

SUMMARY

This study highlights the increasing number of actors involved in public action and the growing complexity of an interaction in which municipalities only play a very minor role, as is witnessed by the discredit attached to local elective functions and the gloom and apathy generated by local elections. In Morocco, the declaration of the "oneness of the city" went hand and hand with an extraordinarily fragmentation of the decision-making process and procedures. In Lebanon, however, as a result of ossified government structures, the municipal elections of 1998 were hotly contested and a good level of participation was achieved. Local elections are frequently dominated by the ideas of leading citizens and employers, but ultimately it is sectarian ideas and a central location which triumph. In the face of forced urban planning such as in Ouagadougou, citizens turn to religious actors and the traditional chiefs rather than local government. Nevertheless, occasionally, as in Beirut, the municipality is run by a strong political party and takes a leading role in public action. In Senegal, the repolitization of urban society after 1996 is based on an associative sector which acts as a broker and a training ground for future elites while also challenging the established authority. Here and there new spaces of public debate are being opened, and at the same time, for the first time in Africa, forms of political communication are developing (the role of the free media, in particular community radio stations, is very important here).

Last, we have tried to make comparisons with regard to the role of international donors in the transfer of models. International aid influences public decisions to varying degrees in different countries, but reforms that are more or less imposed by central government express the creation of dependency. The countries involved are urged to standardize the management of public business, with the "good governance" package imposing the marketization of local powers. The donors make a selection among local authorities, favouring those with sufficient resources and which are likely to adopt easily the proposed ideas about urban management. The urban orders that are implemented when decentralization is implemented are chosen on the basis of both imported and local historical models. In Lebanon and Palestine donors conform with community and regional equilibria. In Senegal, municipalization is modifying the links between central authority and local political networks. Will international donors be content to merely initiate an inflation of discourse without altering the division of power? Aid will certainly play a role in the emergence of pressure groups and political entrepreneurs, but it will ultimately strengthen the existing social status quo by regulating the post-adjustment society very thoroughly while maintaining its elites in place. The influence of imported models, amplified by experts, is no less powerful, to the extent that in countries receiving aid the systems of actors tend to become standardized in accordance with the expectations of their international partners.