

TOPICS IN URBAN MANAGEMENT

Spring 2016

DESCRIPTION OF LECTURES

How To Manage Millions: Set Boundaries, Relinquish Control

Many good things can happen when millions of people come together in cities, but so can many bad things. All successful societies have found ways to set boundaries that limit the bad outcomes and then to relinquish control so that within these boundaries, individuals are free to discover and innovate. As will discuss in more detail later in the semester, one type of boundary is the one that separates the public space (roads, sidewalks, and parks) that the government controls from the plots that individuals control. Permits for fishing establish a more abstract type of boundary. An even subtler one prevents a restaurant from selling unsafe food. Governments can use “good measurement, and small stakes” to create incentives for people to respect such boundaries. As a government gets better at defining boundaries and enforcing them, it can relinquish more control. It evolves toward a “strong but narrow state.”

Crime and Punishment / Police Management

Crime is among the important sustaining causes of concentrated poverty. Inadequate law enforcement and hyperactive punishment systems can both create terrible outcomes, and the heaviest burden tends to fall on people in high-crime neighborhoods, who are already disproportionately disadvantaged. The explosion in serious crime, including homicide, starting in the early 1960s, followed by the development of mass incarceration starting in the 1980s, illustrates both sides of the problem. These important concepts will be addressed through an examination of changes in policing in New York City and the current challenges facing the New York Police Department.

Dynamics of Deterrence

Every law and regulation creates the problem of how to secure the compliance of the people whose behavior the law or regulation tries to manage. One approach is to impose penalties for non-compliance. But the capacity to punish is always limited by the resources available, and in many circumstances there are more violations than there is capacity to punish them. This creates a dynamic-control problem: deciding how much effort, and what kind of effort, to put into detection and punishment, and deciding

also the form and severity of the punishments to be inflicted. Most actual institutions manage that problem rather badly, inflicting too much of the wrong kind of punishment, and doing so in a way that fails to secure compliance. This lecture will present principles that can guide the design of more nearly optimal sanction regimes.

Alcohol, Tobacco, and Other Drugs

Public policies can influence drug-taking and the associated risks by limiting the supply of various drugs via taxation, regulation, and (in the extreme) prohibition, by shaping norms and attitudes about drug use, and by providing help to people whose drug-taking has escaped their voluntary control. None of those policies is straightforward, and none is without costs and risks. An attractive alternative now under consideration would instead use frequent drug testing combined with swift, certain, and fair sanctioning to reduce drug-taking, reoffending, and incarceration rates among drug-involved offenders.

Urban Air Quality Management

Air quality is an important factor impacting quality of life in cities. However, even in circumstances where public demand and political will coincide in wanting to address air pollution, improving air quality in urban cities is difficult. The majority of public health and air quality improvements to date have primarily resulted from either federal regulations or external changes in our economy; neither of which is under the control of city managers. This lecture will address the scientific, economic and legal considerations for cities to take an increased role in implementing innovative policies that reduce pollution concentrations and public health burdens at the local level.

Clean Water for All

Disparity in public health between the developing vs. developed economies can be largely attributed to differences in maintaining adequate sources of clean drinking water and utilization of effective liquid waste management practices. However, water quality and water availability is not only a developing world problem. This lecture will address challenges both domestically and abroad in maintaining clean drinking water for all using specific examples, including: controlling Lead (Pb) levels in Washington D.C. drinking water, water management challenges in Central Valley, California, and lessons learned from international efforts to improve water quality in developing regions.

Climate Resiliency in Cities

Cities continue to struggle to secure an increased measure of climate resiliency even as the United States and international community make progress towards more aggressive greenhouse gas regulations and international agreements. The role of cities in assisting climate change mitigation must be weighed against spending and programs addressing climate adaptation. This lecture will discuss scientific, economic, and policy aspects involved with climate change decision-making at the local level of government.

The Urbanization Project: Humanity's Big Adventure

Human history gets interesting with the Neolithic revolution, the time roughly 10,000 years ago when several independent groups of people in disparate locations on earth developed sedentary agriculture and began work on “The Urbanization Project.” This project involved a transition from a life in mobile packs like wolves to life in nests like those of wasps, termites, and bees that can hold millions of individuals. This project is still underway, but will largely be finished in the next century. This lecture sets the stage for those that follow by looking at the big sweep of history and noting the profound, and profoundly optimistic, change in the quality of life that the urbanization project has allowed. To pull this off, humans had to learn how to cooperate in groups with thousands of members, then millions, and now billions. Once we started working together, we accomplished amazing things.

Cities as Labor Markets

The efficiency of large labor markets is the *raison d’ être* of cities. Large concentration of people are more productive and creative than small isolated communities. Cities provide citizens many amenities in addition to employment, but the quality of these amenities depends on a functioning labor market. Evolving transport systems should allow labor markets to operate while the spatial distribution of jobs and residence are changing, as observed in various large cities of the world.

Formation of Urban Spatial Structures

Cities are formed by the interaction between markets and design. Many planners tend to believe that cities would function better if they were entirely designed. In the former Soviet Union, Mao’s China and a few government built cities like Brasilia, markets had no role to play in the development of cities. In market economies, markets and local government design have both an important role to play in the development

of cities. It is important to identify the key areas in the development of cities where markets or design should prevail.

The Rise and Fall of Manhattan's Densities

Densities should neither be too high nor too low but “just right,”—that is, within a tolerable or, to use a more contemporary word, sustainable range. We discuss the changes in the population densities of the built-up areas of Manhattan and its neighborhoods from 1800 to 2010. New York City is now expecting a significant increase in population, entailing significant densification in Manhattan and elsewhere. Using the lessons learned from our study, we outline a densification program—for New York City and for other cities the world over—that could accommodate a larger population without recourse to heavy-handed land assembly for large and heavily subsidized housing projects.

Managing Urban Expansion: from Global Monitoring to Stakes in the Ground

The lecture will discuss current work at the NYU Urban Expansion Program. The primary mission of the NYU Urban Expansion Program is to lend assistance to the municipalities of rapidly growing cities in making room for their inevitable expansion. The secondary mission of the NYU Urban Expansion Program is to gain a better understanding of urban expansion the world over by monitoring a stratified global sample of 200 of these cities. We discuss the monitoring program and present some of its latest findings. We also discuss progress in country urban expansion initiatives, with an emphasis on the Ethiopia and Colombia initiatives.

Transportation Policy: Commuting and the Spatial Structure of Cities

Urban transport has two important roles in the development of cities: allowing the labor market to function and maintaining the elasticity of the land supply, indispensable for keeping housing affordable. However, as cities sizes increase and the pattern of densities evolve, transport systems have to adapt rapidly to the new spatial distribution of jobs and residence. New transport technologies have the ability to allow an increase in the size of urban labor markets, while reducing commuting time, pollution and greenhouse gases due to transport.