

Introduction

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In this book, we want to integrate two of the major topics being discussed today in urban policy: sustainability and partnerships. While each of these two concepts is quite distinct there is a congeniality between them that we find intriguing and worthy of our study. Sustainability is an objective, and partnerships are a mechanism. We want to put the mechanism in service of the objective. Any sustainability initiative is a collective or collaborative effort, involving a city's public administration, of course, but to be successful it must involve and engage the imagination and energies of many individuals from many social, cultural, business, university, neighborhood, religious and other communities. Knowing how partnerships are formed and work, how the interest of participants is maintained, and how the energies, talents and knowledge of diverse individuals can be effectively utilized toward a common objective, is necessary if success is to be achieved.

In this introductory chapter, I will first review some approaches to sustainability, and then examine the mechanism of partnerships. The chapters that follow will first focus primarily on sustainability, and then we will offer some examples of partnerships in action and make explicit the relation between mechanism and the policy objective.

SUSTAINABILITY

The contemporary literature is replete with works on sustainability, and this is one of the most pressing issues facing urban leaders today. Sustainability is popularly seen as a feature of our natural environment and the degree to which humans have been degrading the air they breathe, the water that supports their life, and the natural surroundings that are so vital to their economy causes those who think seriously about it to become alarmed. Individual scientists, governments and international organizations provide a chorus of expert opinion that drowns out the emotional and ideological naysayers, all but the most impervious to rational thought. Important as

environmental sustainability is, we must be aware that sustainability has at least three other aspects that are equally worthy of our attention.

First is economic sustainability. Will we be able to maintain the vitality of our economic activity to the extent that we will be able to achieve the material standard of living, the amenities, the kinds of jobs, the degree of social inclusion and the well-being, in the broadest sense, to which we collectively aspire? Second is demographic sustainability. Will the composition of our population and its pace of growth contribute to or hinder the growth of our society? Will the gender mix, the rate of population growth, the age distribution and the mix of skills be such that they will sustain improvements in economic performance? Third is the availability of resources, both material and human. Will population growth and deterioration of our environment create material and talent constraints that will force us to accept decreasing material well-being?

Concern about sustainability is being expressed at all levels of the international community. Not all of them take the same approach to this policy issue. For example, at the global level, the United Nations held its Rio+20 conference, the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development in Rio de Janeiro, 20 years after the Earth Summit in Rio. The objective of this meeting was 'to shape how we can reduce poverty, advance social equity and ensure environmental protection on an ever more crowded planet'.

At the heart of this policy was the notion of sustainable cities, home to half of the world's population and of 60 percent by 2030. Almost all of the urban expansion in the coming years will take place in developing countries. These cities are marked by slums (soon to be home to 1 billion), inadequate housing, and inadequate and deteriorating infrastructure, and they lack access to adequate basic services, energy and opportunity. This process of urbanization will bring some efficiency gains but will also exert pressure on potable water, fresh air, and public health. Hence, the United Nations (UN) emphasis on green economies and on sustainable development.

National organizations, such as the National League of Cities in the USA, have also promoted attention to sustainability. One of the difficulties facing city leaders in the US is the combination of fiscal austerity and gridlock in the Congress and the withdrawal of the national government from many of its traditional roles of support for the nation's cities. The League's Sustainable Cities Institute is designed to provide a venue for mayors and specialists from cities to engage in a process of sharing ideas with regard to common problems, of discussing possible solutions, and of forming structures that will enable cities to work together toward creating common initiatives. One thing that is being done in many US cities is the construction of new green transportation lines, such as light rail.

Along these lines, investments will be made in new green, energy-efficient residential, retail and business structures. Access to all of these will be facilitated for residents in proximity to the line.

Most individual cities have initiated their own sustainable development projects. These projects are aimed at efficient energy and resource usage, at easing access to the locations within the city, at creating jobs and economic growth, and at encouraging tourism. Chicago, for example, has introduced its Sustainable Chicago 2015 Action Agenda with seven strategic themes focused on promoting a sustainable economy, making energy use more efficient and clean, promoting public transportation in lieu of the automobile, improving storm water management and reducing water usage, improving the city's parks and green areas, enhanced recycling, and reducing carbon emissions from all sectors. Many cities are doing similar things, and one can anticipate that the combined result of these efforts will have a positive impact throughout the country.

SOME ASPECTS OF PARTNERSHIPS

A partnership can take several different forms and can be created for several different purposes. But while a partnership is created for some specific short-term purpose, it can also be adopted as an ongoing way of operating in the longer run. One common purpose is that of forging a response to a specific situation, such as the loss of a major employer, or some short-run, but major, disruption of the economic or social life of the community. Often a partnership will be formed for the purpose of administering a grant of funds from an outside source, perhaps a superior level of government or a foundation, or of formulating an approach to obtaining outside funding. Another purpose of a partnership is that of providing ongoing coordination of activities such as maintaining or enhancing the attractiveness of the community and its local economy in the long run. This sort of partnership can grow out of one that is formed for a short-run purpose, or simply as a way to avoid any unwanted deterioration of town competitiveness. Some partnerships may be highly formal in their origin and organization, while others may be casual, informal and almost accidental. Each form of partnership will have its own needs for participation, from just a few directly involved entities to a broadly representative participation. A grant for infrastructure will have a narrower requirement for partnership participation, whereas response to loss of a major employer will involve political, economic, social and cultural participants due to the wide array of impacts and of responses required.

Ronald McQuaid has summarized the components of a partnership

as having: (1) a voluntary relationship; (2) a wide range of participants, including private and public sector entities, and non-governmental organizations; (3) an agreed strategy; (4) a long time scale; and (5) agreed contributions of resources to the process (McQuaid, 1998, Section 2).

Furthermore, partnerships may be formally structured with clear lines of authority and responsibility, with some individual in charge, or they may be loosely structured entities that function on the basis of consensus. They may also be strong or weak in their power to command action by participants. Obviously the degree of urgency of action will have a major impact on which of the two forms is most appropriate.

Roger Wettenhall has identified for us many approaches to partnerships but there are two that seem to be most relevant to the case being studied here: Triple Helix and governance (Wettenhall, 2003, pp. 77–107). Both speak to the fact that more than municipal government is necessary if there is to be success in achieving the economic objectives of any strategic economic planning.

The Triple Helix Model is often used to depict the structure and relationships among participating entities. Formally, the model relates three distinct sectors of participation: universities, industry or business, and government. Each has a separate role to play and contribution to make to the effort. The model is usually used to discuss the process of innovation in the context of the individual firm developing technologies that will enhance its competitiveness in the market. Henry Etzkowitz has described this as a process that leads to ‘science-based regional economic development’ (Etzkowitz, 2002). But the concept of the three entities working collaboratively has much broader implications and applications, including that of the collaboration of a university, the local business community, and the local government in an initiative to chart a course for future economic and social development and other civic objectives.

In this latter application, the Triple Helix morphs into the notion of governance: that is, how the government institutions work with a wide array of economic, political and social entities to achieve the desired ends, or shared objectives, with regard to economic development, infrastructure improvements, urban amenities such as cultural and recreational institutions and programs, social inclusion, adequate housing, and so forth.

As David Wolfe has written, the attention given to the concept of governance arises from an understanding of the importance for local strategic economic planning of ‘interaction among a wide range of social and economic actors, including provincial or state and local governments, the private sector voluntary, business and not-for-profit organization’ involving ‘a more decentralized, open and consultative form of governing’ (Wolfe, 2013, p. 7). This need arises from the reality that participants

cannot be coerced into collaboration, and that they must be induced to participate and to accept some collective responsibility and authority for actions undertaken. It is also true, in the case of small towns, that ‘opting out’ and ‘free-riding’ reduces the effectiveness of the initiatives undertaken when the number of participants is small to begin with.

This raises the contrast between efficient decision-making and democratic participation. Efficiency can mean speed and solving a problem, whereas democracy often entails slow deliberative processes – perhaps arriving at the same solution. Michael Haus and Hubert Heinelt discuss this in terms of complementarity, where all participants ‘work together to bring about a certain outcome’ (Haus and Heinelt, 2005, p. 23). In a small town this is more easily achieved. Meetings are open and, when the issue requires, well attended. Decision-makers are known to many individuals in the community and can get input on issues on a regular basis. Haus and Heinelt list three things that are required for democratic self-government (Haus and Heinelt, 2005, p. 15): (1) there must be ‘some kind of “authentic” participation’; (2) the process ‘has to be measured according to the degree it solves the problems that affect the fate of the community’; and (3) it ‘has to be judged according to the transparency of its institutions and processes’.

David Wolfe discusses the notion of ‘civic capital’: ‘a set of relations that emerges from interpersonal networks tied to a specific region or locality and contributes to the development of a common sense of community based on a shared identity, set of goals and expectations’ (Wolfe, 2013, p. 11). In a similar vein, John McCarthy examines the need for ‘institutional thickness’; essentially a ‘high degree of trust and shared norms and traditions’ (McCarthy, 2007, p. 136).

THE SUBSTANTIVE CHAPTERS OF THE BOOK

This book continues with three chapters that take a somewhat theoretical approach to sustainability. These will be followed by two sets of chapters with examples of sustainability policy or initiatives from Asia and Africa, and then from Europe and North America. In these chapters we treat urbanization, competitiveness, citizen participation, growth and renewal. The final part of the book offers five examples of how partnerships have been instrumental in achieving the objectives of competition, service delivery, sustainable development, public expenditures and industrial development. Limitations of space preclude a detailed explication of each of the chapters, and I leave it to the reader to discover the content of each of them. I and the other authors hope this is found to be a beneficial and interesting exercise.

