

International Journal of Urban and Regional Research

Authors Meet Critics

A joint Initiative of the *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* (IJURR) and the *Studies in Urban and Social Change* book series published by Wiley-Blackwell

Date: 13 December 2011

Start: 17.38 GMT +2 (Italian time zone)

End: 19.40 GMT +2 (Italian time zone)

Authors: JEFFEREY SELLERS AND SUN-YOUNG KWAK

Article: State and Society in Local Governance: Lessons from a Multilevel Comparison (2011, IJURR 35.3, 620–43)

Participants

Anirban, Adhya
Balakrishnan, Sai
BouAkar, Hiba
Cage, Caroline
Chatzi, Venetia
Herring, Christopher
Ibrahim, Aliu
Karaliotas, Lazaros
Kose Burak

Labbé, Danielle
Lewis, Nathaniel
Manella, Gabriele
Nwachi Christy
Schrader, Stuart
Stefanovska, Jasna
Uffer, Sabina
Wang, Jun

Moderators

Yuri Kazepov
Giovanni Torrisi

<Torrise, Giovanni> Welcome to everybody. We welcome in particular professors Kwak Sun-Young and Jefferey Sellers, the authors who tonight are going to respond to our comments and criticisms.

<Sellers, Jefferey> Hello everyone.

<Kwak, Sun-Young> Good morning everyone!

<Torrise, Giovanni> We've now got used to saying 'good day', which is more generic than 'good morning'. In fact, for most people it is late afternoon ;-)

<Kwak, Sun-Young> Yes, good day everyone :-)

<Torrise, Giovanni> Very well. I would say we can begin our meeting for today. First of all, I would like our two authors to introduce themselves and the work we are going to discuss later. After that participants may begin to send their questions. Please try to write one at a time. Authors, the floor is now yours.

<Sellers, Jefferey> Good day everyone. I'm Jefferey Sellers and I have been doing comparative urban work using case studies for several years now. The article sought to provide an overview using one of the large datasets that are now available.

<Kwak, Sun-Young> Nice to talk to you all, I'm Sun-Young Kwak, PhD from University of Southern California. My research focuses on transnational policy networks and environmental policy reforms in Europe and East Asia.

<Sellers, Jefferey> I should add that we are also very interested in state–society relations, and we have set out a way of classifying national systems using both national and local dimensions. This aspect is part of a larger project that is analyzing national differences in what we call infrastructures of local (or urban) governance.

<Torrise, Giovanni> Very good. I have already received many questions for you both. But let's begin with one from our participant Danielle Labbé.

<Labbé, Danielle> I have a fairly simple question. Throughout the article, you use the expression 'compound synergies' but (and tell me if I am wrong), you do not define what this means exactly. Could you please tell us more about where this concept comes from and what it means?

<Sellers, Jefferey> Synergies is a term adopted from Peter Evans and others, who have used it to characterize the products of interactions between state and society. Usually it is applied without adjectives, but our findings show multiple synergies, between local actors, national systems and sectors. That is why we add the term 'compound'.

<Labbé, Danielle> Could you give us an example of an interaction that you would label a synergy? Or compound synergy?

<Sellers, Jefferey> On the synergy question, an example would be when a citizen group or a business mobilizes higher level governments through protest, lobbying, etc. Compound synergies are also with institutional systems, so that, say, a nationalized infrastructure empowers business more in local budgetary politics than it would do elsewhere.

<Torrise, Giovanni> Here is a question by Caroline Cage:

<Cage, Caroline> To what degree do you think the history of state–society interactions in the past have influenced the level of participation and approach that now exists by both by the state and by civil society in local/national decision-making. Do you think the local cultural context of participation also plays a part in the relationship between civil society and the state? Were there cases where the form of government had changed in the past, and thus the relationship between civil society and the state had changed?

<Kwak, Sun-Young> Political culture is generally explained as the effect of national policy structure and civic culture found at the local/national level, and many scholars have articulated that political culture is a crucial variable that shapes the effect of civil society on national policy performance and reforms.

The French case will give you an example of the changes in state–civil society. Its traditionally anti-dirigistic and localistic culture have changed over the last two decades and now we see increasing civic participation in government policy reform projects, for example in the recycling movement.

It will be a very comprehensive discussion if we review the history of state–society interactions and their effect on urban governance. Here I'd like to emphasize that cultural context *is* significant in that decentralization in the 1980s and 1990s in Europe and Asia, for example, has changed/increased the scope of public participation in local/national politics and the role of civil society in urban and national governance.

<Cage, Caroline> Thank you, I think that has largely answered my questions. I was interested in whether this may have affected the likelihood of whether and whom within civil society would get involved; whether there may be some effect from historical interactions on whether they believe they will have an influence.

<Sellers, Jefferey> Absolutely, the types are historical products and it is an important project to understand how they are constructed and reconstructed. Rescaling is partly about this.

<Torrise, Giovanni> Very good. We are getting into the discussion. Another note on the vocabulary by Stuart Schrader:

<Schrader, Stuart> Although this article includes a few citations of literature that uses theories and vocabularies of geographical scale, the article itself avoids this vocabulary. What is the

reason for avoiding it? And, assuming it was a conscious decision, what is gained or lost in your view by not using/engaging with scale/rescaling/scalar structuration.

<Sellers, Jefferey> We are talking about scale, but use the term 'levels' to refer to the institutional dimension of scale, i.e. levels of government. One problem with the scaling terminology is that it appears to disregard institutions as they are usually conceived, and the operation of institutions is the main topic here.

We gain several things with the focus on levels. We can focus on the institutional patterns and their effects, which are captured by the levels of government (or, if you will, arenas of contestation). This is a significant advantage, since scaling/rescaling is a kind of 'catch all' category. Rescaling of what, exactly? That is where we supply some additional clarity. There are of course other dimensions of scale: economic, social, identity. These can also be captured separately.

Finally, we need to attend to the stickiness of institutions, and I have found it difficult to see how the scaling language can do this.

<Torrise, Giovanni> Okay Stuart, would you like to ask anything else related to this?

<Schrader, Stuart> Sure. I can see how the stickiness of institutions can get lost, which is important to avoid. But I guess to put it very simply, it seems like the compound synergies that you find are essentially similar to the relationships captured by scaling processes. But there is no need for all to use the same vocab!

<Sellers, Jefferey> Yes, the language refers in some respects to the same thing. But I would argue that one way or another, there needs to be more attention to structure and agency. This is a common feature of political science debates, but absent in most of the rescaling discussion. That is where greater precision of some kind can push explanations forward.

<Schrader Stuart> I can appreciate that call for precision. Thank you.

<Torrise, Giovanni> One of the very interesting things about these online meetings is that they bring together people from all over the world, making instant-comparative research something possible.

Now a question by Christy Nwachi, which has already been answered partially:

<Nwachi, Christy> A clear demarcation could be deduced in your analyses: the society-centred sector of economic development and the state-centred sector of budget making. While the former is a bottom-up approach, the latter could be regarded as a top-down approach in governance. However, the challenge for the society-centred sector stems from its participatory/inclusive nature in urban governance, which is time-consuming in decision-making. Is that right?

<Sellers, Jefferey> Christy, there may indeed be that kind of effect. However, economic development is a process that necessarily includes economic actors and forces in a capitalist

context, and budgetary decision-making is inherently within the state. What you say — the need for efficiency — may be one element that makes budgetary processes more state-centred, but participation is important too.

<Kwak, Sun-Young> Civic participation doesn't necessarily entail time-consuming and ineffective policymaking, although it did when civil society was emerging. In fact, civic participation, NGOs, and their networks with policymakers have increasingly effectuated and facilitated policymaking processes and its outcomes/performance, and there are numerous examples on the effective networks of policy advocates, including the public, civic associations, and government officials — for example environmental reforms at national and local levels in Brazil (Hochstetler and Keck, 2007). Also, the public and NGOs offer very informative expertise on policy reforms.

<Torrise, Giovanni> Christy, any other remark about this?

<Nwachi, Christy> No, thanks a lot.

<Torrise, Giovanni> A question from Nathaniel Lewis:

<Lewis, Nathaniel> This is more of a broad-based, two-part question that is more general rather than focused on any one particularity of the article. First, what do you see as the potential applications of your classification; i.e., do you see it as a point of departure for case-study based inquiries of governance in particular countries or cities? On a related note, I wanted to ask if political scientists doing this kind of quantitative work — which I think usefully illustrates the macro-level, big picture of governance — ever receive criticism for flattening the 'particularities of place'. This is a longstanding debate in geography and I wanted to know if it extends into other disciplines.

<Sellers, Jefferey> Nathaniel, the classification is inferred from many case studies, but it implies hypotheses about the process and who participates (along with how and at what level/scale). There are also potential implications for policy outputs, as implementation seems easier in nationalized systems for many sectors.

On the second point, yes there is a division within political science, even if quantitative approaches are more common than in some other urban fields. Case studies are still probably the leading methodology in urban politics. I and others have argued for bridging the gap with multiple case approaches, or by combining case studies with quantitative analysis.

Case studies could be employed to test the hypotheses that come out of the typology, for instance. One implication is also different sets of winners and losers in different systems. Inequality is more likely a consequence of civic localism, especially place-based inequality, for instance.

<Kwak, Sun-Young> Qualitative analysis and case studies will reinforce or test the major points of our study. As we discuss hybrid cases (e.g. France) in our analysis, I think we present not only generalized but also substantive research on the national 'variations', and quantitative and

qualitative analyses will complement each other on this of course.

<Torrise, Giovanni> Nathaniel, any other issue to be addressed?

<Lewis, Nathaniel> Great, thank you, that is exactly the kind of application I was thinking of.

<Torrise, Giovanni> Now a question by Sai Balakrishnan.

<Balakrishnan, Sai> Dear professors Sellers and Kwak, Thanks for a great article. There's been a lot of seminal work from Western political scientists (including Hall's varieties of capitalism) that tries to conceptualize typologies in state–society relations. If we had to draw similar typologies of 'national infrastructures of local governance' for non-Western countries, what would that look like? Would these categories hold, or do we need new categories? Are there any good recommendations on scholars who have tried similar exercises in non-Western contexts?

<Sellers, Jefferey> There is no reason why typologies can't be done in developing countries too, and I am currently working on extending this typology to those. In many respects they are not that different. I think there is something distinctive about the context of local governance that distinguishes it from typologies based on other aspects of state–society relations. Varieties of capitalism, as discussed by Hall and Soskice (2001), centre on the firm.

Local governance is different, it includes elements like co-production of local public goods and services, implementation of policy, local development markets. These are related to capitalism but not built around the firm. We need new typologies to characterize them.

<Kwak, Sun-Young> In response to Sai's question, examination of non-Western countries will be an interesting analysis for the varieties of capitalism discussion, as the theory is based on growing globalization of the typologies.

<Sellers, Jefferey> Based on later research, I believe that this typology has applicability in developing world contexts. If you look at international data, the institutions and levels of participation vary among developing countries in similar ways to those seen here. There are major differences that reinforce the developing/developed country divide, such as the operation of capitalism. But local government forms have largely globalized. The one strongest point that comes out of this research so far is the difficulty of building a nationalized system. Participation is often quite high in developing countries, but institutional capacity and integration is usually a problem, especially given the global economic position of localities there.

<Torrise, Giovanni> Sai, anything else to ask?

<Balakrishnan, Sai> Yes, please. Any good research that could be a starting point for developing countries?

<Sellers, Jefferey> There is a growing number of case studies, found in IJURR and related publications. Most of this is plugged into generic theories that imply relatively uniform effects from globalization, capitalism, etc. We need more comparative case studies and meta analyses to provide the basis for analyzing variations within the developing world, which is even more diverse than the developed world.

<Torrisi, Giovanni> Very good. Lazaros Karaliotas' question now:

<Karaliotas, Lazaros> Thank you both for a thought provoking paper. Given that the data-set that you mobilize is based on the chief administrative officers' perceptions, in what ways, in your opinion, can the critiques that were addressed towards the Corruption Perception Index, for example — i.e. being a matter of perception and feeling rather than one of mathematical measurement, and hence to a certain degree reinforcing these preconceived perceptions — be addressed?

<Sellers, Jefferey> There are advantages to using reports by the same actors in every setting as informants, but disadvantages as you note. We do have controls in the regressions based on perceptions, but the ideal way to address this issue would have been to triangulate using different kinds of other actors (activists, politicians, other informed citizens, business people). The UDITE study was funded by local administrators, however, so that was what we had to work with. Funding for a broader comparative survey would be welcome!

<Torrisi, Giovanni> The discussion is also very interesting because it relates very much to the judgment about the credibility that the markets give to a state. This has caused several issues in Europe, in Greece, Italy and Spain in particular. More than the actual corrupt governance of the states, what was relevant was the perceived bad governance of the states, by the markets.

<Karaliotas, Lazaros> Actually, coming from Greece, Giovanni's point is one of the issues that I had in mind when asking the question. Thank you.

<Sellers, Jefferey> Perhaps a control for national levels of corruption would be helpful!

<Torrisi, Giovanni> We are trying to do that at European level, but have a long way to go... Let us now take a moment to read a question from Christopher Herring.

<Herring, Christopher> Many scholars have suggested that the degree of interurban competition is largely determined by the degree of local involvement (through funding/policy) by higher levels of government, by which competition is somewhat mitigated within 'nationalized' contexts. This would suggest that city governments in nationalized contexts would be less influenced by business interests in both economic development and the budgetary process. Yet your findings instead stress the difference of business influence being one between sectors, and rather highlight the similarity of this difference in both nationalized and civic localist contexts in the conclusion. Do you think nationalized and civic localist contexts affect interurban competition — do you think it affects the interaction of the actors in your

model, and if so how? For instance I could see the survey respondents claiming that businesses do not have a direct effect on the budget process, yet in a civic localist context there might be inbuilt pressures of attracting investment and promoting business-friendly policies that do not exist in the nationalized contexts.

<Sellers, Jefferey> Like you, Christopher, I was initially surprised by the results for business influence. But the measures here tap businesses as organized actors rather than the effects of economic forces. In fact, since civic localist local governments are more self-financing, they are probably more dependent on local economic performance than the other types. The power of business in nationalized systems is an institutional power, related to corporatist institutions. But these same arrangements probably mean that business pursues different objectives, including more local public goods like welfare state services. So it is important to distinguish different types and directions of business influences.

<Torrise, Giovanni> Christopher, anything else?

<Herring, Christopher> No, that basically sums it up. I actually thought the finding about organized business on the national level was quite interesting and something that is ignored in the literature.

<Torrise, Giovanni> Very good. A question just arrived from Adhya Anirban:

<Anirban, Adhya> Did you find any specific limitation to using the UDITE survey? Would you suggest any other possible methodology or tactics for extending this research to other contexts?

<Sellers, Jefferey> Sun Young can address this too, but one limitation we have not mentioned was that there was very little data on the demographic or economic context of localities besides the local population. Most case studies show that different types of cities have very different types of governance, and a lot of the variation we were unable to measure probably lies in those variations.

Another direction quantitative analysis could take would be to gather more limited data on governance for multiple cities, but analyze it with more easily available economic and demographic data.

<Kwak, Sun-Young> I think more cases from different countries other than the 14 countries will help us make the analysis more comprehensive. For example, Ireland was in the original data, but since there were too few responses, we had to drop the country case. If we can expand the country cases, it will be a great addition to the analysis.

<Torrise, Giovanni> Adhya, are you interested in extending this research in your country? Please remind me, which country it is?

<Anirban, Adhya> I am from India. I am interested in examining some effects of the 1992 constitutional amendment in India empowering local municipalities in the city of Calcutta. At the same time, I work and teach in Detroit, which presents some interesting cases of local information infrastructure provision in the face of population decrease and a shrinking city.

<Sellers, Jefferey> Great! One of our projects comparing metro inequality focuses on Kolkata, which has just enough municipalities to allow an interesting quantitative comparison. One possibility might be a nested analysis, combining strategically selected cases with some data analysis of the overall patterns. The Detroit/Kolkata comparison would be fascinating. You would probably need to find some focal point to make it manageable, but there are important parallels despite the very different international contexts.

<Torrise, Giovanni> Very good. One of the aims of these meetings is also to promote some research networks. We now have our last question for today from Caroline Cage.

<Cage, Caroline> There are several instances of hybrid countries in your table of greater or lesser degree levels of participation versus integration in national level politics. Do you think that this could potentially be visualized as more of a chart than a table where countries are higher or lower on one level or another so that the degrees of each country within each category could be compared?

<Kwak, Sun-Young> Yes Caroline, a visual chart would be very helpful. Thank you for your comments. I'll think about how to chart the different degrees of participation among the national variations.

<Sellers, Jefferey> Caroline, thanks for this question. The typology was originally constructed using a factor analysis of national indicators for the countries, including institutional ratings as well as fiscal indicators (see Sellers and Lidstrom, 2007 for details). The existing case study literature would probably not permit the kind of graphs you propose to be done without some arbitrary judgments. But a carefully selected set of indicators would make it possible.

<Torrise, Giovanni> Caroline, you have the floor for the very last remarks in this series of 'Authors Meet Critics'.

<Cage, Caroline> Thank you, I would be interested to see if this could be possible, but as it is very complex I can understand how this might also be difficult. I look forward to hearing more about how the study progresses.

<Sellers, Jefferey> I can refer you to an online paper where I attempt to do this, on my website (please e-mail me as I was unable to paste.)

<Cage, Caroline> thank you I will send an email.

<Torrise, Giovanni> If you send me the link, I will forward it to all the participants. It could be of general interest. I would like to thank our authors for today, Professor Sellers and Professor Kwak for their very interesting contribution. Even struggling with a new system, we succeeded in having a very fruitful exchange.

<Sellers, Jefferey> Thanks to everyone for the stimulating and productive discussion.

<Kwak, Sun-Young> Thank you very much for your comments and questions, which will help us to improve our project. Please let us know if you have further questions on the article.

<Torrise, Giovanni> I would like to thank as well all our participants to these events organized by IJURR. The success of these events depended heavily on the very high quality of your participation. As this is the last 'Authors Meet Critics' in the series, we will be in touch to collect feedback and comments on how to make it even more interesting (we will probably send you an email or some e-forms). And now, please write directly on the main windows. It is party time! ;-)

<Cage, Caroline> Thank you everyone, and in particular Yuri and Giovanni. I have really enjoyed participating in this series!

<Nwachi, Christy> It has been a series of wonderful events. Thanks to all the authors, students and our amiable moderator, Dr. Giovanni Torrise. Going to miss you all! CHRISTY.

<Uffer, Sabina> Thank you very much to Yuri and Giovanni for organizing this — it was great! And thanks for the stimulating questions from everyone.

<BouAkar, Hiba> Thank you everyone, thank you for the opportunity to participate in these forums, it has been a great experience.

<Kose, Burak> Thank you professors Kazepov and Torrise for facilitating the Authors Meet Critics series!

<Herring, Christopher> Cheers!

<Karaliotas, Lazaros> I really enjoyed taking part in this process. Thanks to the authors, Yuri and Giovanni and to all the other participants.

<Chatzi, Venetia> Thank you all for your contributions, especially the organizers! It has been a great experience.

<Wang, Jun> Thank you to everyone, I really enjoyed the seminar series, keep in touch!

References

Hochstetler, K. and M.E. Keck (2007)
Greening Brazil: environmental activism in state and society. Duke University Press, Durham, NC and London.

Hall, P. and D. Soskice (eds.) (2001)
Varieties of capitalism: the institutional foundations of comparative advantage. Oxford University Press, Oxford.