

Book Review

Local Governance and Inter-Municipal Cooperation by Filipe Teles

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Teles, F. (2016). *Local governance and inter-municipal cooperation*. New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan. \$67.50 (hard cover), ISBN: 987-1-137-44573-5.

In the last few decades, few topics have been of more interest to public administration scholars than governance. The change of public service delivery paradigm from government to governance enables us to develop and test diverse service delivery mechanisms that are generally characterized by networking among multiple actors, public-private collaboration, and negotiation and persuasion as decision-making rules (Goldsmith & Eggers, 2004; Salamon, 2002). One of the areas where this current trend is well observed and studied is local administration. Appropriately, Teles' *Local Governance and Inter-municipal Cooperation* comes at a time when we are reviewing what we have done so far and considering what more we academics need to do in the future.

Teles points out briefly, but quite effectively, why studying local governance and inter-municipal¹ cooperation is important to contemporary public administration. He argues that “place and identity play a relevant role in public policy” (p. vii). Simply put, *local* is where we live every day with other people and where most fundamental services are provided to us, so it is an old, but fundamental, research theme. According to Teles, the relevance of studying inter-local cooperation, especially in a comparative context, appears in the diversity of institutional arrangements, cultural and administrative traditions, different societal functions, and dissimilar competencies in each case. In spite of its challenging diversity, Teles encourages scholars to pursue systematic and coherent research in this arena.

The book is comprised of three sections that address its objectives step-by-step: 1) discussing key issues related to inter-municipal cooperation through an in-depth literature review and the author's own development of the extant research (Chapters 1 to 3); 2) adding comparative lessons and implications to the literature by examining European countries (Chapters 4 and 5); and 3) identifying challenges that need to be addressed in future research (Chapter 6). As emphasized throughout the book, the underlying need for this study is the continuing trend of territorial change reform across European countries. The study of inter-municipal cooperation based on the comparative perspective is the book's biggest contribution to the literature.

Chapter 1 focuses on motivations for inter-municipal cooperation. To explain the increased use of cooperation between municipalities, Teles provides his own framework which includes four categories of drivers: a priori (nature of the problem, history of previous collaboration); intrinsic (identity and territorial context, power relations among municipalities, institutional context, organizational profile of each municipality); extrinsic (external influence and incentives); and a posteriori (expected outcomes). The combination of those four dimensions is effective and

¹ I understand *inter-municipal*, on which Teles focuses, is very similar to *inter-local* that is more commonly used in the U.S. literature although they are not identical. The reason why Teles solely focuses on municipal-municipal cooperation is not clearly explained in the book. As the basic issues are shared between these two cases, I use *inter-local* as well where I mention *local-local* cooperation in a more general context.

comprehensive for examining inter-municipal cooperation motivation. Teles also posits that while it provides efficiency gains as a major benefit, economies of scale pose a serious challenge to democratic control and accountability for participating local governments. This fundamental conflict between benefits and potential risks is repeated throughout the book, which helps the author maintain a balanced perspective when addressing inter-municipal cooperation.

In Chapter 2, Teles explains the diversity of inter-municipal cooperation arrangements. The nature of inter-municipal cooperation varies from a more voluntary and bottom-up approach to a more compulsory and top-down approach. It involves different combinations of actors comprising internal (local politicians, local bureaucracy, and other inter-municipal organizations) and external (civil society organizations, private companies, regional or central organizations, and citizens) components. There are also variations in its form among service delivery, contracts, coordination, and information sharing. In addition, different theories have been tested to study inter-municipal cooperation, including the political economy model, the network theory approach, the public choice argument, and the collective action approach. This chapter is the most theoretical part in the book and provides considerable information. Although these theoretical discussions are complex, Teles approaches each while putting the diversity of inter-municipal cooperation at the core.

Chapter 3 compares alternatives that municipalities can choose to increase the efficiency and scale of economy of local governance. While it is his primary focus, Teles does not simply praise inter-municipal cooperation, but balances his approach with discussion of other alternatives of consolidation and meso-governance arrangements. Teles suggests local governments can also work with upper level units such as national government and regional organizations when *small* is not beautiful. Another approach is corporatization, which takes advantage of market mechanisms in local service provision. From this chapter we learn there are multiple alternatives in local and regional governance, and finding the most relevant one is a challenging goal for local governments.² It would be beneficial, however, if the author examined more deeply the influence of regional organizations on inter-local cooperation in the European context. Since regional organizations may significantly influence voluntary inter-local cooperation efforts (Kwon, Feiock, & Bae, 2014; LeRoux, Brandenburger, & Pandey, 2010), a comparative study including European and U.S. regional organizations would be interesting.

Chapters 4 and 5 analyze European local governance, focusing on strategies that local governments have taken for successful territorial reforms (e.g., balancing economy of scale and democracy). In Chapter 4, Teles explains that a variety of cooperative arrangements have been used among European countries in conjunction with the countries' different territorial reform approaches. For example, while Denmark prefers amalgamation, this approach is not welcomed in Portugal. Chapter 4 is a brief summary based on an extensive review of literature that includes key characteristics of many European countries. In Chapter 5, Teles strongly suggests the need to consider the unique political contexts of each country when studying its territorial reform approaches. He specifically focuses on Portugal. He explains the political contexts of Portugal and examines the current status and relevance of each of the major approaches within that political system. An interesting challenge to choosing between consolidation and decentralized inter-municipal cooperation in Portugal is that, while the national government maintains strong political power, citizens have a culture of valuing local identity. Both of these chapters demonstrate that diversity in approaches to territorial reform among European countries means that local governance and inter-local cooperation are complex and challenging research themes that will be better understood when more comparative studies are done.

² While numerous alternatives are available, especially in the U.S. context (i.e., Walker, 1987), I understand these alternatives addressed in this chapter are the major focus of this book.

In the last chapter (Chapter 6), Teles discusses questions that need to be addressed in future studies. One fundamental question is how to improve the governance capacity of inter-municipal cooperation in a multi-level policy context. Each of three key domains (efficiency, democracy, and stability) generates specific questions. Teles argues that high levels of diversity and complexity in local governance and inter-local cooperation across countries, especially those caused by the different political systems, continue to increase the demand for more empirically evidence-based and more comparative studies. We need to bear his recommendations for future studies in mind.

Overall, the book accomplishes its aforementioned objectives by helping readers understand the academic and practical meanings of inter-local cooperation in local governance, the variation in the use of inter-local cooperation across countries (particularly in Europe), and the areas that we need to elaborate on in the future. Through these efforts, Teles shows that we have achieved much in the study of local governance and inter-local cooperation, but this field is so dynamic that more rigorous and comparative research should be added continuously.

An extended volume could include more detailed explanations of the issues covered in the text; however, it was not the author's intention to publish a textbook-type thick book. In spite of this, the current version has sufficient advantages, especially because it includes major critical issues in inter-local cooperation and expands non-U.S. contexts. This book will help practitioners and students and scholars of local governance and city management understand the dynamics in this field. This would also be a useful textbook for graduate seminar classes on local and metropolitan governance.

Disclosure Statement

The author(s) declare that there are no conflicts of interest that relate to the research, authorship, or publication of this article.

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