

New Public Management and Smart Local Governance in the Era of the Fourth Industrial Revolution: Lessons From Namibia

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INTRODUCTION

Public management entails the systematic or scientific running of public organisations with the aim of attaining certain desired outcomes (Colon & Guérin-Schneider, 2015). This concept ties in well with local governance which seeks to manage local authorities or institutions to ensure effective transfer of powers from the national to the sub-national level (Oviasuyi et al., 2010). Due to the inherent relationships between public management and local governance, much research regarding their inter-linkages has occurred over the years.

With specific reference to Africa, the terms public management and local governance have attracted appreciable scholarly attention. However, the application of new public management (in particular) to local governance in the region could benefit from more focus. This is important given the need to enhance governance efficiency and improve service delivery to residents. Thus, this chapter assesses the implications of new public management for smart local governance in the era of the fourth industrial revolution based on a case study of Namibia (in Southern Africa). Specifically, it seeks to address the following questions: What are the conceptual relationships between new public management and smart local governance in the era of the fourth industrial revolution? How has smart local governance been defined by the principles of new public management? What are the implications of new public management for smart local governance based on lessons from the Namibia case study? The choice of Namibia emanates from its appreciable progress with respect to governance, science, technology and innovation since independence. The study is qualitative in nature and relies on document and discourse analyses, as well as interviews to make its observations. Before delving further, the chapter dissects definitional or conceptual discourses regarding new public management, smart local governance and the fourth industrial revolution. It then provides a brief contextual overview of Namibia to undergird the discussion.

The concept of new public management entails a break from the extant administrative ethos of bureaucracy, centralisation and elitism. This traditional paradigm which was mostly prominent in the early and middle parts of the 19th century sought to address the limitations of urbanisation and industrialisation. During this period, politicians were the primary actors in setting organisational goals with technocrats only playing a secondary role. Moreover, citizens were passive beneficiaries in the decision-making process which was dominated by public actors. Government agencies were the main institutional vehicles for providing public services (Bryson et al., 2014). From the 1980s and 1990s, new public management emerged as an alternative conception to traditional public management. This new approach, unlike the

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previous ethos, simultaneously emphasised efficiency and effectiveness in service delivery. The goal was to overcome inherent failures in the existing paradigm of government (Bryson et al., 2014).

New public management entails the application of private sector principles to enhance the quality of public service delivery. The goal is to create a more citizen-oriented approach which seeks to minimise waste (Iacovino et al., 2017). The concept is also associated with the devolution of power, a more prudent use of scarce resources, better governance transparency, as well as a monitoring and evaluation system (Colon & Guérin-Schneider, 2015). It involves the provision of performance-based incentives to increase levels of productivity. Moreover, it promotes competition either through internal markets in the public sector or contracting out to the private sector. It also separates the provision of public services to promote agency and assignment of roles to other organisations with the goal of ensuring better quality (Lapuente & Van de Walle, 2020).

BACKGROUND

New public management is inherently linked with smart local governance and the fourth industrial revolution. The concept of smart local governance entails the adoption of technology tools by local authorities to enhance the decision-making process as a way of ensuring better social inclusion and quality of life. This can occur through more active engagement with various stakeholders such as public officials, the private sector, citizens and local communities. It may also entail digitisation when it comes to the provision of urban services such as transportation (Masik & Stepień, 2021). With specific reference to smart cities, urban futures imply that technology has an important role to play in the evolution of contemporary and future urbanism. Moreover, knowledge and innovation economy refer to how technological progress contributes to urban management and enhanced capacity in the new economy. Technology push factors mean that improvements in technology create smart city products and the solutions associated with them. Demand pull factors refer to the need by cities for efficiency improvements in service delivery which increase the reliance on technology tools (Angelidou, 2015).

Evidently, smart local governance entails the adoption of information and communication technology tools to promote citizen engagement in the decision-making process. This may involve the use of online platforms for public interactions to ensure better quality of service delivery. It entails internal coordination mechanisms and external collaboration to engender collective action in order to attain desired goals. Ultimately, the concept ensures better outcomes such as a more inclusive planning process (Rodríguez Bolívar & Meijer, 2015). The term smart city thus connotes an urban area which is run more efficiently, addressing the problems that confront the traditional city. The goal is to improve the quality of life for residents, enhance administrative effectiveness and ensure better quality of service delivery (Rodríguez Bolívar, 2015). This may entail the adoption of innovative governance approaches, as well as the use of publicly available data to address major challenges such as waste management. Moreover, the use of technologically adept mechanisms is paramount for ensuring a more coordinated approach to management. Ultimately, the realities of the urban lived experience create the need for alternative approaches to addressing development challenges (Glasmeier & Christopherson, 2015). As a result of its reliance on technology, the smart city is associated with conceptions such as the digital, networked or virtual city. It thus seeks to utilise technologies to promote governance efficiency and participatory planning (Freudental-Pederson et al., 2019).

As already noted, the purpose of this research is to dissect the nature of smart local governance as configured by the principles of new public management. Specifically, the study seeks to address gaps

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