Trans. Inst. Indian Geographers
Vol. 5, No. 2, July 1983

ADMINISTRATIVE GEOGRAPHY

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ABSTRACT : This article makes a case for an unexplored field of Administrative Geography. The contributions by geographers to the administrative area studies are reviewed with a discussion on the scope and approaches to this discipline.

Johnson (1970, p. 1) rightly asserts that differences between the developed and the developing countries, or between progressive and backward areas within them, can be addressed to the ways their terrestrial space is organised. Five types of spatial organisation are enumerated : military, religious, judicial, administrative and economic. The economic organisation of space finds a comprehensive discussion in Johnson's book. The other spatial organisations are given only a casual treatment.

This conforms to the pattern of geographic research in general. It is said with particular reference to the administrative organisation of space which manifests itself in the division of any politically defined area into administrative uuits of varying hierarchical order. Each unit is meant to perform specific function/s consistent with its administrative status. One can, of course, distinguish between the general purpose administrative units, such as counties in the United Kingdom and districts in India, and the special purpose administrative units, such as school district in the United States, health units in Sweden and census enumeration areas in Nigeria. The special purpose units, in their spatial jurisdiction, are generally intra-general purpose units but sometimes these do enclose or overlap a number of them.

The quality of life in any area is contingent, among other factors, upon the nature of its spatial administrative organisation. Administrative structures, in particular, are clearly influential in directing and standardising man's activities (Beaujeu Garnier, 1976, p. 100). These determine the kind and quality of services one is going to obtain and civic obligations he is expected to perform. Hence an immediate task before geograghers is to examine existing spatial patterns of administrative areas and to suggest alternative spatial arrangements (Massam, 1972, p. 1).

That there should be a spatial unity between the economic and administrative organisation is best illustrated in the Soviet thinking and policy (Konstantinov, 1980,p. 534), that administrative organisation of space should conform to the daily pattern of life has been the corner stone of the recent local government area reform in the United Kingdom (Redcliffe - Maud and Wood, 1974, pp 1–100), and that spatial arrangement of administrative units should promote development is appropriately emphasized in countries like India, Nigeria and Brazil (United Nations, 1962, p. 1). All this not

only presents a growing awareness toward the great relevance of the spatial administrative organisation but also highlights the varying perspectives and strategies toward that end.

Areal Division of Power and the Value System

The administrative organisation of space is, in essence, the areal division of government power (Maass, 1959, p. 10). This power is first divided according to the process (among legislative, executive and judicial bodies), the function (among different governmental departments, such as defence, foreign relations, home affairs, education and health), and the constituency (among representatives of different sections of population). All this division of power is then fitted into a variety of spatial frameworks at the national, regional (state) and local levels. The division of power by the process, function and constituency is evidently represented at all the different areal scales.

On its face, any administrative organisation of space seems to be a mechanism for convenient management of large, heterogeneous and disparate units. In spirit, this, organisation is deeply rooted in the whole philosophy of government and society of any region. It reflects the basic values of the people in a particular area. These values include efficiency, justice, democracy, community, and development. Efficiency, in an economic sense, calls for an administrative organisation of space which promises maximum output with minimum input of resources, time and effort. Hence relatively large administrative units may be reckoned as more efficient than the smaller ones in areas with advanced technology. Justice demands an organisation which renders equity to the core (coincident with the headquarters) and the periphery of any administrative unit. This is more easily achieved in smaller units, particularly when transport and communication are not so developed. Democracy is realised by ensuring greater participation of people in administrative matters. Administrative structures with fewer tiers, unitary form of administration at every level, and smaller units are more suited to this purpose. The objective of integrated community life is achieved by conforming the administrative units to community areas. This calls for a correspondence between the sociological and administrative organization of space. The development process is best facilitated by adjusting administrative units to resource regions. In a real life situation, however, considerations of management convenience may outweigh all other factors in this respect. The convenience lies generally in maintaining the *status quo*. That is why the established administrative structures may persist even under changed conditions.

It follows that areal division of power is not merely a technique for organisation of government power but is also a means to organise society according to the value system of the people and its government. It also aims at striking an equilibrium between government and society. This objective is best achieved through democracy wherein society effectively becomes the government (Hoffman, 1959, pp. 113–115).

Administrative Area Studies in Geographic Literature

A perusal of geographic literature shows that there has been a considerably long but only an occasional and sporadic interest in the study of the administrative organisation of space. A pioneer and stimulating discussion on the geographical aspects of administrative areas came from Peake (1930) in his Herbertson Memorial Lecture. He looked into the evolutionary process of the counties, county boroughs and districts in England. Fawcett (1919) and later Taylor (1942) also made significant contribution to the theme but they were concerned more with division of the country into macro units for administration and regional planning respectively. Gilbert (1948, p. 172) rightly stated that the problem of govern-

ment areas, large and small, should be treated as a whole. His ideas on the local government area reform were marked by a great insight and clarity. Freeman (1968) made a contribution by way of his comprehensive treatise on local government areas in England and Wales from 1830 to 1968. This apart, the Institute of British Geographers (1970 and 1974) always felt obligatory on its part to make observations on any scheme of local authority reform in the country.

Massam and Burghardt (1968) trace the interest of the American Geography in this theme to the mid-fifties. The beginning was represented by the works of Jones (1954), Ostrom (1956), and Brown (1957). A profound empirical study of the changing administrative geography of China from the pre-Christian era to the present day was made by Whitney (1970). Massam (1972) himself made a notable contribution by way of enunciating the scope, methodology and application of this topic of study.

The German geographers have also evinced a similar interest since the early fifties (Kupper, 1973). Hottes (1953) was one of the forerunners. He dealt with administrative area reform in Gummersbach through the application of ideas relating to structural and functional regionalisation. It was again during the 1950's that the Institut fur Landeskunde at Godesberg conducted useful research for reshaping the territorial boundary system in the Landev. One session of the 38th German Geographers Congress in 1971 was devoted exclusively to the matters relating to administrative area reform. Anyhow a majority of the West German geographers has remained non-commital on issues pertaining to local and regional administration (Kupper, 1973, p. 175).

The Soviet geographers have indeed maintained an extraordinary interest in the study of administrative areas. This is manifest in the frequency of articles in the *Soviet Geography* on administrative regionalisation, size and shape of administrative areas and relationship between the territorial organisation for administration and the development process. This concern contrasts with their virtual indifference to Political Geography. Their fascination for the administrative area study stems from a desire to make Geography more useful to administration.

The current geographic interest in Administrative Geography has found four broad expressions : (i) an analysis of public policies in a spatial perspective, represented by writings of Prescott (1968); (ii) a systematic analysis of administrative structures in terms of their size, shape and evolution, as demonstrated by Haggett (1965), Massam and Goodchild (1971), and Massam (1972) ; (iii) identification of techniques for reapportionment of electroal districts, illustrated in the writings of Morrill (1973) ; and (iv) application of location-allocation models to the distribution of public services, exemplified in the works of Yeates (1963), Gould (1966), and Tornqvist *et al.* (1971). Recent books on Political Geography include a chapter on administrative areas as an expression of internal political organisation of a state. Many of the techniques traditionally employed for a politico-geographic analysis of the state are considered applicable to the study of its administrative divisions also.

The fact, however, remains that geographic studies focusing directly on administrative areas remain small in number. More glaring is the paucity of research publications on area administration. Such a concern has repeatedly been voiced by scholars like McColl (1963), Helin (1967), Prescott (1968), Whebell (1968) and Massam (1975). The response has, so far, been grossly inadequate.

This continuing indifference to the study of administrative areas is hard to understand. This is particularly so when most of the research in Human Geography is based on data dy administrative units, every acco-

unt of an area begins with its administrative map, and every geographic analysis has to give a due importance to administration as a factor in any human situation. But when it comes to an inquiry into the nature of administrative areas *per se*, the task is not considered of much avail.

How is this explained ? A survey of literature reveals that geographers have always shown a preference for the study of macro-units such as distsicts and counties, which are local in character and significance. Lack of data on administrative areas, especially in respect of their evolutionary process and changing nature of obligatory functions, is another factor responsible for this. It is also worthy of note that traditionally the geographic regions have been in constant conflict with administrative areas. The successive political and economic events in the world moved in a manner which made the administrative areas less coincident with physical and economic regions (Blazek, 1976, p. 48). Hence every regionalisation intended to present a scheme which was an alternative to the administrative division of an area. This decreased rather than increased the importance of administrative areas in the mind of geographers.

A weak background of geographers in Public Administration seems to be still another contributary factor. Geography had its weakest interface with Public Administration of all the social sciences. This largely explains the virtual absence of geographic research on area administration. The standard books on Public Administration practically ignore the importance of spatial aspects of administration and the writings in Geography equally lack in treatment of themes relevant to Public Administration. In the process, both the disciplines have remained deprived of the benefits which could accrue out of their mutual interaction.

Equally important are the reasons which lie outside the profession (Coppock, 1976, pp. 4-5). Policy makers do not seem to be aware of the spatial dimensions of their problems and policies. Hence they could not appreciate the relevance of administrative organisation of space to the administrative process. As such, the geographers were not asked to make a contribution of which they were capable.

Political Geography and Administrative Geography

It is true that the study of administrative area has started receiving some attention as a part of Political Geography. Pounds (1963), Prescott (1968) and Muir (1981) devote a chapter each on the theme in their respective books. Jackson and Bergman (1973) deserve a special mention for giving the first place to ' local systems and regions ' in their three level treament of Political Geography at the loclal, national and international scale. The academic position of all these scholars is fairly represented by Muir (1981, p. 211) when he states that the geographic studies of *administrative areas* should firstly be generic in nature, seeking comparison between various administrative areas in terms of hierarchy, shape and size of different units; secondly these can be historically based, tracing the evolution of administrative areas throngh time; and thirdly these can be functionally based, focusing on administrative obligations at different levels of hierarchy. He would also like the geographers to give special attention to issues relating to administrative area reform.

But would it be appropriate to fix Administrative Geography as a part of Political Geography and to restrict the scope of its enquiry to the administrative area as one type of political area ? The answer to this question has to take a cue from the separation of Public Administration from Political Science. Public Administration distinguishes itself by the study of the *executive* rather than the *political* institutions and processes (Waldo, 1968, pp. 145-155). Administrative Geography can also carve out a corresponding sphere of its academic

activity distinct from that of Political Geography. Its focus of interest is not to be confined to the administrative area alone but should also cover the *area administration*. And in the current context, the administrative process is of such a vital importance that its treatment as a separate theme in Geography can only ensure a proper justice to it.

Even the administrative areas, in the recent geographic literature. have been viewed in ways other than their status as one category of political areas. Bennett and Chorley (1978, pp. 286-295) treat them as one of the decision making spatial systems concerned with designing and execution of public policy. Garner (1975, p. 324) visualises them as one of the human environmental structures having a strong bearing on the pattern of supply and utilisation of public services. Coppock and Sewell (1976, p. 26) rate the administrative area reform as a particularly challenging assignment in applied regional geography. The Soviet geographers are also promoting a new subfield as 'Geocybernetics' which is the same thing as the 'Geography of Area Management' (Konstantinov, 1980, pp. 532-533). Keeping in view all these diverse perspectives and orientations, it will be imperative to develop Administrative Geography as an independent branch of our discipline.

Scope of Administrative Geography

What should be the content of Administrative Geography ? Any statement on this count has to remain tentative since this field has yet to take its form. None the less the scope of Administrative Geography has to be defined only in the light of the nature of geography as a distinct discipline and nature of administration as a specific object of study. The list of topics for study under Administrative Geography will also be contingent upon the approach, such as systematic, behavioural, systemic, radical or humanistic, one adopts within geography.

Theoretically, Administrative Geography should be concerned with the spatial aspects of interest to Public Administration. The latter focuses upon public administration as a process manifest in all government activity concerned with carrying out the law, as made by legislative bodies or other authoritative agents and interpreted by courts, through the processes of organisation and management (Waldo, 1968, p. 145). Hence one has to distinguish between two dimensions – conduct and content – of public administration. The former involves the process of planning (statement of objectives and policies and of the line of action to achieve these), organisation (personnel recruitment and allocation), direction (providing leadership), co-ordination (synchronising the programmes and avoiding duplication) and control (determining whether the enterprise is on target and schedule) of all government operations (Dimock and Dimock, 1970, pp. 10-11). The latter embraces all the elements of administration, such as the administrative institutions including councils, the bureaucracy along with the chief executive, and the public finance as well as public relations. Administrative Geography will examine all this, and other relevant things, in a spatial perspective.

In practice, the spatial perspective will imbibe a threefold task. The first involves an understanding of the spatial variations in all aspects of administrative conduct and content. The second aims at an analysis of the role of administration as a factor in determining the nature of landscape, economy and society of different areas. And the third seeks to examine the administrative spatial structures at the local, regional and national levels. Considering the heavy investment of governments in administration, the heavy cost of working with inefficient spatial structures and extensive disruption caused by their periodic reform the amount of theoretical work in this area is surprisingly small and unstructured (Cliff, Haggett, Ord, Bassett and Davies 1975, p. 48).

Geographers may understandably find certain themes of a greater interest, being more akin to their philososphy, methodology and talents. These include the division of space into a variety of administrative units, evolution and reform of administrative areas, spatial attributes, such as hierarchy, size and shape of admistrative structures, areal differences in adminirative organisation and spatial patterns of public finance. A recent contribution by Bennet (1980) on the geography of public finance has earned a worldwide acclaim. Of a special-relevance to Administrative Geography will be the stndy of local authorities which are administrative areas in their finest form. Also the relationship between the administrative and development process, especially in developing countries, offers itself at another rewarding field of enquiry. All this is said not to undermine the importance of studying other aspects of administration but just to indicate priorities.

Approaches in Administrative Geography

As indicated above, there could be several approaches, such as systematic, behavioural, systemic, radical and humanistic, to an understanding of the spatial organisation of space for administration. Taking the case of administrative areas as an illustration, the systematic approach aims at an analysis of their various attributes, the behavioural looks at them as a special kind of decision making and implementing framework, and the systemic attempts a comprehensive understanding of the integrated functioning of their all components. The radical approach will highlight the extent to which various attributes of administrative areas contribute to social injustice, discrimination and exploitation (Olsson, 1974). From a humanistic viewpoint, administrative areas can be seen as, regionally varying, foci of emotional attachment and loyalty at local level (Tuan, 1976, pp. 268-269). It may be added that while the systematic approach is traditional and has been common to the growth of all branches of our discipline, the other approaches are more recent and sophisticated in their conceptualisation and methodology. It is indisputable, however, that all of these are complementary to each other and contribute toward a better understanding of a phenomenon or a process through their varying perspectives and differing emphasis.

One discernable development in respect of social sciences has been their gradual transformation from ' content ' sciences to ' perspective ' sciences. Now we have Economics of almost everything - from that of education to that of marriage and family planning. Geography always distinguished itself by its (spatial) ' perspective ' but its ' content ' has remained quite incomplete. There is an urgent need to extend its sphere of inquiry to at least those areas which are of vital relevance but have remained largely unexplored. Administrative Geography is certainly one such field.

Acknowledgement

The author expresses his gratitude to the Royal Geographical Society, London for financing his six month visit from October 1981 to April 1982 to the Department of Geography, University of Cambridge, Cambridge, England. The visit enabled him to accomplish a monograph on Administrative Geography in consultation with Professor Michael Chisholm to whom he is greatly beholden for regular advice and encouragement. The present paper has grown out of that monograph. Thanks are also expressed to Professor G. S. Gosal of the Department of Geography, Punjab University, Chandigarh for going through this paper and making suggestions for its improvement.

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