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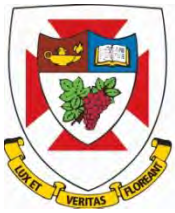

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The Institute of Urban Studies is an independent research arm of the University of Winnipeg. Since 1969, the IUS has been both an academic and an applied research centre, committed to examining urban development issues in a broad, non-partisan manner. The Institute examines inner city, environmental, Aboriginal and community development issues. In addition to its ongoing involvement in research, IUS brings in visiting scholars, hosts workshops, seminars and conferences, and acts in partnership with other organizations in the community to effect positive change.

INSTITUTE OF URBAN STUDIES

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The following article is a condensation of a paper soon to be available from the Institute of Urban Studies.

The Politics of Urban Innovation: A Preliminary Analysis of Bill 36 and the Unification of Greater Winnipeg

by

Tom Axworthy

On Saturday, July 24, 1971, the Legislature of the Province of Manitoba gave third and final reading to Bill 36, "The City of Greater Winnipeg Act". The passage of the Unicity Bill ended one of the most bitter conflicts of modern Manitoba politics and ushered in a unique experiment in North American metropolitan government.

The goal of this paper is the examination of the process which led to the adoption of the reform. The case study itself is organized around the theoretical concept of innovation. Innovation is a vague word which is often used but little understood. It is hoped that this study will not only increase our knowledge about urban politics in Canada but will also clarify the meaning of this important concept.

Theories of Metropolitan Reform

One of the basic problems facing our society today is whether the system of local government, which originated in the 18th and 19th centuries, is capable of coping with the many pressures associated with mushrooming urbanization. Urban growth makes a mockery of political boundaries and results in two main problems:

1. The existence of many local government units makes it difficult to cope with area-wide problems such as pollution, planning and transportation.
2. Fragmented local government results in financial inequality.

To deal with the above problems, local government planners have developed a variety of institutional structures ranging from amalgamation, to two-tier authorities, to area-wide special purpose bodies.

The Concept of Innovation

Innovation is a form of planned change, a new response to social or system pressures. Innovation within the political system is defined as any new policy, structure, technique or behaviour qualitatively different from existing practice or predominant traditions proposed as a response to a particular problem or change in the environment.

Innovation thus invokes the detection of a need for a new policy and the initiation of the process for obtaining acceptance of that policy. The basic elements of the process which apply to our case study are:

1. Perception
2. Idea-configuration or creation
3. Adoption

The need for perception must be the starting point. Before innovation can take place someone has to realize that a problem needs attending to, or that there has been a change in the environment which necessitates a change in the operation of the system.

Part II of the case study explains why Bill 36 was innovative and tries to describe the process by which it was created.

Part III of the case study is perhaps the most important section in the paper. Here we describe the process which led to the adoption of Bill 36.

Using concepts developed in the different literatures of innovation, integration and policy-valuing, the following framework has been formulated to help classify the different factors which affect the politics of achieving urban change. Due to limitations of the empirical data, not all these factors have been discussed in the Winnipeg case example, although the framework has been followed as closely as possible.

(Editor's note : The Framework for the analysis of the politics of urban change, has due to limitations of space been ommitted.)

The Environment of Urban Policy

The environment in which any urban policy takes place is, of course, fundamental to understanding the nature of the political powers. The environment influences political activity and is, in turn, influenced by it. Urban policy, which refers to authoritative decisions on a local level, is affected by the economic, social, religious, and cultural factors present within its boundaries. The local environment produces both resources, which can be employed by the local decision-makers, and constraints, which limit the behaviour of the local voters.

The socio-economic context refers to the physical factors of size, density, and heterogeneity, which affect political life, and to the economic resources of the area.

The political setting is composed of a variety of variables which influence the course of urban policy. The classification of local political culture is rarely defined but always referred to.

The classification of urban community is a concept borrowed from the integration literature. "Community" refers to the state of affairs where the inhabitants of a given area "show some minimal readiness or ability to continue working together to solve their political problems."

The Participants

The participants in the urban policy valuing process may range from the Mayor of the city, to the Premier of the Province, to the average voter. Although every urban decision may have a different set of participants, one can group the major classifications of actors relatively easily. These are:

1. the formal decision-makers
2. business interests
3. labour unions
4. city newspapers
5. reform groups
6. municipal bureaucracies
7. neighbourhood groups
8. the public

The initiators refers to that group of actors who succeed in placing their issue or problem on the public agenda. Opponents and Supporters simply refers to the actors who were involved in the political battle to get the policy adopted.

Strategies/Results

The techniques employed during a political conflict are also of interest. The arena is the different theatres in which the conflict unfolds – battles in the press, public meetings, investigating committees and the legislature. The nature of the arena, that is, whether the fight is taking place in the press or in Parliament, may well affect the type of strategy which is followed.

(Editor's note)

In the paper proper, there is a long and detailed examination of the history of municipal government in Winnipeg, an analysis of the Metro years and the process of municipal reorganization from initiation to final enactment of the bill. The full discussion of the political battle both inside and outside of the legislature has also been omitted from this article.

What follows is a brief description of how the process can be adopted to the framework of the concept of innovation.

THE ADOPTION OF BILL 36

The political battle over Bill 36 can be divided into two phases: in the first or White Paper stage the Government maintained that it was not irrevocably wedded to the White Paper proposals and it gingerly explored public reaction through a series of town hall meetings.

The second phase of Bill 36 occurred after the government had presented the bill to the legislature. At this point, the arena of conflict was transferred from public meetings to the legislature.

The Framework Applied

In the previous section, the long process which led to the adoption of Bill 36 was described. Many individuals, forces, and factors were involved and the framework for the analysis of urban change is a means of organizing this data. Not all the possible factors discussed in the framework apply to the Winnipeg case example but enough of them are present to be summarized.

The Environment of Urban Policy

The environment of urban policy in Winnipeg was a curious blend of tradition and change. Socio-economic factors like Metropolitan Winnipeg's size compared to the rest of the province was an important reason why Winnipeg problems could not be ignored. It is too important to the life of the province and too many voters live there for any senior government to leave its problems unattended for too long. The ethnic heterogenity of Winnipeg was perhaps the main reason why Stephen Juba was so powerful. The political setting of Winnipeg affected the levels of participation which in turn was one of the most significant findings of the case example. In the battle over Bill 36, the political termperature was low. The public did not seem to get aroused in any significant way and

perhaps more surprisingly the level of interest group activity was almost minimal. Few pressure groups appeared to enter the conflict over Bill 36, and almost none seem to have influenced the actual creation of the White Paper. Unlike some issues in Manitoba – notably the dispute over auto insurance – actors such as the newspapers, labour unions and business groups did not appear to be overly concerned. The only bodies with active roles were the formal decision-makers – the local governments, the Government, the legislature and the parties.

The Participants

As stated above the active participants in the battle over Bill 36 were relatively few. On the one hand there was the NDP government supported by the city of Winnipeg, Metro, and some professional groups and on the other there were the area municipalities; the Conservatives and Liberal Parties in the legislature and the local citizens' group.

The decision-making power was the NDP cabinet and in particular Premier Schreyer, Mr. Cherniack and Mr. Green. The motivations of the government were in part ideological (Cherniak and Green both had been members of the first Metro Council and were personally convinced of the benefits of unification) and in part political.

The motivations of the area municipalities were quite simple – their very existence was at stake and Hell hath no fury like a politician about to lose his job. The motivations of the Liberals and Conservatives were political: the backbones of these two parties were suburban representatives and rural strength. Neither of these groups were much in favour of Unicity. Each hoped to make gains in the suburbs by opposing Bill 36 and in the case of the Liberals this meant reversing previous party policy which had favoured amalgamation.

Strategies/Results

The battle over Bill 36 was fought in three main areas: the press and the initial public meetings, the legislature, and finally the law amendments committee. In each of the locales the opposing groups were attempting to do different things.

One could discern various stages of the campaign. For the first month or so the government and potential opponents made their preliminary moves. Rather than present a bill on the subject of urban reform, the government published a White Paper which enabled them to present their ideas while not becoming too firmly attacked if the political temperature became heated. The mayors of the area municipalities met informally, compared notes, and then announced their opposition at the formal meeting of January 21. The White Paper stage of the conflict continued until the end of April when the government brought down the bill which contained the White Paper proposals. This was the Key period in the history of Bill 36, when Unicity could have been defeated. The Bill-36 stage of the conflict included the debate in the legislature and the attempts various groups to change specifics of the act.

The strategy of the government was to keep Unicity from becoming a "live" political issue. There were elements in the White Paper which could trigger off an emotional battle and at all costs the Government wanted to avoid a repetition of the auto insurance debate. The government adopted the tactic of "sweet reasonableness" where it was willing to change non-essentials as long as the main outlines remained firm. To avoid the charge of being dictatorial, it set up a series of public meetings where cabinet ministers appeared receptive to change. The Taraska Commission was appointed to review the ward boundaries, and the French language was made an official language to appease the citizens of St. Boniface. The government bought off a potential source of opposition when they guaranteed that all municipal employees would retain their existing salaries under Unicity. At the last moment when Bill 36 was safe, they also felt compelled to bow to the Mayor of Winnipeg. As in the case of the municipal employees, the future opposition of the mayor was neutralized by giving him what he wanted most. The strategy of the area municipalities was opposite to the government's: they needed to transform Unicity into an intensive issue with wide scope which would attract major currents of opposition. Because of the fight in Cabinet over the community committees, it was felt that the government, as a whole, was not as strongly committed to Unicity as it had been to other issues. If enough public opposition could be generated, the government might retreat. Opponents to Unicity made strong attacks in the papers, the local councils put out propaganda and aided citizen groups to form, but the issue never jelled. Unlike Stephen Juba, the suburban mayors did not have enough polttical resources to constitute a real obstacle to the government.

Conclusion

Bill 36, then, is an example of an urban policy innovation. It was born in response to difficult problems in the environment, it contained a novel approach to the solution of these problems, and its adoption was the result of a major political confrontation.

(Editor's note – The final paper to be known as The Future City Part II, will be available by March 31, 1972.)

IUS DOCUMENTS

REFORM OF ENVIRONMENTAL ADMINISTRATION

by - Professor Lloyd Axworthy
Director , Institute of Urban Studies

-- prepared for the Workshop on Canadian Law and the Environment at Banff, Alberta, March 1972.

TRAINING MANUAL IN THE USE OF VTR EQUIPMENT

- prepared by the staff of the IUS as part of an OPPORTUNITY FOR YOUTH PROGRAM in the summer of 1971.

COMMUNITY TV GUIDE - an introduction to community programming, and to the potential of cable systems. This is available in a sixteen page tabloid newspaper format.

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