policies, democratic or political and administrative have been developed and legislated in most of the developing countries aimed to improve efficiency and equity (Crook and Manor, 1999; World Bank, 2000; Ndegwa, 2002; Mawhood, 1983; Crook and Manor, 1998). In the early and mid-1990s, democratic decentralized urban management practice incorporated some participative mechanisms to engage citizens in decision making and policy formulation. The 1990s witnessed a wave of liberal democratic decentralization process across the world. This process is associated with structural adjustment reforms and policies supported by a neoliberal expression of a modernization theory (Samoff, 1990). The Modernization theories are more concerned with socioeconomic prerequisites of local democracy.

Political reforms promoted democratic decentralization processes characterized by the transfer of power and resources to local governments and representative authorities, democratically elected and accountable to their constituents (Crook and Manor, 1998; Agrawal and Ribot, 1999). Democratic reforms of the State are motivated by the desire to foster democratic local institutions aimed to meet the needs of a diverse citizenry (Vedeld, 2003). Institutional economic and political reforms shape the democratic capabilities of the state and civil society.

Democratic decentralization reforms are implemented to promote the empowerment of local governments and authorities expecting to contribute to local democracy despite the difficulties to establish local democratic authorities (Ribot, Agrawal & Larson 2006; Agrawal & Ribot 1999; Grindle 2007). Democratic decentralization plays a crucial role in accompanying the democratic reforms (Manor, 1999). Under the framework of democratic reforms, the design and implementation of democratic decentralization have to take into account the powers and the means to transfer from central and national institutions of government to local government institutions. Reforms must establish the basic institutional arrangements of democratic decentralization, and paying attention to be fully implemented.

Democratic decentralization reforms, policies and projects transfer functions, powers and resources to elected local governments, authorities and agencies affecting democracy. Initiatives in policy instrument reforms aimed to develop and practice of principles and strategies of democratic decentralization create opportunities for more equitable distribution of benefits. Local urban economic, social, ecological and cultural dynamic must be taking into account when adjusting policy to the particularities of democratic decentralization of each local space.

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