BOOK REVIEW

The Institutional Position of Seaports: An International Comparison. By Henrik Stevens (Kluwer Academic Publishers, Dordrecht-Boston-London, 1999), pp. 353, ISBN 0-7923-5979-8

This book is the translation from Dutch into English of a Ph.D. Thesis. The author is interested in how the shift from public to private ownership, i.e. privatisation, changes the assignment of responsibility and accountability within organisations in general, and within port authorities in particular. In his own words: *'the theoretical objective is to provide an insight into the division of control in a number of State-market relationships. By focusing on the question of control, we can examine whether the reorganised governmental task or agency is able to meet the required expectations'* (p.3). In this context, 'control' means, to the author, *'...the way in which accountability is regulated'*.

The writer approaches his task by developing a theoretical framework for public administration which is then applied to port administration in case studies of eleven international ports, viz., Rotterdam, Antwerp, Hamburg, New York, Seattle, Los Angeles, Vancouver, Kobe, Hong Kong, Singapore, and Durban.

The theoretical part is covered in the first three chapters (53 pages), which are, in my view, not easily accessible to the non-academic reader. A comprehensive understanding of the material requires a great deal of familiarity with the literature in public administration, organisation theory, and decision-making processes. Boiled down to their essence, these three chapters are an addition to the theories we have for organisational decision making for, in this case, large technological projects such as port expansion and development which require extensive planning, take long time to implement and, because of rapid technological change, are apt to have unforeseen consequences of any magnitude. How are these processes regulated, or controlled – i.e., how is accountability assessed? For those interested in these issues, the first three chapters should be rewarding reading (as would chapter 12, see next paragraph).

Given the above, the author questions, in the last chapter (12) whether ports can learn from experience, and each other, so as to change administrative and organisational structures to better meet established goals. The writer tries to answer this question through a comparative analysis of the case studies, but no unequivocal answer emerges.

The intervening eight chapters (4 – 11), containing the case studies, constitute the bulk of the book. The cases are both descriptive and analytical. While they are intended to facilitate a comparative analysis, each case can be read as a unit independent of the others and the theoretical frame. Each case, while focusing on the position of the port authority in the overall administrative system, contains a wealth of information on all aspects of the port's functioning. This material is easily accessible to the interested layman and is, in my view, the most valuable part of the book. The cases are easy and interesting reading.

On balance, the book is, in parts, difficult to read for the non-academician, but, for those seriously interested in maritime matters, this should be a worthwhile addition to the library.

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