GOVERNANCE AND GEOGRAPHY EXPLAINING THE IMPORTANCE OF REGIONAL PLANNING TO CITIZENS, STAKEHOLDERS IN THEIR LIVING SPACE

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SUMMARY

Governance is a process that enables states, local authorities, elected representatives to co-construct, alongside the population on every level, decisions for the common good with long-term future consequences.

Initially we will try to make up a sort of archaeology of the concept, and its paths through the domain of the social sciences. Then we will try to set up a theoretical base giving a certain order to the concepts and notions applied to *governance* today and attempt a critical analysis. Finally, based on a few concrete examples, we will reflect on the role that geographers can play in this process

The term ***governance*** was coined by American economists. It meant optimising economic efficiency by taking into account the human aspect of market prices initially and then subsequently the improvement of urban planning. In the late 80s – early 90s, the concept of *governance* then migrated from economics to English political science leading to the notion of *urban governance* taken up by other European countries in the context of *local planning*. It examines how private enterprise enters into the decisions that one could consider as being exclusively public. The concept expanded into international relations, both in financial and environmental areas (*global governance*). Here the approach is more technical and has been used by economists at the World Bank and the IMF, *good governance* describing state management that would respect the macro-economic principles of institutions coming out of Bretton Woods. The European Union and the EBRD have also gone in this direction. The same goes for the organization of *global governance* according the principles of the concept of *sustainable development*. On the basis of the principle of human survival, there is an underlying technocrat idea that development is possible by re-orientating the economy and

society thanks to new techniques that prevent us from exhausting the resources of the planet. International structures lay down the rules, and States ratify and apply the decisions taken. In this context, citizens are invited to participate in this collective work and *governance* is presented as the *social facet of the principle of sustainability* that brings together citizens and decision-makers (elected representatives and experts). *Participation*, which forms the subject of Principle 10 of the Rio Declaration on Environment and Development (June 1992), has become the master word.

The concept of governance can be defined by several elements. The first element is that we move from the concept of *government* towards that of *governance,* which inherently denounces the traditional political model of government. Consequently, there is a ***transformation of the forms of public action***. We go from the State and elected representatives as the sole *actors* in the traditional model to a multitude of *actors* in a governance model. The second element is that after negotiation between the actors, a *decision* is taken with emphasis on the ***interdependence of the powers associated in this collective action.*** Therefore, the way the decision is made changes the roles of the actors, principally that of the State: In the traditional political model, the elected representatives have sole power in the decision making process and the State is sole guarantor of the decision being carried out. With the process of *governance*, the State's role changes: it is just a facilitator of the decision-making system. There is a move of the decision-making and its responsibilities towards *civil society* with the barriers between the public and private domain falling away. The third element concerns what one could call *common property*, *public property*, *public service*. However ***common property is not considered in the same way in every culture***. The Latin conception of common property originates in Roman law, and in "droit régalien" a concept more recently applied to common property as a "bien régalien" inalienable from the state[1]. This is not the case for the Anglo-Saxon conception of common property where it is considered as being able to be managed privately. Concerning the *management of this common property*: centralized management (the traditional model) is considered inefficient whilst in the model of governance, a ***decentralized management, from the citizens upwards,*** is proposed and is described ***as healthy, efficient and as the only alternative***. Another element to define governance is the aspect of ***power*** inevitably associated with a *decision*. The implementation of the process is initiated by a problem of general interest, which can be perceived as the equivalent of ***common property***, used in conjunction with the concept of ***sustainable development***. In the *Latin tradition* the process for this management goes from the *top down*. The power of decision is concentrated in the hands of elected representatives of the citizens or ***representative democracy***. It is the opposite of the *Anglo-Saxon tradition*: the process of ***governanc***e in this sense is the search for ***consensus*** between the ***actors*** through ***participation*** and from the *bottom up* leading to a shared *decision*, and this case we call it ***participative democracy***. In order to work, this last process passes via ***informing/training the citizens*** so that they may

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1   "Droit régalien" is traditionally applied to 3 areas: justice, police and army, finance, inalienable from state control and which cannot be administered privately. Bien régalien is a property inalienable from the state. In this case resources such as water are traditionally, under Roman law a "bien régalien", not able to be administered privately.

understand the ***stakes***. This active participation of citizens in the decisions forms the social aspect of *sustainable development*.

Presented thus, the bottom up process seems infinitely superior to the top down process. But is this really true? One of the characteristics of governance is that it has a large ideological content that is rarely explained by the authors of various works. The concept of *governance* has the quality of exposing in the traditional model of *representative democracy* that not only the State and the elected representatives of the people hold sole power of public decisions. There are authorities, more or less secret, who discreetly bear weight in the decisions made and contribute to the crisis of governability at the origin of governance. In the latter, ***the fact that there are multiple actors intervening is recognized and integrated in the process***. ***One can compare this to the culture of lobbying*** in Anglo-Saxon countries. Public policies would be more efficient thanks to the coordination carried out between all the public and private actors. Hence the ambiguity of the concept of governance. So it is that for some, *governance* is an instrument in the service of liberalization of societies by limiting the roles of the State and the elected representatives, often considered as incompetent to reply to the problems posed, thus removing obstacles to economic liberalism by introducing non-governmental competent actors into the decision-making process. For others, *governance* is perceived as the road to democratization of the State functions, to civic mobilization and to local political initiatives. It is also perceived as a tool to reinforce regulation mechanisms to counter the perverse effects of liberalism and in particular social breakdown. In this case, the concept of *governance* is truly the social facet of the principle of *sustainability*, and the question is whether or not its application to the *decisions* to be made implies or not a *sharing of power* between elected representatives and citizens.

Geographers seem to be missing from all the literature devoted to the process of governance. Yet geographers are often involved in regional planning decisions and they work as experts. They rarely study the process of governance itself as applied to regional planning. Thus, ***spatial durability*** consists of solving socio-spatial imbalances and reorganizing planning from a sustainable viewpoint where solutions enabling flexibility and reversibility should be favoured.

We can associate what one might call ***geo-governance*** to this *spatial durability* where the need for minimal *information* to be given to the *actors* of a given space is required, e.g. to local communities so that there is admissibility by all of the *decision* made. This sort of *geo-governance* goes toward the sense of the finality of the second meaning of *governance*, i.e. the democratization of the functions of the State and the fight against the perverse effects and the excesses of liberalism. The question being whether, in decisions to be made, it implies a sharing or not of power between elected representatives and citizens. As things are, an expert geographer is capable of explaining planning projects to the people. The following step would be to engage a broad discussion to bring out ideas and expectations of the end-users and their potential integration in the project, with clear explanations if they were not integrated.

But more precisely, what about the experience of citizens' participation in these projects to make planning projects coherent with the aspirations of society? A study concerning several experiments carried out in France and Switzerland demonstrates the limits of the

process of *governance* and of *participative democracy*, when governance is applied to space, to territory and its planning. To evaluate this, we will, concerning France, go over our own experiments carried out between 1998 and 2002[2] and concerning France and Switzerland, use the reports of experiments from 1990 to 2005[3]. In France, as in Switzerland, it is now obligatory to have the citizens take part in the creation of their living space. Comparative analysis of the experiments show that the citizens' *participation* goes from its weakest form of simple information to its strongest form as a type of *representative democracy* where the decision makers have all the *power*. There is no example of true *participative democracy*, as there is no true sharing of power between elected representatives and citizens. Three types of *participation* stand out. The first type is ***no citizens' participation*** (Grand Lyon experiment, Toussaint, Vareilles, in urbia note 3). The process of *governance* is managed between elected representatives, technicians and experts, inhabitants being represented by associations who are involved in the writing of a charter about the occupation of public areas. Such an organization can be deemed to be ***technocratic***. The local associations support the decisions. A second intermediate type is represented by two cases one of which is "an experiment on the ground… carried out… in a canton of Geneva… to develop a participative process aimed at giving the inhabitants of a neighbourhood collective and individual means to act in favour of their health and quality of life." (Burnand, 2006 in urbia note 3). Some elected representatives fearful of having to relinquish or share their decision-making powers, and some public health officials too confident in their knowledge of the public, discredited the process of public participation and diminished the results. Nevertheless, the process managed to find a few solutions to problems raised. The third, and seemingly most common, type shows that the citizens' participation in the governance process is a ***supplementary participation of technocratic conception*** making ***governance a type of representative democracy***, reinforcing and re-legitimizing the elected representatives' power of decision. The experiments in Tours, Yvorne, Basel and Lausanne (Bertheleu, Bonnard, Dubas, 2006 in urbia note 3) and Grenoble (Masson-Vincent, 1998 note 2) are illustrations of this to varying degrees. In the example on Grenoble, it was a case involving the 600 000 inhabitants of the Urban Area of Grenoble. The local institutions requested the creation of a game about planning in this area, showing the spatial stakes in the perspective of 2030. For technicians and experts, the aim was to inform the inhabitants but also the councillors of the potential spatial consequences of planning decisions. For councillors, it was an aid to presenting projects in public meetings. It was also created as a training tool, thanks to interaction between the subject and the object. The game contains a module about knowledge of the urban area, one on the planning documents to make and the procedure to do this, one on the goals of the regional development plan, and lastly a game module. The person playing could show the spatial consequences of his planning propositions in a 3D image, and use the same presentation tools as the councillors. They are then able to hold discussions on an equal footing and share the decision-making in a better way. A councillor might feel threatened by citizens' proposals. If he sees

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2   M. Masson-Vincent: "Citoyenneté et géographie. Quels liens? Exemple de la révision des duments d'urbanisme de la région urbaine grenobloise", Géopoint 1998 «Décision et analyse spatiale», Avignon (France), Groupe Dupont.

3   Urbia 3-2006, online publication on the University of Lausanne website www.igul.ch

the positive side to the situation, he can also be ready to go towards a co-production of the citizens' proposals. Here the result would be a true *participative democracy* where the search for *consensus* is not just a search for popularity. *Geo-governance* like this would be the basic concept to consider the inhabitants' opinions in the organization of sustainable planning of their living space. The road to *geo-governance* is still long to go from governance as a process of representative democracy to a true participative democracy.