

Abstracts and Titles of Recent Student Work

Department of City and Regional Planning University of California at Berkeley

Doctoral Dissertations

Isabelle Tien Fauconnier. *Privatized Water, Retreating State: Access and Affordability Issues for a Public-Private Good in Developing Country Contexts*. Spring 2003.

While the potential efficiency gains to be realized through water utility privatization have been extolled, the impacts of such programs on different categories of service users are not well understood or closely scrutinized in the literature. Along with efficiency, do privatization programs improve the accessibility and affordability of water services to low-income households?

This dissertation argues that the current conceptualization of water supply as a mostly private good has led to the design and implementation of policies that do not improve the physical and economic access of disadvantaged users to water services. With empirical evidence from a water service concession in Argentina, a lease contract in Senegal and a management contract in Venezuela, the study examines processes of reform design, contract architecture, tariff and subsidy determination, regulatory framework design, and the formation of new institutional partnerships. Unlike previous work in this field, the study places a strong emphasis on understanding the users' perspective, using household surveys and interviews focusing on issues that impact the poor in developing urban settings.

To understand the complex social and political characteristics of water that affect reform outcomes, yet are seldom taken into account by policy makers, this study proposes three dimensions: access, affordability and process. Access to the service is affected by the political economy of production, market structure, and the conceptualization of water as a private or public good. The affordability of the service is influenced by price-setting and enforcement mechanisms, the politics of regulation, and the design of subsidies. It is also linked to the political economy of consumption, itself influenced by users' perceptions of water as a social, merit, or private good. The process of water supply reform – shaped by its leaders and participants -- plays an integral role in determining outcomes for low-income households.

The thesis argues that unless water supply is understood along a continuum of public and private characteristics that include social and political factors, privatization reforms in water supply are unlikely to achieve significant service improvements for the urban poor, and will also lead to unfavorable results for the utilities themselves.

Peter Voss Hall. *The Institution of Infrastructure and the Development of Port-Regions*. Fall 2002.

This dissertation asks what role local public agencies might play in regional economic development through the market-shaping institutions they create and sustain. Recent economic geography literature has sought to account for patterns of regional development in terms of institutional differences across space. Research has sought to identify and understand these institutions, defined as taken for granted formal and informal rules, practices, norms and patterns of behavior. However, the current literature is vague about the role of public policy, and often ignores extra-regional economic forces.

This dissertation confronts these problems directly by examining the institutionalized relationships between one type of local public agency, port authorities, and one global industry, automobile manufacturers. The evidence presented in this dissertation consists of case studies of two public port authorities (Baltimore and Long Beach) and various automobile importers (Toyota, Honda, Mercedes and Volkswagen), supported by documentary and economic data. The research strategy involves tracing the consequences for the geography of automobile import activity of institutional change in public ports.

I argue that the economic geography of automobile import and distribution activities can be systematically related to changes in the planning, leasing, pricing, and management policies of US public port authorities. Firms using such public infrastructure seek a relational fix, or an appropriate set of institutionalized relationships, that allows them to overcome the uncertainties associated with investment and other economic actions. How port authorities go about providing infrastructure – the planning policies they promote, the financing mechanisms they employ, the contracts they enter into, the labor relations they sustain, the organizations they create – these institutions all support particular relational fixes and devalue others. Changes in these institutions arising from the process of containerization have changed the actual and potential relationships between infrastructure providers and users. In turn, this influenced both the patterns of port usage and infrastructure investment decisions.

The findings indicate that local public agencies are able to influence regional economic development outcomes through attention to the institutions governing the relationships between multinational firms and other economic actors. A central challenge for local public agencies is to achieve institutional compatibility with a diversity of economic actors, in a way that is both responsive to changes in industry organization and accountable to local communities. For planners in particular, this implies paying closer attention to the way in which institutions influence actual and potential public-private relationships.

Annette Miae Kim. *Making a Market: The Institutions Supporting Ho Chi Minh City's Urban Land Development Market*. Fall 2002.

After a decade of reforms in transition economies, it is clear that building markets is not as simple as we originally thought. The same reforms applied in different contexts have produced a variety of economic outcomes. Traditional mainstream economics had ignored the role of institutions, assuming that innate individual interest in profit would be sufficient in unleashing market activity once legal norms were established to reduce the threat of property expropriation. There is growing recognition in international development policy circles that a key reason to the unevenness in market development in terms of growth and domestic investment must lie in differences in institutional contexts.

This dissertation examines how a private land and real estate market in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam emerged where many supposed market fundamentals are missing. It was a mystery to some how domestic private land development firms could have emerged. With an undeveloped legal system and some of the weakest property rights amongst the transition economies, foreign capital flight after the Asian currency crisis in 1998, an undeveloped banking sector, and constantly fluctuating and interventionist government policies, Vietnam should have been a nightmare for any private business. And yet, the bulk of annual new housing is now supplied by the private sector. This study asked how these firms emerge, invest, and operate.

I hypothesized and found that a complex set of institutional factors shaped and supported agents to engage in new economic actions, one of the main reasons that Ho Chi Minh City's real estate market has been able to develop rapidly. This case challenges our current understanding of what are essential market institutions. I propose an integrative model for understanding how the institutional factors I found worked together and the key elements to developing a market.

Asha Elizabeth Weinstein. *The Congestion Evil: Perceptions of Traffic Congestion in Boston in the 1890s and 1920s*. Fall 2002.

This dissertation examines how people understood the phenomenon of traffic congestion in Boston in the 1890s and 1920s, tracking the evolution of their ideas between the two periods. Then, as today, public discussions of policies to relieve congestion were based upon ideas about such issues as what causes congestion and why it matters. To understand how congestion was perceived in these eras, I used a case study approach, looking at discussions of it during two sets of planning debates. The first case is a debate from 1891 to 1894 that led to the building of a subway in downtown Boston. The second case is a debate in the mid-1920s over plans for the so-called "loop highway," a boulevard running through the downtown.

I posed three research questions to limit and define the meaning of the term "perceptions" for this analysis: why did Bostonians think traffic congestion was a problem, what did they think caused congestion, and what policies did they think might reduce it? To answer these questions, I analyzed the words of the people involved in the debates, using materials such as newspapers, government publications, and magazines...

Three themes stand out among the conclusions I drew about perceptions of congestion during the two periods. First, the factors people perceived as causing congestion were closely linked to the policies they favored. Second, most people didn't actually talk much about how they perceived congestion, even though they believed it was a problem. This relative silence reflects the fact that ideas about congestion were not particularly controversial. Third, many perceptions that Bostonians held about congestion were not only accepted as conventional wisdom within each time period, but they changed very little across the two periods-people understood congestion in the 1890s in many of the same ways that they did in the 1920s, even though traffic conditions had changed radically in the intervening years. For example, the favored policies were major capital projects; while regulatory approaches were proposed, opposition from interest groups or the public blocked the implementation of all but the most limited new rules.

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