

Chapter 2

Theorizing Governance

Joyeeta Gupta, Hebe Verrest, and Rivke Jaffe

Abstract This chapter presents an overview of governance theories and discusses the emergence of governance as an analytical and a normative tool. It reviews theories that conceptualize the relations between different governance actors, including debates on interactive and hybrid governance, and presents different perspectives on the spatial dimensions of governance incorporating theories of multi-scalar governance. Specifically, the chapter focuses on how these debates on governance apply to the urban level and emphasizes what a geographical perspective might add to existing governance discussions. This chapter notes a number of contemporary conceptions of the city that operate as overarching goals of urban governance, including ideas of ‘just’, ‘smart’ and ‘sustainable’ cities.

Keywords Governance • Good governance • Interactive governance • Hybrid governance • Multi scalar governance

2.1 Introduction

The introductory chapter discussed how the multiple dimensions of globalization have transformed the geographies of urban governance in nine ways (see Sect. 1.2) and briefly introduced the concept of governance (see Sect. 1.4). Over the last few decades, theories on government and governance have developed along multiple, discipline-specific trajectories and in a non-cumulative manner meaning that they do not build on other theories of governance (Kersbergen and Waarden 2001), leading to considerable confusion in the field. As a concept that bridges a variety of disciplines, governance means different things to different scholars and is employed within different theoretical traditions. Researchers drawing on an (international) law perspective, for instance, emphasize legality, accountability and the rule of law; sovereignty would also play a role. Those working from an international relations or

J. Gupta (✉) • H. Verrest • R. Jaffe
Department of Human Geography, Planning and International Development Studies,
Amsterdam Institute for Social Science Research (AISSR), University of Amsterdam,
P.O. Box 15629, 1001 NC Amsterdam, The Netherlands
e-mail: j.gupta@uva.nl; h.j.l.m.verrest@uva.nl; r.jaffe@uva.nl

political science perspective tend to focus on issues of participation, legitimacy, equity and relationality (Biermann et al. 2010), while economists generally highlight efficiency, effectiveness and financial viability. Anthropologists might emphasize contextuality and hybridity (Jaffe 2013; Maskovsky and Brash 2014). Approaches drawing on a more geographical perspective, as this book does, tend to emphasize place, space (including its relationality), nodes and networks, scale and human-environment interactions (Sparke 2006; Prince 2012) (see Sect. 1.3).

Beyond this diversity of approaches within theoretical debates, governance has also become an important concept in more policy-oriented debates; it has emerged simultaneously as an analytical and a normative tool. Governance can refer to actors and networks (the underlying powers, the relationships); the process, architecture and structure of governance (formal and informal norms and rules); and the quality of governance (e.g. ‘good governance’ includes elements such as rule of law, legitimacy, equity and effectiveness) (Levi-Faur 2012a). It is against this background that this chapter presents an overview of the contemporary field of governance studies. It discusses the emergence of governance as an analytical tool (see Sect. 2.2); trends in more normative debates surrounding governance (see Sect. 2.3); theories that conceptualize the relations between different governance actors (see Sect. 2.4), the spatiality of governance (see Sect. 2.5) and ends with a reflection on how our understandings of governance matter in the urban context (see Sect. 2.6). These sections pay specific attention to the ways in which these debates play out at the urban level, noting the role of different conceptions of cities such as ‘the just city’, ‘the global city’, and ‘the smart city’. As argued in Chap. 1, an implicit starting point, with normative implications, is the focus on sustainable and inclusive development of cities (see Sect. 1.5).

2.2 Governance as an Analytical Tool

The theoretical emphasis on governance can be seen in part as a response to more rigid or reified understandings of political rule. Rather than focusing primarily on the actor or entity that governs (in earlier theories usually – the government), the analytical concept of governance focuses on the process of ruling and managing territories and populations. Government includes “the formal institutions of the state that perform the action of governing based on their monopoly of legitimate coercive power within a demarcated territory” (Stoker 1998: 17), while governance is “the sum of the many ways individuals and institutions, public and private, manage their common affairs. It is a continuing process through which conflicting or diverse interests may be accommodated and cooperative action may be taken” (Commission on Global Governance 1995: 2). While this is a relatively power-neutral, consensus-oriented definition, governance is a highly political process (Beall and Fox 2009; Torfing et al. 2012) – a dimension more explicitly recognized in the European Commission’s (EC 2003: 2) definition of governance as “the rules,

processes, and behaviour by which interests are articulated, resources are managed, and power is exercised in society”.

An analytical focus on governance rather than on government allows for, first, a more nuanced understanding of practices rather than people, organizations or nation-states – it draws our attention to the how in addition to the who of governance. Second, the concept of governance emphasizes that both state and non-state actors can play a role in shaping the rules and interactions needed to manage society – the process of governing tends to involve multiple governance actors in addition to the state. These interdependent actors and networks can range from corporations and local civil society groups to transnational social movements. In this regard, we might distinguish between two extremes in forms of governance, one more state-centred and one more network-based (Peters and Pierre 1998). Third, governance is a process that takes place across a range of spaces: practices of governance, which often involve multiple interacting governance actors, take place at multiple, interlinked levels of a variety of scales (cf. Ostrom 2009).

Moving away, then, from theories of government that assume the centralized, hierarchical nation-state to always be the analytical starting point, governance studies involve “an interdisciplinary research agenda on order and disorder, efficiency and legitimacy all in the context of the hybridization of modes of control that allow the production of fragmented and multi-dimensional order, *within* the state, *by* the state, *without* the state and *beyond* the state” (Levi-Faur 2012b: 3). While the decentering of the state in (urban) governance is often theorized as resulting from neoliberalism, as outlined in Sect. 2.3, Parnell and Robinson (2012) point out that this does not always need to be the most important factor. In the global South, distinct patterns of state formation and competing interests may be more important factors in shaping hybrid or fragmented governance arrangements, in which states may never have been the main actors.

2.3 Normative Uses of Governance

In addition to being used as an analytical tool (see Sect. 2.2) to understand how, by whom and at what scales, territories, populations and resources are governed, governance is often used as a normative tool (Kooiman 2005). Two main trends can be identified in this regard: first, a neoliberal move away from state-centric models of governance towards network-based models; and second, models of good governance that emphasize democratic ideals such as transparency and participation (see Table 2.1). In practice, these two models are often interconnected, if sometimes in contradictory ways. On the one hand, a neoliberal move towards greater involvement of non-state actors is often presented as more democratic, and good governance models’ emphasis on efficiency often echoes neoliberalism’s depoliticizing perspective. On the other hand, good governance models often explicitly recognize the importance of the state and the need to strengthen its capacity, a tendency that conflicts with neoliberal trends.

2.3.1 *Neoliberal Models of Governance*

The first normative use of governance discussed here relates to the neoliberal policies that have gained global prominence during the past few decades. Here, the normative emphasis has been on moving away from state-centric models of governance (sometimes called ‘big government’) towards a lean state and what in the UK has been called ‘big society’. This shift has involved policies that promote deregulation and privatization, as neoliberal models generally present the market as the most appropriate or efficient institutional framework for allocating goods and services in society. Some proponents of the neoliberal model argue for recognizing the rising importance of corporations as governance actors in their own right. They encourage moving away from state-centric models of governance towards decentralized and diffuse decision-making and resource allocation. Proponents also argue that this form of governance, which involves close relations between commercial and other social actors (with converging or diverging interests), is non-hierarchical, flexible, unstructured, often informal and has low levels of bureaucracy (Krahmann 2003).

Such models have informed policies promoting the privatization of public goods (e.g. water, security, electricity or public transportation), so-called self-governance (e.g. corporate social responsibility), public-private partnerships (e.g. Kofi Annan’s Global Compact and many infrastructural projects) and the decentralization of authority to the lowest appropriate governance level, sometimes also referred to as the principle of subsidiarity. Such decentralization policies initially focused on transferring authority to lower levels of government; only later was decentralization also seen as a way to transfer authority to non-state actors at the urban or local level.

These multi-nodal or multi-actor models have become well-known governance practices in cities in the global South and the global North. A widely popular example of the neoliberal governance model at the urban level has been the promotion of business improvement districts (BIDs) that involve corporate actors in the revitalization of urban commercial areas. Such policies create special urban zones in which private actors fund public services; they often involve the application of special by-laws and the establishment of public-private partnerships, with businesses taking on a central role in financing and implementation. Critics argue that BIDs involve a market-driven, consumer-oriented and externally oriented form of urban development, which sanitizes public spaces by excluding poorer urban residents in order to attain the status of world-class cities (e.g. MirafTAB 2007).

Another example of urban policies relating to the neoliberal model of governance is the privatization of the provision of public goods and services. Proponents of the neoliberal model argue that privatization improves both the efficiency and the quality of service delivery. Water provision is one domain that has been privatized in many cities in the global North and South. In many cases especially in the South, efficiency gains and service delivery improvement have in fact been limited. In fact, privatization is often associated with reduced quality of service delivery, in particular to low-income groups. Exclusion and inequality may increase; experiences with the privatization of (potable) water delivery show that market parties do not mitigate existing inequalities in water distribution systems and may even further exclude low-income groups by increasing water prices (see e.g. Bakker 2010).

A final example focuses on the impacts of privatization on urban development and specifically the de facto privatization of urban planning. Allowing private actors to play a greater role in urban planning reduces the capacities of municipal authorities to effectively monitor urban development and enforce rules and regulations. In rapidly expanding small cities in Central America, municipal authorities basically ‘watch the city grow’ on Google Earth, incapable of influencing unsustainable processes of urban sprawl, much less providing the necessary housing and infrastructure for low-income groups. As real estate developers become more prominent actors than government planners, urban development becomes skewed towards the construction of new middle-class neighbourhoods on the outskirts of the existing city. This development has a negative effect on urban sustainability, reproducing social inequalities and promoting urban sprawl, deforestation and overexploitation of water resources (Klaufus 2010).

Neoliberal governance has arguably led to increased urban exclusion and inequality where economic growth has been favoured over wider social goals and capital has been used accordingly. These processes have invoked the rise of counter-ideas and visions of urban futures framed around understandings of justice, encapsulated in concepts such as the ‘just city’ (Fainstein 2010, cf. Soja 2009) or the ‘right to the city’ (Lefebvre 1968; Harvey 2008). These approaches emphasize that justice and inclusion should be the starting point and end point of urban governance processes. The ‘just city’ targets urban planners and policymakers, incorporating diversity, democracy and equity as primary concerns and emphasizing that urban programmes should be more just, both in the process of their formulation and in their effects (Fainstein 2010). The ‘right to the city’ involves not only the right to access but the right to transform the city and is a common rather than an individual right as it “inevitably depends upon the exercise of a collective power to reshape the processes of urbanization” (Harvey 2008: 23).

2.3.2 *Good Governance*

The second trend in normative uses of governance connects more directly to issues of democracy, even as it incorporates many neoliberal tenets. In contrast to the neoliberal model, however, good governance almost always presents the state as not only a key player but also the central hub of governance arrangements. While good governance models do emphasize the inclusion of non-state actors in governance, the focus is on involving these stakeholders in processes of rule formation, procedural and substantive decision-making, resource allocation and service delivery. Where neoliberal models tend to emphasize corporate involvement, good governance models focus more on the participation of citizens and civil society organizations. Associated debates on deepening democracy have included a spate of discussions on how stakeholders could be engaged along, for example, a ladder of stakeholder participation (Arnstein 1969), that ranges from more consultative to more empowering forms of participation (see Chap. 7). However, discussion may

Table 2.1 Elements of good governance (Authors, based on Ginther and de Waart 1995; UNDP 1997; Woods 1999; Weiss 2000)

Elements	Explanation	Challenges
Participation	All stakeholders and relevant actors can participate in decision-making	Full participation is rarely feasible, for practical and political reasons
Accountability	All decisions are based on specific grounds and decision-makers can be held accountable	Decision-making is diffuse in governance, making accountability difficult
	Includes upward accountability to superiors and downward accountability to electorates, citizens, investors and consumers	
Transparency	All decisions, underlying arguments and outcomes are accessible to all	Practical and political challenges to providing and dealing with full transparency at all times to all actors
Equity	Equity of decision-making refers to fair processes and procedures; substantive equity refers to the fairness of outcomes	Fair process may not lead to fair outcomes
Efficiency	Produces results by optimizing inputs, using the least resources required in decision-making and implementation	Efficient processes may legitimize non-democratic governance
Effectiveness	Effective governance achieves its goals	Effective governance may legitimize non-democratic regimes
Responsiveness	Governance responds quickly to changing circumstances (including social, economic and ecological challenges) and knowledge	Responsiveness may be captive to the politics of governance
Rule of law	Procedural rule of law emphasizes law over arbitrary power and equality before the law of all	Procedural rules may legitimize poor laws
	It is predictable, general, non-retroactive, clear, stable, certain and consistently applied	
	Substantive rule of law also looks at equity issues	

not always be necessary and may not always lead to easy solutions as embodied in the split ladder of stakeholder participation (Hurlbert and Gupta 2015).

The concept of good governance itself was developed in the 1980s, primarily to guide donors in development aid (Doornbos 2001: 93). It has been used both as a condition for aid and a development goal in its own right. Key terms in definitions of good governance include participation, accountability, transparency, equity, efficiency, effectiveness, responsiveness and rule of law (e.g. Ginther and de Waart 1995; UNDP 1997; Woods 1999; Weiss 2000). Obviously, each of these terms itself is ‘colossal’ and involves a specific research agenda (Botchway 2001) – each is itself used both descriptively and normatively. Table 2.1

includes brief explanations of these main elements within good governance models and lists challenges to realizing them.

At the urban level, this normative model has been articulated through the idea of good urban governance, promoted by agencies such as UN Habitat. The Colombian city of Bogotá has sometimes been presented as a model city, given its rapid improvements in fiscal responsibility, provision of public services and infrastructure, public behaviour, honesty of the administration and civic pride. Rather than stemming from democratization, decentralization or neoliberal privatization, however, these changes resulted from the increased autonomy of the mayor vis-à-vis the city council, combined with a series of responsible mayors; from a technocratic rather than a democratic governance style; from mayoral continuity in policy; and an increase in resources effected by these mayors (Gilbert 2006, 2015). In short, good urban governance may depend more on best persons or policy entrepreneurs (especially mayors) than on best practices.

The use of the concept of good governance has been critiqued for being vague – there are problems both with conceptual clarity and its application. Critics have emphasized that donors embrace the concept as a magic bullet, without ever properly specifying the concept; there is no toolbox or set of instruments to ensure good governance and different aid agencies use widely varying indicators. In addition, like neoliberal models, good governance models tend to take an apolitical stance, presuming consensus and equality, in contexts where conflicts of power, vested interests and inequality between actors characterize governance processes (Jayasuriya and Hewison 2004). The often depoliticizing effects of participatory forms of good governance (Chhotray 2007) is especially problematic in areas where empowering private sector actors mean exacerbating an already weak state capacity. Finally, some critics argue that good governance functions as a neo-colonial instrument, given that it is a largely Euro-American model of governance that is used as the criterion for dispensing or withholding development aid (Gruffydd Jones 2013).

2.4 Theorizing Actors in Governance

There is a multiplicity of theoretical approaches to different governance actors and their relations to one another. While we focus explicitly here on actor-oriented approaches to governance, there are also a number of strands of system theories, including general systems or cybernetics approaches, which focus on the system of governance as a whole (Esmark 2011); institutional theory, examining how social institutions impact governance (Peters 2011) and organizational theory, which takes a macro-level deterministic approach to governance. Taking an actor-oriented approach, governance theory in general draws our attention to the role of both state and non-state actors. More recently, authors have begun to theorize the relations between these actors more precisely. While the co-presence of multiple actors

within governance arrangements is sometimes understood as fragmented or incoherent, various theories have emerged to understand how their interrelations are structured. Three concepts, elaborated in more detail below, have been especially influential in terms of theorizing the multiplicity of governance actors: interactive governance, networked governance, and hybrid governance.

2.4.1 Interactive Governance

Interactive governance is understood as “the complex process through which a plurality of social and political actors with diverging interests interact in order to formulate, promote and achieve common objectives by means of mobilizing, exchanging and deploying a range of ideas, rules and resources” (Torfing et al. 2012: 2). The emphasis in interactive governance is on the interactions between the wide range of actors involved (Kooiman et al. 2008), regardless of the outcome. Interactive governance involves, first, a grounding in complexity and process rather than in a set of unified formal institutions or frameworks; second, the formulation of common objectives by actors who seek to produce public value despite divergent interests; and third, a decentralized form of power that can combine vertical, horizontal and diagonal patterns.

Interactive governance distinguishes between quasi-markets, partnerships and networks as the three basic types of interactive governance arrangements in which different stakeholders may have agency (Torfing et al. 2012). Three different dimensions can be distinguished in the agency of governance stakeholders: images, instruments and actions. Images are the more or less explicit and systemic ideas, facts, beliefs, hypothesis and goals that guide governance. Actors have diverging soft, legal and hard instruments at stake that they can use to influence interactions and that materialize in actions deployed (Kooiman et al. 2008: 7). Given its complexity, governing interactive governance itself requires ‘meta-governance’, a reflexive, higher order of governance practices. This level supplements first-order (day-to-day governing) and second-order governance (the underlying institutions or frameworks). Power relations and power inequalities shape interactions in various ways, not only through the relations between actors in interactive governance but also when actors can exert power over interactive governance, e.g. the ability of the state to exercise power over the process (Kooiman et al. 2008).

2.4.2 Networked or Nodal Governance

Networked governance theories generally focus on the interconnectedness of multiple actors in horizontal rather than vertical decision-making structures (see Chaps. 3 and 4). Theories of networked governance are related to both the rise of the network society in the context of globalization (Castells 1996) and the popularity of neoliberal models of governance and complexity theory. They analyse the emergence of

governance through dispersed networks; the consequences of the erosion of public monopoly over public services; and the possibilities for collaborative networks of governance actors to be more effective than centralized, vertical structures in governing highly complex systems. Some authors theorize governance networks as self-organizing and based on trust (Kickert et al. 1997; Koppenjan and Klijn 2004). Others see these networks as increasing inequality, showing how the unbundling and privatization of previously public network infrastructures results in ‘splintered urbanism’ and increased inequality (Graham and Marvin 2001).

The clustering of a network of public and private actors around the governance of specific domains has also been termed nodal governance (Shearing and Wood 2003). Rather than being organized around static governance entities, nodal governance emerges in the form of networks focused specifically on increasingly complex public domains or social problems, such as sustainability or crime (Crawford 2006). At the urban level, networked governance has been evident in policies that promote local meta-governance arrangements (Geddes 2006). In addition, a specific domain around which it has crystalized most clearly has been urban policing, as the police increasingly collaborate with private security communities and voluntary neighbourhood watches in the governance of security (Hönke 2013).

2.4.3 Hybrid Governance

More recently, a number of authors have begun to study hybridity in governance, studying the ways in which multiple formal and informal, state and non-state institutions become intertwined. They focus on situations where non-state actors interact with state actors in the context of public service provision and/or taxation and, through this interaction, begin to merge or form a new synthesis. This analysis of hybrid governance has emerged, first, in contexts of neoliberal restructuring and participatory approaches, studying the effects of marketization, decentralization, outsourcing and the increasing transfer of responsibilities to citizens. This is evident for instance in the field of environmental governance, where co-management, public-private partnerships and social-private partnerships have all been characterized as forms of hybrid governance (Lemos and Agrawal 2006; O’Reilly and Dhanju 2012). A second line of analysis has developed out of conflict studies. Drawing from African cases in particular, various authors sought to move away from normative notions of good governance and failed states (i.e. states where governments do not function at all). Focusing instead on public-private governance arrangements that actually worked on the ground, they began to identify hybrid political orders (Boege et al. 2008) or twilight institutions (Lund 2006). Here authors such as Meagher (2012) have sought to distinguish between constructive and corrosive forms of non-state order that become entangled with the state.

The focus on hybrid governance, especially in development studies, has been characterized as entailing a shift from normative good governance to pragmatic arrangements that actually work (or good enough governance). These discussions have highlighted the intertwining of formal state institutions with informal,

traditional, customary institutions in the global South (and mainly Africa). Critics argue that the current use of the concept tends to ignore the role of corporations, international NGOs and foreign governments, all of which also intertwine with national governments. Furthermore, most contemporary governance systems – including those in the global North – can be seen as hybrid, incorporating elements of multiple institutions and actors. In addition, critics emphasize that hybridity is not the same as co-existence and/or competition; in many cases, the different governance actors or institutions remain distinct rather than actually merging, and it would consequently be better to speak of institutional multiplicity rather than institutional hybridity (Goodfellow and Lindemann 2013).

2.5 Theorizing Spatialities of Governance

Various geographically oriented authors have pointed to reconfigurations in the spatiality of governance, analysing issues of place, space, scale and human-environment interactions (see Sect. 1.4). This section discusses three different strands of theorizing in this regard. First, we focus on the scale of governance, which has shifted dramatically in recent decades, devolving from the national level to subnational levels, such as the urban or community level and ‘scaling up’ towards the transnational or global level. Second, we note work on the reconfigurations of space and place in governance through global networks of similar governance actors in different spatial locations, such as inter-urban networks. In relation to such networks, we focus on theories of policy mobilities, which analyse the global circulation of governance models. A third and final subsection addresses human-environment interactions, discussing theories of ecosystem governance, which make explicit the extent to which socio-political governance processes must also incorporate attention to ecological factors.

2.5.1 *Multi-level Governance*

As the actors and fora of governance change, this is accompanied by shifts in the spatial direction of governance: horizontally towards other social actors, upwards towards the supranational and downwards towards the sub-national level, and diagonally zigzagging between actors and scales (Torfing et al. 2012). This points our attention to the relationship between governance and scales, with the latter understood as those arenas “where sociospatial power relations are contested and compromises are negotiated and regulated” (Swyngedouw 1997: 143). New scales emerge from shifting power relations between social forces in ways that are not pre-determined. Brenner’s (2004) work on shifts in the scale of governance focuses on changes in processes of capital accumulation and broader processes of neoliberal globalization, and how these result in the reconfiguration and rescaling of forms of territorial organization such as cities and states. His work on state rescaling, in

which governance processes shift from the national scale towards other socio-spatial arenas, underlines the emergence of the urban as a central level of governance. However, our book shows that while the urban is important, its governance is embedded in multiple layers of governance.

This privileging of the urban level has been associated with the rise of entrepreneurialism as a mode of urban governance (Harvey 1989; see Chap. 3). This mode involves municipal authorities acting more like corporations – emphasizing efficiency, competitiveness and risk-taking – and is associated with inter-urban competition, as city governments compete nationally and globally with other cities for investors, tourists and wealthy residents. When successful, this strategy provides local authorities and other governance actors with considerable power vis-à-vis regional or national government. However, the shift towards the urban level is by no means universal, as many municipal governments have limited autonomy in relation to higher levels of government, due to a limited tax base and/or tax powers. In strongly vertical governance arrangements, local governance remains firmly nested within or subordinate to governance arrangements at higher political levels; local actors must cope with interference from other levels and also depend on them for technical and financial resources. Especially in the context of cities in the global South, this means that the scope of local authorities to shape urban economic development and deliver urban services independently of the national government remains restricted (Stren 2001; Ghosh et al. 2009).

In certain cases, social actors may be able to address different scales and levels of governance to suit their political ends, employing strategies of scaling up or scaling down (i.e. pushing issues to other levels of governance; see also Chap. 3). This may involve appealing to global governance mechanisms to put pressure on local or national actors (Keck and Sikkink 1998) or engaging with neighbourhood-level actors to ensure local ownership and thus commitment to addressing a specific problem. Internal interests often determine whether external intervention is needed, wanted or resisted, while strategic, extraterritorial reasons may also lead actors to globalize or localize an issue. Many local problems are caused by a variety of drivers that operate at multiple levels of governance, especially in the context of a globalizing world (Gupta and Pahl-Wostl 2013). Many social-economic challenges, then require coherent strategies that are used and developed by multiple actors at multiple levels of governance, with each strategy targeted towards specific ends.

2.5.2 Inter-local Governance Networks and Policy Mobilities

While networked governance (see Sect. 2.4.2 and Chap. 4) refers to networks of distinct (state, corporate and voluntary) governance actors, another important spatial phenomenon is governance through networks of similar governance actors – such as municipal governments – across different locations. This type of inter-local governance networks have been identified primarily at the urban level, for instance in European transnational municipal city networks focused on climate protection (Kern and Bulkeley 2009). Other inter-local examples include networks of mayors,

such as the UN's Compact of Mayors, and the Cities Alliance, a global network aimed at urban poverty reduction that connects local authorities but also includes NGOs. While such interurban networks – similar to other forms of networked governance – are often lauded for their flexible, collaborative nature, Leitner and Sheppard (2002) emphasize that they demonstrate internal power hierarchies, given that they emerge out of pre-existing processes of uneven development and hierarchical state structures (see Chap. 3). However, they found that these networks can also function as catalysts of resistance to neoliberalization.

These more or less formal governance networks are typical of trans-local networks that connect cities and shape urban governance outcomes. In addition, less formal circuits of policy mobility connect and transform cities through the circulation of urban policies. Popular examples of urban policy that have become globally mobile include the previously mentioned BIDs, or urban branding strategies or urban security policies (Cook 2008; McCann and Ward 2011). Those policies, which most likely will become globally mobile, tend to originate in a select number of cities in the global North, such as New York or Vancouver. This tendency stems in part from a belief that only certain cities are capable of producing the type of innovative policies that can be disseminated around the world. This spatial elitism (Blaut 1993 in McCann 2011) entails the risk of neglecting innovative policies produced in other places. In addition, it involves an outdated view of policy transfer that sees successful urban policies or best practices as universally applicable and assumes that they can be transposed to other cities, regardless of local specificities. The uncritical transfer of city models from the global North to the global South also evidences the neo-colonial character of existing circuits of urban knowledge production (Vainer 2014, cf. Roy 2009).

When mobile urban policies entail persuasive visions of the urban future, they can have a strong governmental effect on the cities where they are adopted. This is perhaps clearest in the case of the global city, a universal model of urban development that has been the source of countless city rankings and that has been employed in a broad variety of contexts, often with highly exclusionary effects. Robinson (2006) argues that this classifying and labelling of cities is reductionist and creates unreachable aspirations. Instead, she calls for an emphasis on the 'ordinary city', which exists everywhere – each city being a unique assemblage of people and (transformative) processes. 'Ordinary cities' are affected by global interactions and flows; these cities are diverse and creative, and each city can learn from others. She argues that there should be no common goal for cities to work towards; each will have its own future and distinctiveness.

2.5.3 Ecosystems Approaches

Beyond scale and inter-local networks and mobilities, another group of spatially oriented approaches centres on the relations between societies and ecosystems, embedding governance processes more directly in their natural environment. These

approaches point to the need for governance to take ecosystemic limits into account, to integrate social, economic and ecological aspects, and to ensure that governance actors are aware of, and proactive towards, the uncertainty of future developments. Such approaches include the concepts of governance of the commons, earth system governance, and adaptive governance.

The governance of the commons can be traced back to Hardin's (1968) tragedy of the commons, which refers to the idea that rational economic actors will inevitably overexploit common resources, as each individual seeks to maximize his/her own advantage at the cost of collective solutions. While Hardin originally used the example of collective grazing grounds to illustrate the commons, this perspective has also been applied to natural or human-made common pool resources (CPRs) – such as fisheries, groundwater or transport systems – from which potential users cannot be excluded, but one person's use means less for another. Hardin's pessimistic perspective has been countered empirically in studies that point to forms of governance, and relations between rules, rulers and the ruled in particular, that ensure collective action for the common good (Ostrom 1990).

Earth system governance refers to “the interrelated and increasingly integrated system of formal and informal rules, rule-making systems, and actor-networks at all levels of human society (from local to global) that are set up to steer societies towards preventing, mitigating, and adapting to global and local environmental change and, in particular, earth system transformation, within the normative context of sustainable development” (Biermann et al. 2009: 4). This approach has five analytical components focusing on the architecture, agents, adaptiveness, and accountability of governance and the way in which access to, and allocation of, resources is governed. Its cross-cutting themes are the role of power, knowledge, norms and scale. While the tools of earth system governance can be used at all levels including the urban level, its need to be embedded within other levels of governance is seen as critical in the context of the Anthropocene (see Chap. 1).

Another related approach is adaptive governance, which calls for experimentation, learning (especially double and triple loop learning) and redundancy rather than efficiency (see Folke et al. 2005; Moser and Satterthwaite 2010; see also Sect. 5.4). This approach analyses how multi-level governance can contribute to resilience to cope with the challenges of global change. It calls for flexible and experimental learning processes, cross-scale linkages and greater collaboration with stakeholders to deal with uncertain and abrupt changes. It focuses on analysing social, economic and ecological aspects of the governance of complex social-ecological systems (Füssel 2007; see also Chap. 5).

Applying ecosystems approaches to the urban level, one vision of urban futures that has been influential is that of the sustainable city. Taking into account the ecological aspects of urban development, this approach emphasizes the need to pursue a circular economy closing substance cycles and reducing cities' ecological footprint (see Chap. 5). Another more recent urban goal has been conceptualized through the idea of the smart city (see Chap. 9), which builds on the concepts of closing substance cycles and conserving resources through the use of smart grids and big data. Hajer and Dassen (2014: 11) summarise the smart city discourse as innovative

urban planning that makes use of big data to sense behaviour with a view to managing urban dynamics and fine-tuning services within cities as a ‘living lab’ to cope with life in the Anthropocene. However, they propose going beyond this discourse. They argue that, given that cities have to live within certain boundaries, a shift towards ‘smart urbanism’ is needed, guided by principles such as decoupling prosperity from resource use, a persuasive storyline about the future, strategic use of urban metabolisms, a focus on the default in infrastructure, the need for social innovation to complement other innovations, new and collaborative politics and a globally networked urbanism (see also Chaps. 1, 3, 4 and 5).

2.6 Conclusion: Governance and the Urban Context

As this chapter shows, there is a broad range of governance theories and analytical approaches, many of which link closely to normative models and practices. How we understand governance matters to outcomes in cities, as the popularity of specific models (such as the neoliberal and good governance models) demonstrate. Similarly, the conceptions of cities and urban futures – as ‘just’, ‘global’ or ‘smart’ – can have a direct impact on which stakeholders, mechanisms and technologies take on a central role in urban governance.

In addition to directing our attention to the multiplicity of public and private governance actors that shape urban life, contemporary governance theory points to the role of globalization processes as multiple drivers at local through to global levels that shape urban dynamics. As the geographies of urban governance become increasingly complex, new research and policy questions emerge: how can governance at the urban level deal with those dynamics that arise from urban-rural relationships (see Chap. 5)? Can it mitigate the city’s ecological footprint (see Chap. 5), negotiate constructively with corporate actors who settle in the city in the context of global markets (Chap. 4) and protect residents’ privacy against the God’s eye of mega data miners (see Chap. 9)? Can transnational urban network governance effectively cope with these problems (see Chap. 4)? Answering these questions involves a scope that goes beyond municipal governments and other city-based actors alone. As the various theories and concepts discussed indicate, studying the geographies of urban governance requires attending to the nestedness of urban actors and mechanisms in multiple levels of horizontal and vertical governance systems, and recognizing the interconnectedness of a vast array of actors.

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