

Bolstering Urban Governance in Busan

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Introduction

This paper discusses good urban governance as a global phenomenon and then proceeds to make several specific recommendations for the Korean city of Busan based on recent trends. I seek to build on the recent OECD Busan Report's¹⁾ micro level recommendations for governance capacity building by proposing several options for consultation processes aimed at bolstering citizen input on major issues. The "deliberative democracy" approach advocated here is championed in the US, Canada (Graham, 2003) and elsewhere by an increasing number of urban governments, non profit agencies, and academic institutions²⁾. Busan could adapt this de-

liberative strategy to enhance as other urban regimes have local capacity for formulating informed and effective input in resource allocation, planning, policy formulation, technology assessment, and other areas. In concrete terms, the approach could be used to address such issues as how to bolster the local fiscal base, health services, education, economic development, and the environment. One way for Busan to tailor the approach, especially to cut costs and increase flexibility, might be to lean heavily on the internet and update its "local autonomy centres." Mixing IT and local institutions in a like manner has been employed in several urban settings, including New York, and appears well suited to Korea as it is such a highly wired society. The process advocated holds out the potential to fine tune policies and reduce opposition to their implementation by making the public an active participant in decision-making. These merits of using IT and institutions to enhance local governance are applicable to urban communities in general.

1) Please see Chapter 3 "Metropolitan Governance and Decentralisation," in OECD (2004). The report is available at the following internet site:

http://www.busan.go.kr/open_city/oecd_review_eng.pdf

2) Some of these institutions are at the following internet sites:

<http://cdd.stanford.edu/>

<http://www.deliberative-democracy.net/>

Good Urban Governance

First, though the importance of good urban governance has long been recognized in the specialist literature, it has not been a prominent issue on the political agenda in most countries until quite recently³⁾. This is largely because in the 20th century, the era of the centralized state, local government's role was overshadowed by the dominance of the central state and limited by its extensive regime of taxes, subsidies, regulations and the like. In most of the industrialized and industrializing world, the institutions of local government and its array of services and infrastructure was generally taken for granted. One thing that has changed and brought governance to the centre of the agenda is that we are now an era of subsidiarity and decentralization. To the extent possible, in both the political and economic sense, responsibilities are being shifted to subnational governments, especially the urban level. Moreover, fully half the global population is urban, a figure likely to increase to 2/3 over the next five decades. Thus, fostering good urban governance is now broadly understood to be one of humanity's collective challenges⁴⁾.

But what do we mean by good urban governance? The World Bank tells us that "Good governance is epitomized by predictable, open and enlightened policy making, a bureaucracy imbued with a professional ethos acting in furtherance of the public good, the rule of law, transparent processes, and a strong civil society participating in public affairs."⁵⁾ The UN Habitat Global campaign on urban governance elaborates the concept by arguing that "Governance refers to the process whereby elements in society wield power and authority, and influence and enact policies and decisions concerning public life, and economic and social development. Governance is a broader notion than government, whose principal elements include the constitution, legislature, executive and judiciary. Governance involves interaction between these formal institutions and those of civil society." Habitat add that "Governance has no automatic normative connotation. However, typical criteria for assessing governance in a particular context might include the degree of legitimacy, representativeness, popular accountability and efficiency with which public affairs are conducted." In other words, two of the leading global centres on governance emphasize transparency and efficiency in the formal institutions of the public sector as well as a strong focus on the inclusion of civil society in the management of public affairs.⁶⁾

3) On this, note the World Bank's comments at the following internet site:
<http://www1.worldbank.org/publicsector/decentralization/>

4) These urban challenges are the focus of UN Habitat's World Urban Forum in Vancouver during 2006. Note that the format of the World Urban Forum differs greatly from other UN institutions and is in fact itself a

case study in deliberative democracy:

<http://www.unhabitat.org/wuf/2006/>

5) See: www1.worldbank.org/publicsector/toolkitsgovernance2.pdf

6) See: <http://www.unhabitat.org/campaigns/>

Enhancing the Input of Civil Society

I want to focus on the latter the inclusion of civil society in this paper. Moreover, I want to stress that the search for innovative means of including civil society in urban governance confronts urban governments in all the developed and developing societies. Building capacity at the local level is necessary not only because the gradual withdrawal of the central state's fiscal and regulatory authority puts more weight on the governing institutions at the local level, testing their capacity to respond effectively to even routine demands. There is in addition a background of increasing challenges to industrial society as a whole, challenges that often place inordinate stress on the urban tier of government. These challenges include coping with the costs of ageing, enhancing environmental protection, fostering post industrial economic development, and the like. Coping with these myriad challenges, especially in the context of globalization and its erosive effects on socioeconomic bonds and the body politic as a whole, cannot be left to the formal institutions of the public sector alone. In tandem with decentralization, the enormity and multifaceted character of contemporary social and economic policy challenges puts a premium on bolstering urban governance. One obvious means to this end of better urban governance is incorporating the information and steering capacity that is dispersed throughout civil society. In other words,

bringing civil society more thoroughly into local governance is not merely a normative matter of building more ideal democratic institutions. It is also necessary for the more practical matter of enhancing political and economic efficiency and effectiveness.

But in this respect, too, we face a serious problem. For even as policy challenges have grown more serious, the links between decision makers and the society that their decisions shape are becoming increasingly tenuous. In virtually all of the advanced societies, the amalgamation and articulation of opinion in the public policy debate at the urban, regional and central state tiers is increasingly dominated by well financed special interests. Moreover, even many of the big organizations of civil society are now rather poorly representative of their memberships, as the latter have little opportunity to shape the content of organizational lobbying⁷⁾. Trust in the institutions of government and the public sphere in general is thus in deep decline across the industrialized states. This "democratic deficit," as it has been called, leads to alienation, anomie and increased risks of policy failure as citizens confront the consequences of policy decisions that they feel often quite correctly they had

7) As Harvard University NPO expert Theda Skocpol notes, though America is generally seen as having the most vigorous civil society, even there "political authorities and non-profit organizations rely on professional management and media messages rather than on organized popular participation" (Skocpol, 2002).

little or even no impact on.⁸⁾ Getting citizen input into major decisions is thus a critical issue everywhere and has attracted a wide variety of proposals and practices, including innovative strategies for fostering deliberative democracy.

Deliberative Democracy

The core concept of deliberative democracy is to bring representative samples of citizens directly into the policymaking process. As we have seen, the effectiveness of the indirect approach is diminishing. Indeed, over the past few decades we have seen opinion polling increasingly used as a means to give voice to the broad mass of citizens and legitimize decisions taken in the policymaking process. Pointing to majority support for a particular policy in an opinion poll is often the trump card played in legitimating a specific decision. But while opinion polls may be a valid test of whether a majority of the public agrees or disagrees with a particular position, the opinion tested is passive and generally uninformed about the range of policy options and their inevitable trade offs and implications.

One striking example of the limitations of legitimating policy by polls is evident in

the results of polls concerning taxation. In most cases, a poll that simply asks whether taxes should be raised or reduced will elicit majority support for tax cuts. But when people confront the implications of tax cuts, such as reductions in valued public services and increases in debt financing, they are generally less enthusiastic about cuts.⁹⁾ Deliberative democracy therefore goes beyond testing passive opinion and seeks instead to foster informed public opinion and bring it directly to bear on the policymaking process. This approach has obvious relevance at the urban level, because the devolution of responsibilities puts a premium on finding creative and broadly acceptable policy responses and modes of financing them.

New York's Big Deliberative Benchmark

Let us look briefly at an increasingly noted means of drawing directly on the people who compose civil society. One of the direst challenges faced in recent years by an urban government was that of New York in the wake of the 9/11 terrorist incidents. New York found itself faced with the challenge of rebuilding lower Manhattan as well as rebuilding the lives of residents affected by the enormous damage. The city opted to consult the people directly, and thus drew on the non profit organization America Speaks (<http://www.>

8) The first use of the term "democratic deficit" appears to have been in the 1977 manifesto of the Young European Federalists:

(<http://www.federalunion.org.uk/archives/democraticdeficit.shtml>)

The concern is now so broad that a google search with the term yielded over 95,000 hits.

9) On this, see the very thorough discussion in Hacker and Pierson, 2004. The paper can be downloaded at:

<http://www.ksg.harvard.edu/inequality/summer2004.htm>

americaspeaks.org/), which has organized over 50 such large scale forums since it was founded a decade ago in 1995. In several large scale “town hall” meetings as well as on line forums, America Speaks educated hundreds of New Yorkers about the options and got their considered input on which choices were the most reasonable. These meetings resulted in major changes to redevelopment plans, including such significant issues as transportations routes. The changes and the method in which they were brought about were so striking that they made the front page of the July 21, 2002 New York Times as well as headlines throughout the world. The fact that their plans were extensively revised was no doubt unpleasant for policymakers, as they surely spent considerable time in formulating the initial plans. However, being a product of informed citizen input, the changes made the overall plan more acceptable to the public at large and thus probably much more effective and efficient in the long run.

The New York meetings (the series was titled “Listening to the City”) organized by America Speaks were large.¹⁰⁾ Public gatherings were held on two occasions, February 7 and again on July 20 of 2002 and included thousands of participants. The first of these large scale meeting brought 650 citizen New Yorkers together with experts on urban design and other issues. Then together they went over the op-

tions for rebuilding the downtown core. The second meeting then brought a total of 4300 citizens a largely representative sample of New York’s ethnically and demographically diverse population together with one thousand volunteers and staff who acted as facilitators, issue experts and other important roles. Fully eight hundred of these volunteers came from outside of New York, including the other 50 states as well as elsewhere in Anglo America and Europe. Moreover, there were also over two hundred major media outlets present, “including all of the major networks; dozens of major newspaper dailies from around the country; and media from across Canada, Europe and Asia” (Luke-smeyer and Brigham, 2002: 358).

Following these meetings, and extending over a period of 2 weeks, a further 818 New Yorkers were engaged through 26 discussion groups that debated over the internet. All participants were able to monitor the exchanges that took place in the other groups, and thus draw on that information in forming their opinions. About 10,000 messages were exchanged through this medium, many of which were incorporated in the work done by the initial meetings that had taken place in one physical location¹¹⁾.

Lessons From “Listening”

The scale of “Listening to the City”

10) A web site on the conference series and its final report can be viewed at:
<http://www.listeningtothecity.org/>

11) The on line dialogues are described and stored at: <http://www.listeningtothecity.org/online/polls.html>

makes it one of the most notable examples of deliberative democracy. The costs were considerable, but they challenges the city faced were immediate and gargantuan, as direct economic losses from the 9/11 incidents were in the tens of billions of dollars once lost business and other impacts are factored in¹²⁾. A similar scale of crisis is unlikely to confront most big urban centres, including Busan. Rather, other urban centres' challenges are more gradual: the risk of losing economic competitiveness and livability¹³⁾ over the coming decades due to subpar outputs from inadequate local policymaking capacity. In a decentralizing and globalizing era, the pressures on urban regimes to perform well are mounting like a flood tide. The capacity to provide residents with high quality services that enhance their lives and productivity and that they are thus willing to pay for is a competitive advantage whose payoffs are virtually incalculable. New York's catastrophic shock concentrated minds and brought forth creative policymaking responses that drew on and enhanced the existing concepts and practices in deliberative democracy. But the specific application of the approach in New York is hardly the

only means that has been employed or is possible (or indeed appropriate). Cities such as Busan can tailor the principles and practices to suit their own circumstances.

Regarding Busan's needs, and our purposes here, the big question is what practical lessons we can learn from New York's greatly elevated benchmark in deliberative democracy. First, deliberative approaches clearly work. Indeed, in state level deliberation meetings managed by America Speaks, a majority of the participants determined that payroll tax increases were the best way to bolster social security¹⁴⁾. We can therefore say that extending deliberative opportunities more broadly in civil society not only results in more finely tuned policy. Confronting the tradeoffs that are inevitable in policymaking also helps participants understand the need for realism. Thus we argue that it is possible and desirable for Busan to move in this deliberative direction by building on the OECD recommendations concerning neighbourhood associations within the dong¹⁵⁾.

Fostering Deliberation at the Dong Level

The chapter on governance recommended that the dong local autonomy centres' role be expanded through increasing the menu of activities they engage in and tailoring them for the needs of local areas. But it is also possible to go beyond that

12) The New York City comptroller's report of September 4, 2002 determined the total cost of the attacks to be about US\$ 95 billion: http://www.comptroller.nyc.gov/press/2002_releases/02_09_054.shtm

13) For insights into what features constitute livability in an urban context, see: http://www.aia.org/liv_principles
<http://www.curp.neu.edu/sitearchive/roundtable.asp?id=1441>
http://www.eya.ca/yaec/wuf_livable_05.html

14) On this see: <http://www.americaspeaks.org/about/history.htm>

15) See Chapter 3 "Metropolitan Governance and Decentralisation," in OECD (2004).

and institutionalize the local autonomy centres as deliberative and representative bodies. This might seem, at first glance, an overly ambitious proposal for the centres. But it is practical. And it is valuable even if the deliberative ideal sketched above is not met in many locales. This is because the technical means for bolstering the role of the associations will in themselves deliver practical rewards that will make the allocation of human and financial resources worthwhile.

First, as to infrastructure, there are at least two very important points that we can draw out of the deliberative democracy approach. These concern the use of facilitators and the broadband internet technology. The facilitators' role is essential, in order to moderate input into the discussions as well as maintain the flow of debate. It is not necessary to hire professionals for this task. But some sensitivity to the challenges of small group facilitation is essential, and can be gained either through training or from readily available sources on line¹⁶.

An additional key item is the use of internet related technologies (ie, computer hardware and software) to facilitate the exchange of information within and among local autonomy centres. The centres already specialize in computer training courses, so most likely have the necessary

equipment in place. Moreover, the fact that Korea is one of the world's most highly wired societies (Shameen, 2004) means that familiarity with computer technology and the willingness to use it are broadly and deeply dispersed throughout civil society. This fact alone is an enormous comparative advantage in lowering the costs of enhanced local governance.

In short, expenditures for updating the role of the local autonomy centres can therefore likely be kept quite low. But there will in the end have to be some allocation of resources. Benefits from these investments can be maximized in the short term by using the IT infrastructures to link the centres and the gu in networks of neighbourhood indicators partnerships. The electronic link to the gu and higher tiers of government needs to be bolstered as that is where the indicators (e.g., vital statistics, data on real estate ownership) are generally held¹⁷. Decentralizing access to the data and making it possible to update it through feedback (between the neighborhood association and urban tier of government) as well as use it with software strengthens local capacity. For example, championed by the USA's Urban Institute¹⁸ and other organizations, such networks are in extensive use at the local

16) See, for example:

<http://med.fsu.edu/education/FacultyDevelopment/small%20group%20skills.asp>
<http://www.weblab.org/press/sgd.html>

17) Indeed, as is pointed out in the OECD report (OECD, 2004), the reason the dong had the office space to allow the neighborhood associations to be set up is that their role in record keeping was automated and shifted to the gu.

18) On the Urban Institute's project, see:
<http://www.urban.org/nnip/about.html>

level in the United States¹⁹⁾. The networks see local associations use GIS software (<http://www.gis.com/>) to manipulate local statistical records “for environmental planning and tracking, voter redistricting, land use planning, and, in some areas, for crime prevention and other kinds of community planning²⁰⁾.” In other words, a comparatively small investment in IT related technologies has enormous potential to yield direct practical benefits as well as significant gains in invigorating civil society. In imaging their own neighborhoods, residents gain the confidence and capacity to more broadly manage them as well. The critical items are the institutions and resources to facilitate this expansion of local governance.

The Potential for Elections

This role of the local autonomy centres could perhaps be enhanced even more by making the centres' committee positions elected. At present, the committee in charge of the centres is composed of appointees as well as elected politicians from the shi level of government (the latter have no voting power on the commit-

tee). Comparative studies of neighbourhood associations elsewhere such as the lizhang in Taiwan appear to show that making such positions subject to election significantly increases local interest in the institutions and their activities²¹⁾. Through elections, the centres' credibility would likely increase among residents as well as upper tiers of government. The centres' responsibilities could then perhaps more readily shift from the provision of a simple menu of activities (such as classes on hobbies and foreign languages) to stronger, deliberatively based local involvement in managing community affairs.

Summary

The reforms advocated in the above offer Busan the option of at least enlarging and perhaps even redefining the role of the local autonomy centres. We have argued that moving in this direction could lead to better policymaking and reduced opposition to policy implementation, as the local community would be a much more active participant in designing policy.

The means of implementing deliberative approaches are, of course, quite recent. But as we have seen from just the New York

19) Examples of neighborhood information systems are discussed at: <http://www.npcr.org/MNIS.html>
<http://www.portlandonline.com/oni/>
<http://www.cura.umn.edu/programs/MNIS.html>

20) A detailed summary of the applications GIS software has for community issues and policy can be viewed at:
<http://www.benton.org/publibrary/state/infosystems.html>

21) This result is seen in research related by e mail communication with the present author by Professor Benjamin Read of the University of Iowa, a specialist in China and local governance and co organizer of the 2005 Shambaugh Conference on “Straddling State and Society: Challenges and Insights from Ambiguous Associations”:
<http://myweb.uiowa.edu/bread/>

experience, they can be effective if implemented in a manner suitable to local conditions and challenges. All big urban centres face the task of bolstering local capacity. Many of the pressures on them are generalized throughout the industrialized and developing world. But many are specific to particular locales, as are the institutional and political culture resources on which effective responses can be built. As the UN Habitat (UN Habitat, 2004: 172-83) observes concerning planning and other policymaking in the world's cities, diversity is the rule. Busan is thus not in the position of being a laggard learning from others. Indeed, Korean cities are advantaged in being so wired and having, at the national level, such a receptive regime for experimentation at the local level. With a little effort and ingenuity, Busan could take the benchmarks I have sketched here and move them a long way up the road.

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