Who governs and what is governed in port governance: A review study

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ABSTRACT

Based on an intensive literature review, this paper investigates and presents generalized answers to the two basic questions of port governance, namely who governs and what is governed. There are totally 77 studies selected as the core literature sample according to a five-step approach. The results from literature review show evidences in favor of the important roles played by governmental organizations and port organizations as the main governing bodies of port governance. Furthermore, our analysis shows first, that multilevel governance has become a notable feature of port governance. Second, there are increasing involvements by national or regional levels of government in some countries such as the USA, Brazil, China. Third, port authorities at local level are generally holding the centre-stage position with further autonomy in managing port operations. Fourth, not-for-profit organizations related to port activities play the role of coordinators in port governance. Finally, different governance regimes with different specific governing actors for different port classifications can be identified for many nations. This study shows that fundamentally institutional arrangements and specific port activities are the two basic categories of what is governed. The institutional arrangements determine the port governance configuration and allocation of responsibilities of port activities. There are 12 groups of specific port activities within five categories identified in port governance.

1. Introduction

Since the 1990s, with the increasing popularity of the concept of governance, port governance has grown to an important analytical lens in the port academia. More and more port reforms in the international arena are analyzed under the light of port governance. Meanwhile, some theoretical or base studies are emerging with focuses on the basic issues associated with port governance, such as the port governance model (Brooks and Cullinane, 2006), the relationship between port governance model and port performance (Brooks and Pallis, 2008), the interactions between institutions, port governance reforms and port authority routines (Notteboom et al., 2013) and the common characteristics of the port governance reform processes (Brooks et al., 2017). Despite extensive analysis of port governance, port governance studies remain incipient and it is hard to answer the four basic questions surrounding the port governance namely who governs, what is governed, how is it governed, and for what purpose (Vieira et al., 2014). Having a good understanding of these basic questions can allow us to get closer to the nature of port governance, which is very important in helping policy and decision makers to effectively address practical port governance issues they are facing.

In fact, port governance scholars have recognized the importance of answering these basic core questions, and they also have made great contributions to it by providing valuable insights from relevant perspectives to a certain extent. For instance, Verhoeven (2010) articulates that although port governance reforms increase the power of private players and gradually reduce the roles of port authority, reform processes often do not succeed in restoring the centre-stage position of port authority in port governance configuration. Notteboom and Rodrigue (2005) explore the governance issues in the port regionalization phase and argue that port-bound activities (i.e. the ship as focal point) will be expanded to port-related logistics activities (i.e. adding value to the cargo as focal point) in port governance. Ferrari et al. (2015) present the main port governance models in Europe to show how ports are governed there and further discuss how concession agreement works more effectively as a strategical tool in the landlord governance model. Brooks (2006a) points out one of the premises of port governance reform like port devolution is that productivity gains will result from the new port governance structure, although its "success" is difficult to measure.

Those previous studies function as a stepping stone towards the opening of "black box" of port governance. However, they do not provide

the "key" to that box directly. Our paper devotes itself to gaining the "key". Logically speaking, answering the first two questions (i.e. who governs? what is governed?) is the prerequisite for answering the other two questions (i.e. how is it governed? and for what is it governed?). More specifically, the question of who governs concerns the main governing actors who conduct governance in the port domain, while the question of what is governed concentrates on the governed objects in port governance. Each governing actor has its own roles, functions and goals, and each governed object has its own scopes or boundaries. It can be reasonably deduced that once the answers to "who governs" and "what is governed" are clear and definite, the answers to "how is it governed" and "for what is it governed" are largely determined by the former ones. This is why we focus on giving answers to the first two questions through an intensive review of existing literature on port governance in this paper.

Although the majority of port governance studies predominantly use case studies within specific contexts (Vieira et al., 2014), we take into consideration the homogeneity of port governance around the world in order to give clear answers that can be generalized to the majority of ports worldwide. This is exactly the originality of our research. By exploring the generalized answers to who governs and what is governed in port governance through a review study, we can better understand the nature of port governance. In doing so, the paper can also generate several policy implications for the policy and decision makers worldwide. The contributions of this research are mainly in these two respects.

This paper is organized as follows. In Section 2, the applied methodological procedures are presented to show how the reviewed studies are selected according to specific criteria (defined as inclusion and exclusion criteria). In Section 3, we provide the analysis of the review and give answers to the questions of who governs and what is governed. Section 4 concludes.

2. Methodological procedures for the literature review

Since the 1990s, the focus in port governance studies has been shifted from the concept of port reform to the concept of port governance (Debrie et al., 2013). Although the concept of port governance is widely accepted among researchers interested in port economics and/or port governance domain, it has been used along or in close relation to similar concepts like port devolution, port privatization. Therefore, these similar concepts encompass implicitly some kind of port governance and are used in the literature as equivalent to the concept of port governance. This may result in the increase of ambiguity concerning the distinction between these concepts, the exact meaning of port governance, and its application in empirical studies. Keeping this in mind, and in order to develop the answers to our research questions, we apply a five-step approach to select literature sample in this review study.

Regarding the five-step approach, the main idea behind it is that the port studies using port governance as the analytic lens and focusing on governance issues can be screened and searched. Therefore, we choose to narrow the search scope gradually, and finally identify the port governance studies in the scope of port governance with the concept of port governance. To make sure of the reliability of our final literature sample, the selected studies are checked for representativeness by different means.

Step 1. eligibility criteria. Studies are selected on five criteria that are based on the following characteristics of the studies:

(i) Field of studies: the study should deal with seaport management;
(ii) Topic of "port governance": the study should contain characters "port(s)" and "governance" in the title and/or abstract and/or keywords;
(iii) Language of study: only studies published in English are taken into account;

(iv) Publication status: only articles published in academic journals and chapters in books are reviewed, other relevant papers are excluded, such as conference papers, dissertations, unpublished working papers;
(v) Year of publication: studies published before 31st March 2017 (the last day of searching literature).

Step 2. preliminary selection. The selected studies in our basic literature database are gathered by scanning and searching all studies in the Web of Science, Scopus and Science Direct, which are all the world's leading bibliographic sources. The term "port governance" is searched in title and/or abstract and/or keywords. The search results found in these three databases are respectively 262, 394 and 162 records. After excluding duplicated studies in two or three search databases, there are in total 533 records left.

Step 3. further selection. A check of each record is made by scanning title, abstract and keywords to see whether it satisfies the eligibility criteria described in Step 1. To be specific, one of our four authors acts as the coordinator in the selection process, the other three conducting the selection practically. At the beginning of the process, the coordinator organizes a telephone meeting for all to set the basic principles of selection. Nine categories (i.e. nonsense record, non-English record, conference paper, airport governance, marine/maritime governance, inland water and/or dry port governance, port-city interaction governance, seaport governance, other non-related issues) are identified to categorize the original 533 records. Then the three authors work independently to form their own lists of each category, especially the list of literature on seaport governance, afterwards, the lists are sent to the coordinator, who compares the three lists of selected studies on seaport governance and figures out the differences among them. Then another telephone meeting is held for authors to discuss those divergences and form the list agreed by all. Note that a full reading of the recorded studies has been made by the authors when it is necessary, especially during the process of checking the topic category of a study. As a result, 375 records were deleted from the original list containing 533 records. The further list of studies selected containing 158 records is formed.

Step 4. semi-final selection. As the two targeted research questions are closely related to the concept of port governance, we use the term "port governance" as a fixed search item to conduct further search in the list of 158 studies. By doing so, we can reduce the potential vagueness of our research and make sure our final literature samples are exactly under the umbrella of the concept of port governance. Finally, we are left with 77 studies, among which 40 studies are with "port governance" in titles of the studies, and 37 studies use the term "port governance" in abstracts and/or keywords.

Step 5. representativeness and final selection. The selected studies are checked for representativeness. First, we have checked for bias in publication period (i.e. year of publication) and the temporal distribution (Fig. 1), type of journals/books (Table 1) and the unit of geographical analysis (Table 2). The results show that the distribution of the sample studies is in line with the view of expert judgements of our four authors on existing literature in the field of port governance. Second, the comparison between our sample studies and the samples of selected studies listed in recent review studies on port governance (see Brooks et al., 2017; Vieira et al., 2014) provides evidences that our sample comprises the main studies that were published in the field of port governance. In the end, we choose the 77 studies as the core literature sample to be analyzed in this paper. Without doubt, we also refer to other port and/or non-port related literature beyond our sample to help effectively organize and enrich our research, such as Baird (2000) on port privatization and Scott (2013) on institutions and organizations.