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## The Changing Structure of American Cities: A Study of the Diffusion of Innovation

*Using historical and numerical analysis and the five-part schema, this study finds that over the past 50 years structural modifications and adaptations by American cities have generally followed the standard S curve of the diffusion of innovation. In tests of Kaufman's and Hirshman's theories of epochs of change from representativeness to administrative efficiency, this study determines that mayor-council cities have, in a standard innovation diffusion S curve, adopted many of the key features of council-manager cities, increasing their administrative efficiency. At the same time, council-manager cities, again in an S curve, have adopted many of the key features of mayor-council cities, increasing their political responsiveness. Fewer cities are now either distinctly mayor-council or council-manager in form, and most cities are structurally less distinct, constituting a newly merged or hybrid model of local government—the type III city.*

Cities are collective institutions, both in physical and social terms. Just as people build houses and adapt and remodel them, and build roads and water systems, they also build cities as organizations and as governmental jurisdictions. Like houses and roads, the processes of building, adapting, and remodeling the institutions of local government are dynamic, responding to changing needs, circumstances, and values.

There are approximately 7,500 cities in the United States. The original organizational structure of American city government, the mayor-council model, is essentially a separation of powers structure based on the design of the federal government and state governments. Sometimes called the presidential model, the mayor-council model now includes fewer than half of American cities. A contrasting model of local government, the council-manager model, was a significant part of Progressive Era reforms. Council-manager cities are unity-of-powers structures modeled on business corporations. This model also resembles the parliamentary form of national government.

The availability, in one nation-state, of 7,500 cases of democratic local government with contrasting presiden-

tial and parliamentary forms provides an extraordinary laboratory for the study of democratic institutional structures. This laboratory is greatly aided by the availability of extensive data on American cities.<sup>1</sup> The size of this database facilitates the testing of hypotheses and the replication of findings essential to good social science. More important than the abstractions of social science, there are possible applications to democratic governments based on the findings of this research, applications that hold potential for improving the quality of governance.

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Frederickson, Johnson, and Wood have recently written *The Adopted City: Institutional Dynamics and Structural Change* (M.E. Sharpe, 2004).

## Theory

The study of the changing structural characteristics of American cities is part of a broader body of social science theory generally described as *institutionalism* or the *new institutionalism* (March and Olsen 1984; DiMaggio and Powell 1991; Lynn 1993; Rogers 1995). Individuals, families, neighborhoods, interest groups, and businesses function in the context of the city as an institution. How we function in relationship to the institutional city is determined in part by the particular governance structure of the city. In its formal manifestations, the city sets the rules of participation, exercises authority by making and carrying out the law (statutes, ordinances, or regulations), selects persons to politically represent all residents or some subset of residents, operates a permanent bureaucracy, provides services, and determines who will pay what in taxes. How the city does each of these things is determined by its structure. These structures, as a general rule, tend to conform to societal expectations of how cities should look and function (Lynn 1993, 125). The extent to which societal expectations are matched by the function of the city is the measure of its legitimacy (Stone 1987). Because societal expectations change, institutions face the challenges of responding to change. Some are highly resistant, while others are dynamic.

Patterns of institutional dynamics are captured first by theories of the diffusion of innovation taken from sociology and political science, and second, by the application of theories of eras or epochs, which account for long-term shifts from one to another dominant ideology, theories taken from public administration and political philosophy.

The Progressive movement in the first 50 years of the twentieth century spread many important organizational and policy innovations, including the council-manager form of city government, the short ballot, the secret ballot, merit systems in government, workers compensation laws, aid to the blind and deaf, and minimum wage laws. Edgar McCoy (1940) measured state policy innovations between 1869 and 1931, including old age pensions, women's suffrage, and workers compensation, and ranked them according to whether they were early or late adopters. Using maps, he found the centers of these innovations to be in New York, California, Wisconsin, and Michigan, and he traced the paths of diffusion in concentric circles from those centers. Paths of diffusion were influenced by state variations in transportation and communication capacities, wealth, and urbanization. From this grew the McCoy Innovation Index, which even now explains regional patterns of innovation diffusion.

Doubtless, the ultimate study is Everett M. Rogers's *Diffusion of Innovations* (1995). In a synthesis of thousands of studies of change, Rogers found that innovations or reforms spread in diffusions that exhibit a common pat-

tern—the S curve. At first, the adoption of change or reform is slow, with experimentation, trial and error, and the challenges of being the guinea pig. Once a few others adopt a reform successfully, there tends to be a steep climb in adoption, followed by a leveling off. When institutional change reaches the leveling-off stage, investments in the advantages associated with adopting the innovation drop sharply. Diffusions in social systems happen in surprisingly predictable ways, and the spread of structural changes among American cities is a good example of that.

Patterns of diffusion (some are more comfortable simply calling diffusion “change,” whereas those who favor a particular diffusion tend to call it “reform” or “innovation”) are explained by a series of attendant hypotheses.

1. There is an association between the presence of a perceived crisis and the propensity to adopt a change.
2. Diffusion theory accounts for the compatibility between the purposes of a change or reform and the dominant values of a social system. Because social values change, there is a diffusion of innovation by which innovations adapt to changed values.
3. Spatial proximity often accounts for a diffusion of innovation.
4. Public media are often the carriers of innovation.
5. Communities of experts and consultants are often the agents of diffusion.
6. Closely associated with the media and with diffusion change agents are changing fads and fashions.
7. The diffusion of change is often an institutional pursuit of prestige, status, and social standing.

If the S curve describes patterns of the diffusion of innovation, what explains the likely direction of innovation? Two prominent scholars have given detailed consideration to the directions of institutional change and the reason for those directions. Both use the concept of cycles or epochs of time, a concept that fits comfortably with the S curve of the diffusion of innovation.

Herbert Kaufman (1963, 339) describes the early history of American government as a reaction “against executive dominance in the colonial era.” This was followed by the design of a limited government based on checks and balances and the separation of powers that relies primarily on elected legislative leadership. “By the middle of the 19th century, however, legislative supremacy, the long ballot, and the spoils system resulted in widespread disillusionment with our political institutions” (Kaufman 1963, 339). As a consequence, there was an impetus to separate administration from politics, build merit systems, and reduce the influence of political parties. The municipal reform movement was part of this era, as was the emergence of the new academic field of public administration. But in time, there were reactions against the so-called neutral, professional, faceless bureaucrats and a search for greater

political representation and elected political leadership in the office of mayor, governor, and the presidency.

Kaufman describes the values associated with these eras or epochs, first as representativeness, second as neutral competence, and third, executive leadership. These are not just theoretical matters, as Kaufman reminds us:

This is not to say the values are pursued abstractly, as ends in themselves, or that there is universal agreement on which should be emphasized at any given time. On the contrary, different segments of the population feel differently disadvantaged by the governmental machinery in operation at any given moment, and agitate for structural changes to improve their position—i.e., to increase their influence—in the system. Discontent on the part of various groups is thus the dynamic force that motivates the quest for new forms. Some groups feel resentful because they consider themselves inadequately represented; some feel frustrated because, although they are influential in forming policy, the policy decisions seem to be dissipated by the political biases or the technical incompetence of the public bureaucracies; some feel thwarted by lack of leadership to weld the numerous parts of government into a coherent, unified team that can get things done. At different points in time, enough people (not necessarily a numerical majority) will be persuaded by one or another of these discontents to support remedial action—increased representatives, better and politically neutral bureaucracies, or stronger chief executives as the case may be. But emphasis on one remedy over a prolonged period merely accumulated the other discontents until new remedies gain enough support to be put into effect, and no totally stable solution has yet been devised. So the constant shift in emphasis goes on. (4)

The political philosopher Albert O. Hirschman (1982) found long-term cycles of change in shifting values, attitudes, and ideology. In broad terms, he describes these cycles as eras or epochs of shifting involvement between the collective pursuits of the public interest on the one hand, and the individual or group pursuit of private interests on the other hand. For example, in the United States, we now have low voter turnout, public institutions are held in low regard, and there is little trust in either public officials or public institutions. We are, Hirschman claims, in an era of private interests, following a 70-year era of public interest—the two world wars, the New Deal, and a long period of positive government. In the era of public action and positive government, there were trade-offs and costs in the form of big government, higher taxes, regulations, restrictions on individual uses of property, and very high complexity. And, we learned there were certain intractable problems such as poverty, drug abuse, and terrorism that even

positive government could not solve entirely. As the most recent era of positive government matured in the 1950s and early 1960s, the people could more easily see the public policy costs and trade-offs that had been made. And, to use Hirschman's term, the people were disappointed. The limitations and failures of public institutions were obvious—Watergate and the war in Vietnam, poverty, crime, and drug abuse. In this context, a new acceptance of private interests evolved gradually, and that new acceptance has been the dominant ideology over the last 30 years. As a consequence, public institutions downsized, contracted out, privatized, and deregulated. This is a dynamic process of institutional change that broadly reflects social change and changed contextual circumstances.

This study demonstrates that patterns of structural change in American cities resemble both Hirschman's and Kaufman's arguments about the longer-term eras or epochs of public preferences and changed circumstances. And this study finds that cities tend to change incrementally rather than changing dramatically from one institutional structure to another. This pattern of incremental structural change takes the form of the S curve found in virtually all studies of the diffusion of innovation.

## Structural Change in Municipalities

As part of the Progressive Era and the municipal reform movement, council-manager government, more than any other idea (with the possible exception of jurisdictional suburbanization), influenced the character and quality of American cities (Adrian 1955; Stillman 1974). For much of the twentieth century, council-manager city government was thought to be the new idea, the reform model. As we approach the one hundredth anniversary of council-manager government, it is no longer a new idea. The municipal reform movement, of which council-manager government was such an important part, is over. The rapid increase in the number of council-manager cities is also over. Council-manager government was designed to solve corruption, inefficiency, and management problems, and it did (Adrian 1955). Now that corruption, inefficiency, and poor management are no longer compelling problems, most reform cities with council-manager structures have turned their attention to economic development, political responsiveness, political leadership and accountability, and equity (Nalbandian 1991). Council-manager government, some argue, is a large and influential idea whose time has passed (Gurwitt 1993).

The two ordinary categories of cities are, in fact, legal distinctions. In the statutes of all 50 states, the residents of a particular area may, under certain rules and procedures, incorporate a city. In most states, these statutes provide for at least two city types, the mayor-council form and the

council-manager form. However, city residents may adopt extensive variations within one of the legal forms. Therefore, within a particular state, two cities may be legally established as mayor-council cities, yet be very different structurally. In addition, most states provide for charter cities, a legal process by which the residents of a city may custom design the particular details of a democratic structure into a draft charter and then vote to accept or reject it. For the first 50 years of the twentieth century, the two statutory categories of American cities were relatively good descriptions of distinctly different structures based on distinctly different kinds of democratic logic. Beginning in the 1950s, cities using both structures began a steady process of structural adaptation. But these cities continued to be legally categorized as mayor-council or council-manager structures, categories that often mask actual structural details.

The two dominant forms of American local government, the council-manager system and the mayor-council system, are also institutional concepts. It is rightly assumed that institutions matter, that different institutions, all else being equal, produce different results (Weaver and Rockman 1993). The structural differences between council-manager and mayor-council government have long been judged by scholars to be important (Lineberry and Fowler 1967). For example, during the municipal reform movement in the first half of the twentieth century, cities used structural changes to largely eliminate graft and corruption. City structural changes in the second half of the twentieth century are equally important, but less dramatic than stamping out corruption. Because replacing mayor-council government with council-manager government or vice versa is rare, it would seem there has been little change in municipal structures (Protasel 1988). Debate over the strengths and weaknesses of each model, while important, has tended to obscure a profound pattern of changes that have been under way in each form of city government. Because of this, structural changes in American cities in the last 50 years are not well understood. The purpose of this study is to describe those changes and the likely result of those changes.

Beginning in the 1950s, the most prominent features of council-manager government, such as a professional executive and a merit civil service, were being widely adopted in mayor-council cities (Renner and DeSantis 1998). At the same time, the most prominent features of mayor-council government, such as a directly elected mayor and some or all members of the city council elected by districts, were being widely adopted in council-manager form government. By the 1990s, the fusion of these two models resulted in what is now the dominant modern form of American local government. Although almost all cities are still formally or legally labeled mayor-council or council-manager cities,

in empirical fact most cities are now better described as "adapted cities" or "type III cities."

If the type III adapted city is increasingly the norm, how can it be best described and understood? The language and vocabulary used in the study of city structures and the reform of those structures is woefully inadequate. The traditional language is based on the formal and legal designation of cities as either mayor-council or council-manager, and does not capture variations among them nor help to describe patterns of structural change. The development of the type III city is a response to the theoretical and empirical challenges of understanding American local government. "Because cities have adopted a myriad of structural arrangements that cannot easily be considered part of one model or the other, researchers must reflect this situation in order to be more useful from both a theoretical and practical standpoint" (Renner 1988). The results from this study could not be described using only the traditional categories, so additional categories were created and a new vocabulary invented to describe the research findings. The flexibility of the English language was used to describe the concepts and categories in different ways.

The type I city describes the original mayor-council form of cities (as well as states and the national government) with separation-of-power structures. Type I cities are also referred to as "political" cities. The research shows that type I political cities are increasingly rare.

The type II city is a unity-of-powers model, called an "administrative" city because of its comparative emphasis on management and efficiency. The type II administrative city is a reform of the type I political city, and it is called in the classic literature the council-manager model, which is also increasingly rare, as this study will show.

Most Americans now live in type III or adapted cities. Because this is such a large group of cities, three subcategories or variants of type III adapted cities were created—the adapted political city, the adapted administrative city, and the conciliated city.

The adapted political city retains the basic elements of separation of powers, but has also adopted important administrative features that have buffered the influence of politics and increased management capacity. Adapted political cities rest on mayor-council statutory or legal platforms (a few are on council-manager legal platforms), but they are clearly distinguishable from their type I political city parents.

The adapted administrative city retains the basic elements of the unity-of-powers model but has modified its structures to increase the prospects for political responsiveness and to centralize political responsibility. The type III adapted administrative city is clearly distinguishable from the type II administrative city. The adapted administrative city rests on the council-manager statutory platform.

The third category of type III cities is called the conciliated city. Conciliated means to assemble, to unite, or to make compatible, and it is used here to describe type III cities that are no longer exclusively based on either a separation-of-powers model or a unity-of-powers model. More type III conciliated cities use the council-manager legal platform than the mayor-council legal platform.

Based on this new vocabulary, a five-part schema categorizing American cities according to the details of their structures has been created (table 1). One can quarrel with the detailed structural characteristics used to classify cities. For example, city A, with a council-appointed city manager, at-large election of city council members, and a mayor chosen from among the city council (a type II administrative city), is significantly different from city B, which has a council-appointed city administrator but a district-elected council and a directly elected mayor (a type III administrative adapted city). Although both cities appear to retain the unity-of-powers principle, these structural differences are important and influence the allocation of political and administrative power between the mayor, the council, and the city administrator, as well as influence the day-to-day functioning of city government.

Our findings indicate that cities are much more structurally dynamic than the literature suggests. In fact, cities

are remarkably fluid and adaptable. Between 1992 and 1996, 12.5 percent of American cities reported at least one structural adaptation of the type described in table 1 (Frederickson and Johnson 2001). An extrapolation of this finding suggests that, on average, one-quarter of American cities make at least one change during a 10-year period. The aggregation of these structural adaptations over time has resulted in the emergence of distinct forms of city government.

## Methodology

To defend the proposition that American city structures are highly dynamic and that the contemporary reflection of that dynamism is the emergence of type III cities, a mixture of methodologies was used in this study. Because of the 120-year sweep of time covered in this study, history is important and is used throughout. In reconstructing the rate of structural adaptation from type I to type II cities between 1880 and 1920, early texts on city government were examined (Adrian 1961, 1967, 1988; Banfield and Wilson 1963; Bollens 1952; Bromage 1957; Chang 1918; Childs 1965; Goodnow 1910; Griffith 1974; Lineberry and Fowler 1967; Schiesel 1977; Stone, Price, and Stone 1940; Svava 1989, 1994; Wood 1958; Zinc 1939). Beginning in

**Table 1 Types and Categories of American Cities**

Type I Political	Adapted political	Type III Conciliated	Adapted administrative	Type II Administrative
Mayor directly elected	Mayor directly elected	Mayor either directly elected or selected by council	Mayor directly elected	Mayor selected by council
Most council elected by district	Council elected by district, at-large, or mixed	Council elected by district, at-large, or mixed	Council elected by district, at-large, or mixed	Most council elected at-large
No CAO	Likely to have CAO	Has CAO	Has CAO	Has CAO
Mayor is not on council	Mayor is not on council	Mayor is not on council	Mayor is on council	Mayor is on council
Mayor has veto power	Mayor has veto power	Mayor may have veto power	Mayor may have veto power	Mayor does not have veto power
Mayor full-time	Mayor full-time	Mayor may be full-time or part-time	Mayor is usually part-time	Mayor is part-time
Mayor has staff	Mayor has staff	Mayor may have staff	Mayor does not have staff	Mayor does not have staff
Council full-time	Council full-time or part-time	Council may be full-time or part-time	Council is part-time	Council is part-time
Council has staff	Council may have staff	Council may have staff	Council does not have staff	Council does not have staff
Partisan or nonpartisan	Partisan or nonpartisan elections	Partisan or nonpartisan elections	Usually nonpartisan elections	Nonpartisan elections
Department heads report to mayor	Department heads report to mayor	Department heads report to CAO	Department heads report to CAO	Department heads report to CAO
Mayor serves as CAO	Mayor appoints and terminates CAO without consent of council	Mayor appoints and terminates CAO with consent of council	Council appoints and terminates city manager	Council appoints and terminates city manager
May have civil service	May have civil service	Usually has civil service	Usually has civil service	Usually has civil service
May have bidding system	May have bidding system	Usually has bidding system	Usually has bidding system	Usually has bidding system
Statutory of charter form is mayor-council form	Statutory of charter form is likely to be mayor-council form	Statutory of charter form may be council-manager or mayor-council	Statutory of charter form is likely to be council-manager	Statutory of charter form is council-manager

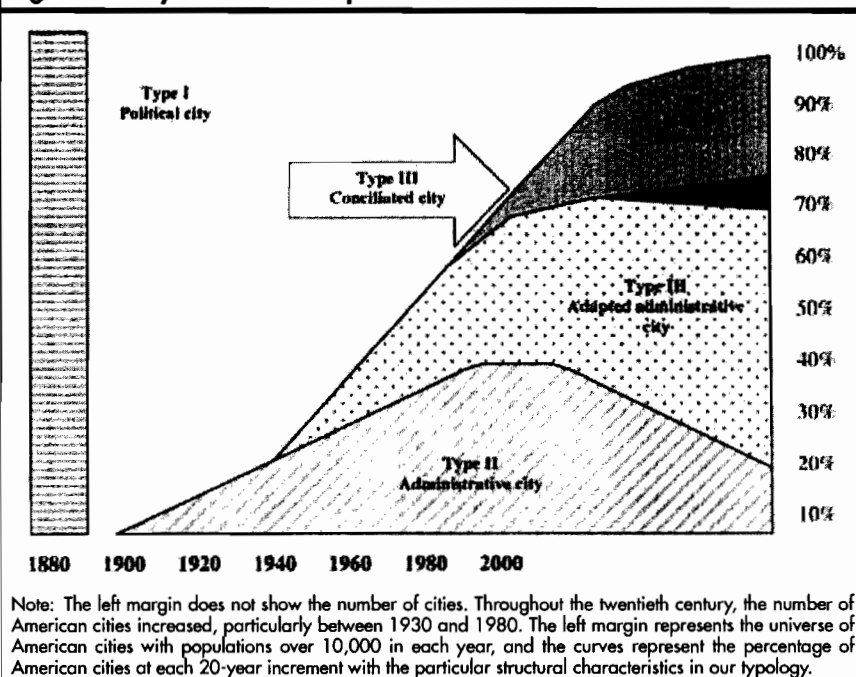
the 1930s, the survey of cities that appears in the International City/County Management Association's (ICMA) annual *Municipal Year Book* was used to estimate the number of cities fitting type I, type II, and the three variants of type III.<sup>2</sup> It is important to point out that the total number of cities increased during the last 70 years. Using information and data from early textbooks on city government and the ICMA *Municipal Year Book*, the percentage of cities that fit into each of the five categories was estimated for 1880–2000. The 2000 estimate was extrapolated from the 1998 ICMA *Municipal Year Book* and the results of a 1998 random survey that the authors conducted, which examined the structural details of 116 cities with populations over 10,000.<sup>3</sup>

## Findings

Using the structural distinctions between the types of cities and the methodology described previously, the findings are summarized in figure 1. Starting in 1880, most American cities had the structural features of the type I political city. Gradually, starting just before the turn of the century—the early stages of the municipal reform movement—the council-manager form of city government began to appear. Almost all of the cities adopting the council-manager form exhibited the characteristics of the type II administrative city. The diffusion of this innovation continued in an S curve through the 1970s. Beginning in the late 1920s, some type II cities began adopting the structural characteristics of type III adapted administrative cities. By the late 1950s, there were almost equal numbers of type II administrative and type III adapted administrative cities. The growth of the type II orthodox council-manager city government leveled off in the 1960s and then, in a reverse S curve, began a steady decline, replaced by an increasing number of cities on council-manager platforms with type III adapted administrative characteristics.

As the number of type II administrative and type III adapted administrative cities increased, the number of type I political cities declined. Beginning in the 1950s, some cities on orthodox type I political mayor-council platforms adopted the structural characteristics of type III adapted political cities. This process, another S curve of change, continued throughout the last half of the twentieth century, a process that reduced the number of type I political cities and increased the number of type III adapted political cities.

**Figure 1 City Structural Adaptation and the Forces of Reform**



Finally, starting in the 1980s, a few cities had so completely mixed structural features that they constituted a third variant of type III city, the conciliated city. Although the conciliated city represents only about 8 percent of the American cities (15 of the 116 cities in the 1998 survey were classified as conciliated cities), the logic of the S-shaped pattern of diffusion of innovation suggests that more adapted political and adapted administrative cities will become conciliated cities.

## From Type I Political Cities to Type III Adapted Political Cities

Over the past 50 years, most type I political cities have become what we describe as type III adapted political cities. In recent decades, many cities on mayor-council charter platforms have provided for the appointment of full-time professional administrators, known variously as chief administrative officers (CAO), chief executive officers, deputy mayors, or vice mayors for administration. The method of CAO appointment varies. In type III adapted political jurisdictions, the mayor appoints a CAO. Most CAOs function very much like a city manager, and many have served as managers in cities with council-manager charters (Svara 1999). The existence of the CAO position in political cities leads to improved efficiency and effectiveness, and therefore warrants the new category of “adapted political city.”

Professional CAOs and city managers ordinarily influence policy. In the day-to-day operations of the type III adapted political city, the mayor has a great deal of struc-

tural power to enforce his or her policy preferences, but tends to delegate to the CAO supervision of the day-to-day functioning of the city administration. In such settings, the relationship between the mayor and the CAO is often described as very cooperative (Svara 1999). In type III adapted political cities, there is still a clear separation of power between mayoral and CAO executive prerogatives on the one hand, and the legislative and budgetary powers held by the city council on the other hand. Checks and balances are commonplace. City council representation of district interests is still routine. It is not uncommon for city council members to anticipate running for mayor and, when in mayoral campaign mode, to use their council position to oppose the policies and programs not only of the mayor, but also of the CAO.

The data indicate distinct elements of the separation of political power and checks and balances in type III adapted political cities. However, there is also less political influence over day-to-day city administrative matters in type III adapted political cities than in type I political cities. Therefore, in type III adapted political cities, the separation of powers is not two-way, between the mayor as executive and the council as legislature, but three-way, between the mayor as executive and the council as legislature, between the mayor and CAO as joint executives, and between the CAO as executive and the council as legislature.

## **From Type II Administrative Cities to Type III Adapted Administrative Cities**

In type II administrative cities, the city manager tends to have a wide scope of influence, including control of virtually all policy implementation, a good bit of city policy making, and even some influence over the city mission, although always in a nonpartisan way (Svara 1989; Nalbandian 1991). Politics in type II administrative cities tend to cluster around elections and then recede sharply. The emphasis is on effectiveness, efficiency, and professional management. It is no wonder that type II administrative cities flourished in homogenous American suburbs, the Midwest, Southwest, and West. These are the crown jewels of municipal reform. But the municipal reform movement is over, and type II administrative cities are increasingly rare. It is estimated that 20 percent of American cities still retain the orthodox council-manager form of government.

Most American cities now elect all or at least some of their council members by district. It is believed that responsiveness to neighborhoods is enhanced by changing from city council members elected at large to city council members elected by district. Over time, more and more cities with district-elected city council members have arranged some monthly pay and certain forms of support

such as offices, cellular telephones, home computers, cars, and access to staff help for council members. Adaptations in this direction are almost always associated with size, larger cities being more inclined to these changes.

An important pattern of structural adaptation from type II administrative cities to type III administrative adapted cities is the changed role of the mayor. The distinct majority of cities with council-manager statutory or charter legal platforms have altered those platforms to provide for the direct election of the mayor. In most of these adaptations, the directly elected mayor is still a member of the city council, serving as the presiding city officer, but with few powers not held by other city council members. It could be said that such cities have the symbols of a mayor without the substance, but those symbols are not unimportant. There is still an essential unity of political powers in a council that includes a directly elected mayor with only symbolic powers. When the entire city council selects the city manager—with the mayor playing no special role in that selection—and the appointed city manager has full administrative powers over day-to-day city affairs, there is a unity of political powers in the council and a distinct separation between council-exercised political powers and management-exercised executive powers.

The trends are all in the direction of enhanced mayoral powers. As cities grow and become more heterogeneous, mayors tend to move from voluntary to part-time and then to full-time positions. In the process, these mayors require offices, salaries, and staff. It is not unusual for full-time mayors to seek the full range of mayoral powers, to become “strong mayors” (Gurwitt 1993). Patterns of political separation of powers and checks and balances usually accompany the trend toward enhanced mayoral powers between the mayor and the council.

In the classic type II administrative city, the council tends to be made up of business leaders who meet one evening a week to make city policy and engage in oversight over city administrative affairs. Seldom do city council members of this type anticipate long-term political careers. Political representativeness and responsiveness in such a model is thought to be general to everyone in the city. In broad policy terms, at-large city councils in type II administrative cities are likely concerned primarily with the overall aspects of city policy. It is wordplay, therefore, to claim that at-large councils are not representative or responsive, because they are. The question of representation changes from the quality of generalized representation of the whole city to the quality of specific representation—to put it another way, representativeness of and for whom. Obviously, not all residents of the city are alike. There is no question that at-large councils in type II administrative cities are primarily white male business leaders who live in middle-class and upper-class neighbor-

hoods (Bledsoe 1993; Welch and Bledsoe 1988). Specific responsiveness to minorities and ethnic groups, as well as the representation of poor neighborhoods, has been an issue over the past 30 years. As a result, a majority of at-large council election formats in type II cities have been changed to all or at least a majority of council members elected on the basis of districts—all in the name of political representation and responsiveness. Cities with all or part district-elected council (with a mayor directly elected by the citizens) are considered type III adapted administrative cities. Council policy processes in type III adapted administrative cities tend to reflect neighborhood and group patterns of representation and, in larger cities, patterns of political careerism and some of the elements of political checks and balances, depending on how the mayor is elected and what the mayor's powers are (Ehrenhalt 1991). Professional city managers and administrators, as well as most of those who study city management, agree that when compared with type II cities, generalized administrative efficiency is often diminished in type III adapted administrative cities because of district-elected councils (Newland 1994).

At the center of the distinctions between type II administrative and type III adapted administrative cities is who selects the city manager or administrator. Connected to this distinction is the issue of administrative reporting patterns—to whom should city department heads report? In type III adapted political cities, the administrator tends to be appointed by and reports to the mayor. In type III adapted administrative cities, the manager tends to be appointed by and reports to the council. However, mayors in type III adapted administrative cities tend to expect managers to report to them. In either setting, the relationship between the mayor and the manager is often described as a partnership (Svara 1994). The background and day-to-day work of professional managers in either setting has been found to be more similar than different. Nevertheless, to those in the city management profession, the manner of managerial appointment, the reporting pattern of the manager (to the council or to the mayor), and the formal power of the manager to appoint and supervise department heads are the critical distinctions between council-manager and mayor-council city governments and between unity-of-powers and separation-of-powers structures (Hansell 1999). From the professional manager's perspective, these distinctions are understandable. Research findings show these distinctions have blurred and, over time, are blurring even further. This structural blurring has resulted in what is the modal form of American city government—the type III adapted city.

There are many small variations within the generalized type III city architecture, such as whether the civil service is unionized and has bargaining rights, whether the mayor

prepares or presents the budget, and whether the mayor has a veto. Under particular circumstances or associated with particular issues, each of these variations may be important. But the importance of each variation is played out within the broader common architecture of the type III city.

Is the type III city a unity-of-powers or a separation-of-powers government structure? It is a mixture of both. Type III cities are not pure unity-of-powers models and do not replicate American corporate structures or the structures of parliamentary national governments. The standard arguments for the unity of powers have to do with the majoritarian democratic capacity to make policy with dispatch and the executive capacity to implement that policy efficiently. Because type II cities are unity-of-powers models and because many type III adapted administrative cities were previously type II administrative cities, there is little question that type III adapted administrative cities have traded some majoritarian democratic capacity to decide and some administrative capacity to efficiently implement policy in return for greater representation and greater direct involvement of elected officials in city executive and administrative functioning.

The standard arguments for the separation of powers are based on the logic of limited government. The founders who designed the separation-of-powers model were determined to stamp out hereditary and despotic governments, and they believed this could be accomplished by pitting democratic ambition against ambition, structurally achieved by bicameral legislative bodies and a separately elected executive (president, governor, or mayor) who would be able to check legislative excesses. For several reasons, type III adapted political cities cannot be properly described as modeled exclusively on the separation of powers. First, there is an established merit-based civil service and a professional administrator who directs their day-to-day work, either by delegated mayoral authority or by direct statutory or charter-based executive power. Second, there are administrative policies, processes, and procedures that militate against direct meddling in city administrative affairs by city council members and even occasionally by mayors. Because most type III adapted political cities evolved from type I political cities, they have traded many of the classic features of the separation of powers and the politics of checks and balances for greater administrative efficiency and capacity.

What is the type III city, if it is neither exclusively a unity-of-powers nor a separation of powers democratic polity? Type III cities are a blend of two logically opposite models of democracy. It appears that citizens who have, over the years, voted for the incremental steps that brought us type III cities were less interested in the contrasting logic of these two models and more interested in reconciling competing notions of democracy. Citizens appear to want



both the advantages of direct neighborhood representation and the assignment of overall political accountability to a mayor. But they also want professional leadership and a merit-based city administration functioning without political mischief.

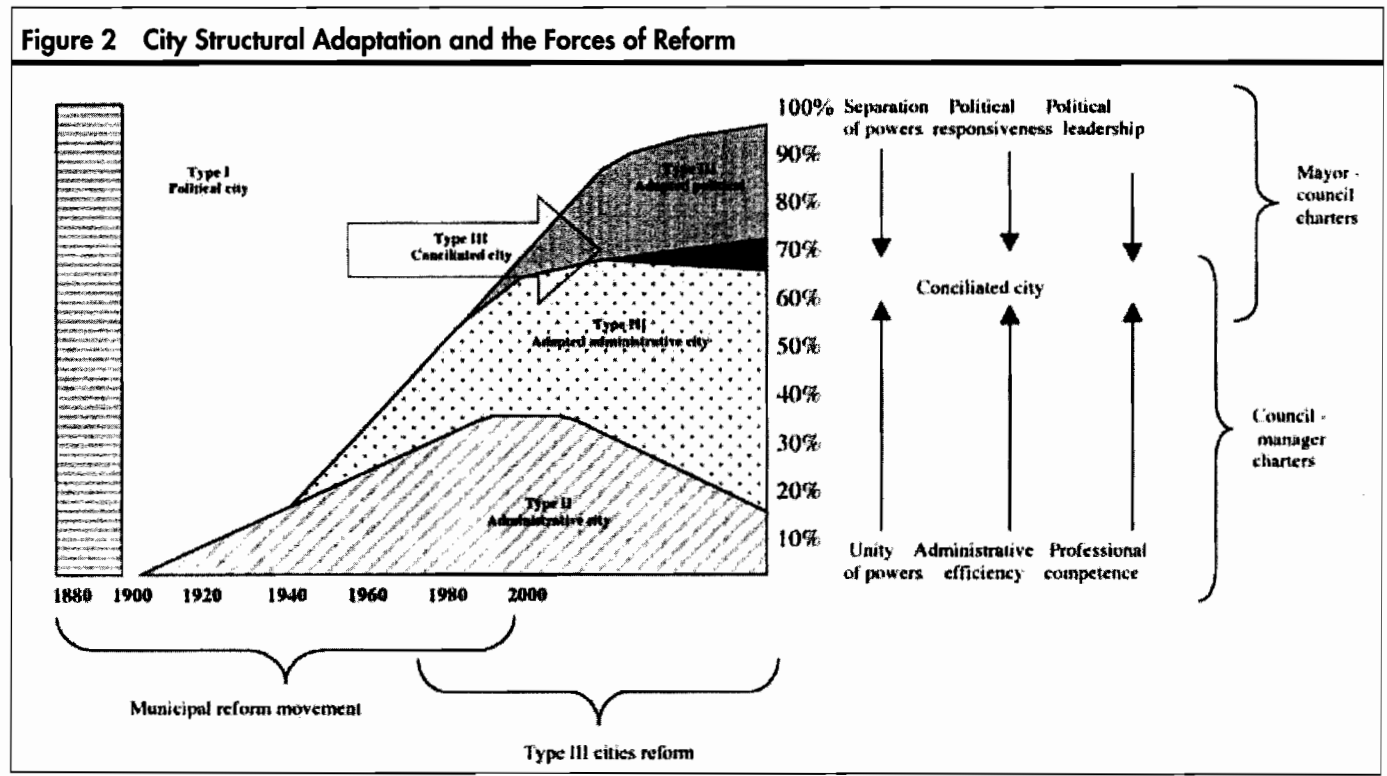
## Conclusions: Accounting for the Directions of City Structural Change

Competing and contrasting values account for the changing patterns of city structures and the S curve of innovation. The arrows shown in figure 2 illustrate the forces driving these structural changes—the drive for administrative efficiency, professional competence, and unity of powers coming from one direction, and the drive for political responsiveness, political leadership, and separation of powers coming from the other direction. The arrows empirically represent competing theories of democratic government. This study tests Herbert Kaufman's theory that, over time, American democratic politics swings in a wide arc between the search for neutral administrative competence and political representativeness. Based on the 120 years represented in figure 2, the structural adaptation arc of city democratic structures does not appear to move from one pole to the other. Instead, the arc of change appears to settle somewhere in the middle.

The rhetoric of change is a polar language, but the actual incremental, democratic structural adaptation of cities appears to be more cautious and intermediate. This rhetoric is captured in Albert Hirschman's (1982) "disap-

pointment" thesis. Like Kaufman, Hirschman observed a wide arc of change over time between efficiency and political responsiveness. The forces pulling structural adaptation through that arc in one direction or the other have to do with the force of contemporary winning arguments based on democratic expressions of disappointment. For example, a typical type I city could easily be described, particularly after a scandal, as riddled with patronage and corruption and, therefore, a disappointment. Such a disappointment provides the impetus and incentive for structural adaptations favoring merit-based civil service and tight bid and purchasing controls. This was exactly the rhetoric of the municipal reform movement, and vestiges of that movement still can be found in the process of adaptation from type I political cities to type III adapted political or conciliated cities.

Much more obvious in the past 20 years has been the rhetoric of disappointment with the detached, efficient, neutral administration of type II cities. When things go wrong—and they always do—there is a logical instinct to fix responsibility, and in democratic political systems responsibility ultimately rests with elected officials. If they are to be held responsible for city affairs, they argue, should they not have greater political and executive power to influence those affairs? While the findings in this study generally support the disappointment thesis, there is also ample evidence that the processes of change, at least as those processes are represented by the incremental adaptation of city structures, are less sweeping and more tentative than the disappointment thesis suggests.



1. The primary data sources are the computer tapes and documents of the U.S. Census of Governments, the International City/County Management Association's annual *Municipal Year Book*, the City-County Management Association's annual *Municipal Year Book*, the U.S. Advisory Commission on Intergovernmental Relations.
2. The surveys conducted by the International City/County Management Association are sent to all cities with populations over 2,500; the results are presented in the annual *Municipal Year Book*.
3. The authors categorized the 116 cities in the 1998 survey data set based on the five-part schema in table 1. For a comprehensive description and analysis of the structural characteristics of each type of city, see Frederickson and Johnson (2001) and Frederickson, Johnson, and Wood (2002).

## Notes

If type III cities blend the values of responsiveness and democratic leadership, on one hand, and efficiency and professional competence, on the other hand, are these values compatible? Can they be blended effectively? Empirically, the answer to each of these questions appear to be yes. Citizens appear to favor blending the contrasting logic of unity of powers and separation of powers and believe this blending to be compatible. Or, they take logical purity less seriously than they take wanting the best from both forms of logic and can find no reason why the best of each form of logic cannot be combined. Through the processes of incremental structural adaptation, city residents have essentially invented the type III city.

In the short run, it appears that type III cities are functioning as their residents want and expect. They may be less efficient than the advocates of unity of powers want, and they may be less politically responsive than separation-of-powers advocates may want, but type III cities appear to meet the needs and wants of the citizens. At least in the eyes of the citizens, thus far, type III cities have successfully combined contrasting democratic logic.

It is very important, however, to remember how malleable and dynamic American city structures are. The present dominance of the type III city structure will no doubt evolve, the direction of that adaptation open to the forces of changing circumstances and the changing salience of winning ideas.

These findings fit comfortably in the so-called new institutionalism perspective. Synthesis of many studies of that radical and comprehensive reform and reorganization is unlikely to be politically digestible (Olsen 2001). Actual change is almost always incremental, because existing structures usually reflect long historical processes, the repeated consideration of competing preferences, and a good bit of compromise. Patterns of adaptation respond to the issues that are winning the battle for limited public attention (March and Olsen 1984). Shifting attention is a function of scandal, crisis, disapproval, and the skills of leaders. Initial proposals for city structural change—for instance, a proposal that a type II city change to a directly elected mayor with mayoral empowerment, or that a type I city change to provide for a chief administrative officer—are not usually successful initially. Instead, they are ideas, preferences, and perspectives competing with other ideas, preferences, and perspectives.

The three forces influencing contemporary patterns of city structural diffusion are the drive for political leadership, political responsiveness, and administrative effectiveness. When combined, these forces produce patterns of diffusion exhibiting fewer and fewer structural distinctions between cities over time. Other studies of diffusion (DiMaggio and Powell 1991) find growing isomorphism among companies and institutions as a result of adaptation. Put another way, cities are becoming more like one another structurally and there are fewer and fewer outliers. There are more and more American cities with relatively similar structural characteristics and fewer and fewer classic type I and type II cities. The modal American city will have a directly elected mayor, a professional city manager or chief administrative officer, some or all of the city council elected by district, a merit-based civil service, formal bid and purchasing controls, and required external auditing.

The findings show that the detailed features of these traditional models have been so mingled as to all but eliminate the importance of the formal designation of a city as either mayor-council or council-manager (Ebdon and Brucato 2000). This is not to suggest there are not some “pure” mayor-council and council-manager cities, because there are. It suggests, however, there are now fewer of them and that the adapted type III city is now the mode, especially for cities with more than 50,000 people. Nor is it suggested that the different values upon which mayor-council and council-manager forms of government are based are now less important. In fact, values such as professional administration, on the one hand, and democratically elected political leadership, on the other, are so important that they are no longer exclusively associated with one or the other model of local government. The emergence of the type III adapted city is a splendid example of the innovation, cre-

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