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Inclusive city governance: International lesson drawing from progressive urban leadership

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Summary

This paper outlines concepts that may be able to help us better understand the power of place in our globalising world. More specifically, it aims to show how good place-based leadership can promote inclusive urban development in both developed and developing countries.

An opening section discusses the struggle that is now taking place in many communities across the world between ‘place-less’ and ‘place-based’ power. In the era of globalisation ‘place-less’ leaders, that is, people who are not expected to care about the consequences of their decisions for particular places and communities have gained extraordinary power and influence. A conceptual framework is introduced to show how ‘place-based’ power can be understood and explains how this local power can, depending on the national and local context, be expanded. A second section offers a way of understanding inclusive place-based leadership. Described as ‘New Civic Leadership’, the model posits the existence of five overlapping realms of leadership in any given locality. The areas of overlap are termed ‘Innovation Zones’ and it is these new political spaces that provide many possibilities for scaling up participatory and co-productive planning. The third section provides three cameos of inspirational civic leadership drawn from different countries to illustrate the argument. A final section identifies emerging themes for future work in development studies. In particular the paper makes a plea for scholars to give more attention to the role of place-based leadership in bringing about progressive change.

Contextualising place-based power

My starting point is that the significance of place is undervalued in public policy across the world, not just in the field of development studies. This is partly because hugely influential central government departments, bolstered by associated policy communities, professions and vested interests, have
come to dominate the way public policy is conceived, developed and implemented. Indeed, as James Scott explained some years ago, the dominant way in which knowledge relating to public policy is constructed limits our understanding (Scott 1998). His critique of silo thinking and the tendency for governments to ‘see like a state’ remains relevant today. Warren Magnusson builds on the analysis presented by Scott and advocates approaches to public policy that put a much higher value on place-based understanding and analysis. His radical argument is to suggest that to ‘see like a city’ holds out many benefits and, in particular, it involves positioning ourselves as inhabitants, not governors (Magnusson 2011).

Scholars in the development studies field have also drawn attention to the neglect of place-based perspectives in international thinking relating to both the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and, more recently, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) agreed by the United Nations in 2015. For example, David Satterthwaite and Diana Mitlin argue persuasively that world poverty can only be reduced significantly if urban poor groups, and local organisations, are actively involved in shaping proposals:

‘Despite the key role played by local institutions in implementing and “localising” internationally agreed development and environmental agendas, their roles remain under-recognised and under-supported. Those who are discussing and determining the post-2015 agenda tend to be at a vast distance from local realities’ (Satterthwaite and Mitlin 2014, 257).

It follows that we need to develop a more compelling analysis of the role that place-based communities and interests can play in the development of future public policy. A study of 84 participatory research projects, involving people living in extreme poverty and marginalisation in 107 countries, lends support to the claim that local, place-based projects, involving the co-creation of new solutions, can be very effective (Leavy and Howard 2013). In their recommendations for post-2015 international policy these authors stress, inter alia, the importance of promoting better governance, based on values of accountability, transparency, trust and effectiveness – values that can best be achieved through citizen participation and influence in decision-making.

In my recent book I contrast ‘place-less’ power with ‘place-based’ power (Hambleton 2015). Over the last thirty years or so, place-less leaders, that is, people who are not expected to care about the consequences of their decisions for particular places and communities have gained extraordinary power and influence. The book develops an extended argument, one illustrated with many inspiring examples of place-based leadership drawn from around the world, explaining how this place-less power can be challenged. In line with other critiques of economic globalisation the book makes a case for strengthening the power of people living in particular localities.

Place-based leaders are not, of course, free agents able to do exactly as they choose. On the contrary, various powerful forces shape the context within which civic leaders operate. However, these forces do not erase the potential
for local leadership. Rather, they place limits on what urban leaders may be able to accomplish in particular places and at particular moments in time. **Figure 1** provides a simplified picture of the four sets of forces that shape the world of place-based governance in any given locality.

At the bottom of the diagram are the non-negotiable environmental limits. Ignoring the fact that cities are part of the natural ecosystem is irresponsible, and failure to pay attention to environmental limits will store up unmanageable problems for future generations (Girardet 2008; Jackson 2009). This side of the diagram is drawn with a solid line because, unlike the other sides of the square, these environmental limits are non-negotiable.

**Figure 1 Framing the political space for place-based governance**

Source: Hambleton (2015) p 114

On the left hand side of the diagram are socio-cultural forces – these comprise a mix of people (as actors) and cultural values (that people may hold). Here we find the rich variety of voices found in any city - including the claims of activists, businesses, artists, entrepreneurs, trade unionists, religious organisations, community-based groups, citizens who vote, citizens who don’t vote, children, newly arrived immigrants, anarchists and so on. The people of the city will have different views about the kind of city they wish to live in, and they will have differential capacity to make these views known. Some, maybe many, will claim a right to the city (Brenner et al 2012). We can assume that, in democratic societies at least, elected leaders who pay little or no attention to these political pressures should not expect to stay in office for too long. Expression of citizen voice, to use Hirschman’s term (1970), will see them dismissed at the ballot box.
On the right hand side of the diagram are the horizontal economic forces that arise from the need for localities to compete, to some degree at least, in the wider marketplace - for inward investment and to attract talented people. Various studies have shown that, contrary to neo-liberal dogma, it is possible for civic leaders to bargain with business (Savitch and Kantor 2002).

On the top of Figure 1 we find the legal and policy framework imposed by higher levels of government. In some countries this governmental framing will include legal obligations decreed by supra-national organisations. For example, local authorities in countries that are members of the European Union (EU) are required to comply with EU laws and regulations, and to take note of EU policy guidance. Individual nation states determine the legal status, fiscal power and functions of local authorities within their boundaries. These relationships are subject to negotiation and renegotiation over time. It is clear that Figure 1 simplifies a much more complex reality. The space available for local agency is always shifting, and a key task of local leaders is to be alert to the opportunities for advancing the power of their place within the context of the framing forces prevailing on their area at the time. Figure 1 indicates that place-based governance, shown at the centre, is porous. Successful civic leaders are constantly learning from the environment in which they find themselves in order to discover new insights, co-create new solutions and advance their political objectives. Note that the four forces are not joined up at the corners to create a rigid prison within which civic leadership has to be exercised. On the contrary the boundaries of the overall arena are, themselves, malleable. Depending on the culture and context, imaginative civic leaders may be able to disrupt the pre-existing governmental frame and bring about an expansion in place-based power. Much depends on the national and regional context.

The New Civic Leadership conceptual framework

In the 1980s New Public Management (NPM), which involves the use of private sector management practices in the public sector, gained popularity in many countries (Hoggett 1991). In essence, the approach stems from the belief that government should be run like a private business. Elsewhere I have argued that the introduction of New Public Management techniques has often done great damage to the public service ethos, and that treating citizens as self-interested consumers is a peculiarly narrow way of thinking about public service reform (Hambleton 2015, 61-63). I suggest that those interested in progressive public policy making might find a notion that I describe as New Civic Leadership (NCL) to be more relevant and useful.

New Civic Leadership involves strong, place-based leadership acting to co-create new solutions to public problems by drawing on the complementary strengths of civil society, the market and the state. If we are to understand effective, place-based leadership, we need a conceptual framework that highlights the role of local leaders in facilitating public service innovation. Here I provide a sketch of a possible framework.
Figure 2 suggests that in any given locality there are likely to be five realms of place-based leadership reflecting different sources of legitimacy:

- **Political leadership** – referring to the work of those people elected to leadership positions by the citizenry

- **Public managerial/professional leadership** – referring to the work of public servants, including planners, appointed by local authorities, governments and third sector organisations to plan and manage public services, and promote community wellbeing

- **Community leadership** – referring to the many civic-minded people who give their time and energy to local leadership activities in a wide variety of ways

- **Business leadership** – referring to the contribution made by local business leaders and social entrepreneurs, who have a clear stake in the long-term prosperity of the locality

- **Trade union leadership** – referring to the efforts of trade union leaders striving to improve the pay and working conditions of employees

Figure 2: The realms of place-based leadership

These roles are all important in cultivating and encouraging public service innovation and, crucially, they overlap. I describe the areas of overlap as innovation zones – areas providing many opportunities for inventive behaviour. This is because different perspectives are brought together in
these zones and this can enable active questioning of established approaches.

It is fair to say that the areas of overlap in Figure 2 are often experienced as conflict zones, rather than innovation zones. These spaces do, of course, provide settings for power struggles between competing interests and values. Moreover, power is unequally distributed within these settings. This is precisely why place-based leadership matters. The evidence from my research on urban governance is that civic leadership is critical in ensuring that the innovation zones are orchestrated in a way that promotes a culture of listening that can, in turn, lead to innovation. Civic leaders are, of course, not just ‘those at the top’. All kinds of people can exercise civic leadership and they may be inside or outside the state. The author’s definition of leadership is: ‘Shaping emotions and behaviour to achieve common goals’ (Hambleton 2007 p174). This definition puts emotions centre stage and stresses the importance of the co-creation of new possibilities.

Having explained the five realms of place-based leadership it is now possible to advance the presentation by locating the five realms within the broader context outlined earlier – see Figure 3.

**Figure 3: Place-based leadership in context**

![Figure 3: Place-based leadership in context](image)

Source: Hambleton (2015) p 128

**Inspirational examples of place-based leadership**

This section provides very brief cameos of just three examples of bold place-based leadership drawn from different countries and contexts. These are
chosen to illustrate the exercise of progressive place-based leadership at different scales and in different political systems.

**Pro-poor settlement upgrading, Langrug, South Africa**

Langrug, an informal settlement of around 1,900 shacks in Stellenbosch, Western Cape, is home to about 4,100 people. An effort to tackle the growing problems of the settlement was made in 2010. Senior officials from Stellenbosch Municipality, with the support of an NGO (Community Organisation Resource Centre (CORC)), joined with two social movements - Federation of Urban and Rural Poor (FEDUP) and Informal Settlement Network (ISN) – to develop leadership capacities and a leadership structure for people living in the settlement.

This mobilisation strategy was linked to community based data collection, and a municipal-wide formal agreement between Stellenbosch Municipality and the alliance was signed in 2011. By early 2012, the community leadership had established block committees in every part of the settlement and a number of useful projects were underway, including installation of additional flush toilets, creation of play parks around communal toilets and the development of water management systems.

Staff and students from different institutions – including Worcester Polytechnic and city planning students from the University of Cape Town – have worked with residents to reshape the settlement, introduce hot showers, a post office, a hair salon and other facilities. In 2012, the partnership invited masters degree students from the City and Regional Planning and Landscape Architecture, University of Cape Town, to develop a long term plan for the development of the settlement. In 2012 Langrug won the South African Planning Institute’s (SAPI) award for good ‘community/outreach’ planning. The institute recognised that effective collaborative work at the local level had improved the quality of life and pioneered an imaginative approach to community-based problem solving in difficult circumstances.

**Progressive planning in Malmo, Sweden**

In 1994 civic leaders in the City of Malmo - population 320,000 - were faced with a formidable challenge. The traditional industries of the city, notably shipbuilding and textiles, were in steep decline and, in effect, the long established economic structure of their city was in a state of collapse. The elected leaders, with the support of their officers, responded with great imagination to the difficulties they faced. Under the leadership of Ilmar Reepalu, then Mayor of the City, a new vision for the future of Malmo was developed, one that imagined a thoroughly modern, environmentally aware city.

Initially the emphasis was on responding to climate change, and a major programme to regenerate the old industrial area with far-sighted eco-friendly policies and practices was introduced. Over time, given the increase in new immigrants arriving in the city, a strong commitment to social sustainability
and inclusion was developed to sit alongside the long-standing efforts to promote environmental sustainability.

City planners play a major role in the governance of Malmo. Christer Larsson, Director of City Planning, put it this way: ‘The structure of the city is crucial to our approach to climate change. Through careful planning designed to ensure mixed-use developments close to railway stations we can reduce the need for car travel enormously and, at the same time, improve access for residents to job opportunities’. A sophisticated Comprehensive Plan for Malmo was adopted in 2000 and this was updated in 2014. The plan is designed to grow the city, but with the smallest possible environmental impact by emphasising ‘inward expansion.’ High quality development is concentrated around public transport nodes, and the plan aims to create an appealing city that is socially, environmentally and economically sustainable. An important element of the success of urban governance in Malmo is that there is significant devolution of power to district leaders within the city.

*Equity planning in Portland, Oregon, USA* iv

Portland, Oregon, USA has acquired an international reputation for progressive city planning. A city of 610,000 in a metropolitan area of 2.4 million, Portland has a long established commitment to sustainable urban development. Susan Anderson, Director of the Portland Bureau of Planning and Sustainability, notes that: ‘Over the past eight years, Portland has shifted its focus to not only advance traditional planning and sustainability, but also to more fully understand issues related to equity, displacement and social justice’.

Anderson and her team worked closely with, then Mayor, Sam Adams and other stakeholders to create the Portland Plan, an impressive citywide strategic plan adopted by the City Council in 2012. This bold and innovative document puts advancing equity at the heart of the strategy. The Plan provides a framework for recent housing, economic development, environmental and transportation plans and projects.

Ted Wheeler, the recently elected Mayor of Portland, is building on the work of his predecessors and, given the progressive values of the city, it is not surprising he is now playing an important role in the network of American cities that are opposed to the racist and divisive policies being proposed by US President Trump. For example, shortly after taking up office in January 2017, he reaffirmed the importance of Portland’s role in the Sanctuary Cities movement: ‘Under my leadership as Mayor, the City of Portland will remain a welcoming, safe place for all people regardless of immigration status’.

Anderson works closely with the Mayor and other leaders in the public, private and voluntary sectors and takes the view that planning can play an important role in advancing social and environmental justice in the city and the region. It is important to highlight the contribution of Portland State University (PSU) to local civic leadership. With 30,000 students and a location in the heart of the Portland business district the university is deeply committed to promoting
sustainable and equitable urban development, and faculty and students are active in the vibrant civic networks of the city.

Reflections and emerging themes

The anti-globalisation backlash of recent years reflects, in large measure, the fact that a growing number of people feel relatively powerless to influence decisions that have a direct impact on their lives. In this paper I have suggested that it can advance our understanding of this growth in anger at distant, unaccountable decision makers if we reflect more critically on the shifting balance of influence between, what I have called, place-less and place-based power. In simple terms we can record that the rise of economic globalisation has resulted in a startling growth in the power of place-less decision makers, that is actors who are not expected to care about the consequences of their decisions for particular places and communities. This is problematic and this power balance needs to be altered dramatically.

What more specific themes emerge from the analysis presented in this paper for the Panel 12 theme of ‘Achieving inclusive urban development through scaling up participatory and co-productive planning’? The discussion below identifies five topics that could be explored at the conference.

1) Place matters

The paper opened by suggesting that the significance of place is, on the whole, undervalued in public policy. Elsewhere I offer an extended discussion of the meaning of place, and set out five arguments why place should be given much more attention in policy making:

- Place-based identity
- Environment, local loyalty and the quality of life
- Enhancing governmental effectiveness
- Places as building blocks for democracy
- The need to combat place-less power (Hambleton 2015, 79-107)

Many efforts to develop participatory planning are place-strong. They draw strength from local feelings of attachment and efficacy. Across the world, millions of communities are enhancing local wellbeing by, in effect, building on the power of place. In this paper the example of Langrug, South Africa provides a respected example of effective, local place-based leadership.

The other two examples mentioned in this paper – Malmo, Sweden and Portland, Oregon – illustrate the value of a multi-level approach to place-based leadership. In these cities those responsible for civic leadership have been successful in scaling up participatory models of planning. In both these cases there are very active community-based associations at the neighbourhood level and city governance structures are designed to respond creatively to local demands for responsiveness. But, integrated with good neighbourhood planning and decision-making, city leaders in Malmo and Portland have developed progressive strategies at the citywide level.
focussed, in both cases, on promoting equitable as well as sustainable development.

2) **Local government matters**

This second point is, in fact, closely related to the first because place and local government are deeply intertwined. Indeed, I have defined local government as 'place-based leadership for the common good' (Hambleton 2015, 177). There is an important political dimension here. It suits global capital to have weak local governments, so far as possible, across the world. This is because relatively feeble local authorities will tend to lack the political and legal authority to mount effective opposition to the impositions of place-less capital. Neoliberal politicians, sympathetic to the interests of multinational companies, have, then, contributed to the growth of place-less power not just by attacking the idea of planning in the public interest, but also by either weakening the institutions of strong elected local governments, where they exist, or by opposing the creation of stronger local governments in countries where local democracy is under developed.

Reference was made earlier in the paper to the way that international thinking relating to both the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) has neglected the voices of local government, civil society and the urban poor. This failure to engage with place-based communities nearly derailed the U. N. Habitat III Summit, the major global conference, held in Quito, Ecuador in October 2016. In the event, the Summit agreed to back a ‘New Urban Agenda’, but it was not long before incoming U.N. Secretary-General Antonio Guterres appointed a global panel of urban experts to assess the future of UN-Habitat (the UN’s lead agency on urban issues). The panel, which reported in early August, has recommended, *inter alia*, the creation of a new entity – ‘UN Urban’ – to stimulate interest in cities across the U. N. system (United Nations 2017).

At the same time the panel recommends that UN-Habitat, based in Nairobi, should continue, but that it should have a sharper focus on two topics: 1) equity in urban development, and 2) the setting of urban planning norms through rules and legislation. From a local government point of view we can note that, on the plus side, the expert panel recommends new governance arrangements that could, potentially, give local government leaders and non-government figures more voice in the future. For example, the panel suggests that together they should have ten representatives who will advise a new UN Policy Board. Critics have, however, already argued that these proposals do not go far enough in giving local governments a strong ‘seat at the table’. The panel’s report will be debated at U. N. Headquarters in New York City on 5-6 September 2017. Watch this space.

3) **Place-based leadership deserves more attention**

A central thrust of this paper has been to argue that policy makers and scholars concerned to achieve inclusive urban development should give much more attention to leadership and, in particular, the cultivation and
development of effective place-based leadership. It is unsettling to note that papers prepared as part of the construction of the United Nation’s Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), as well as the SDGs themselves (agreed in 2015), say little or nothing about the importance of developing local leadership. Leadership also goes largely unmentioned in work carried out to underpin the United Nations New Urban Agenda, agreed in Quito, Ecuador in 2016. In my view there appears to be a significant, and worrying, ‘leadership gap’ in thinking regarding the creation of sustainable and equitable cities and city regions. This is startling when one recognises that practitioners and activists, when they refer to successful, social innovations with which they are familiar, often refer to the inspirational role of local civic leaders in bringing about change.

The three case studies of progressive planning presented in this paper – Langrug, Malmo and Portland – all highlight the important, indeed vital, role of passionate, place-based leadership in bringing about change. The New Civic Leadership (NCL) conceptual framework provides one way of understanding the nature of place-based leadership in any given locality. The framework can be used to throw light on the exercise of civic leadership in any given locality. It can, for example, be used to help analyse local power, and it can illuminate who is gaining and who is losing in the governance process. It is important to make a wider point. The approach to leadership adopted by successful, progressive leaders is not the out of date ‘top down’ approach to leadership, associated with the early development of leadership studies - one in which senior charismatic figures claim to have the answers and tell their subordinates what to do. On the contrary, these, and other, examples of effective place-based leadership emphasise listening to diverse views, bringing people together and releasing the collective intelligence and insights of groups and organisations.

4) Innovation Zones can enable the co-creation of new solutions

The New Civic Leadership framework suggests that there are likely to be five overlapping realms of leadership in any given locality and that these realms reflect different sources of legitimacy. The areas of overlap between these realms are described as innovation zones – areas providing many opportunities for new approaches to be explored. This is because people with very different backgrounds and experiences are brought together in these zones and, if supported by good facilitation, people can draw strengths from these differences to generate new ideas. It may be that this idea of innovation zones can spur fresh thinking on how to scale up participatory or co-productive planning to the city scale.

In my view the central challenge here concerns the development of more effective approaches to the leadership in public service innovation. I explore this theme in some detail in Chapter 6 of my book and here I highlight a few key lessons from this international research. The first point to stress is that there is no such thing as best practice. Rather localities can assist each other by sharing relevant practice. Second, successful scaling up requires senior leaders in a locality to orchestrate a local process of social discovery. Local
leaders can play a crucial role in articulating the importance of tackling inequality, the central political challenge of our time, and can set a tone by their words and actions that promotes experimentation and risk taking in relation to tackling inequality. Put simply they can shape emotions and behaviour to create inclusive places. Third, in relation to the theme of driving forward urban innovation at city scale, public leaders, and I include here leaders from all five realms of place-based leadership (see Figure 2), have four core tasks: 1) Creating space for innovation, 2) Getting the right people in the space, 3) Demonstrating emotional commitment, and 4) Modelling appropriate behaviour. The three cameos presented in this paper provide a glimpse of this kind of outgoing approach to civic leadership, one that places a high value on improvisation, one that values citywide innovation as well as local experimentation.

5) Scholars should focus more attention on study of ‘success’ stories

Lastly, it would be a step forward if scholars concerned to advance understanding of progressive urban development devoted much more time and attention to the study of successful efforts in different settings and at different scales. Social scientists and scientists have created an immense body of valuable scholarship on the changing dynamics of cities and city regions in both developed and developing countries. There are now many fine critical studies of urban and regional processes and outcomes, including a welcome expansion of literature on cities in the global South (eg Parnell and Pieterse 2014). This literature provides fundamental insights on the interests and processes shaping contemporary society.

Still in short supply, however, are critical studies explaining how urban innovations in particular places have made significant steps forward in the creation of just and sustainable cities and city regions. It follows that an important question to add to the development studies field of inquiry, one that focuses on lesson drawing from successful efforts to include the excluded, is: ‘How did they do it?’ Academics who choose to give more attention to positive achievements in people-centred approaches to inclusive and sustainable urban development will, in my view, soon find that they are advancing our understanding of place-based leadership.

References


**Endnotes**

i The author’s book provides 17 examples of inspirational, place-based leadership drawn from 14 different countries, including developing as well as developed countries.

ii More details are provided in Hambleton (2015) pp 156-161.

iii More details are provided in Hambleton (2015) pp 197-201.

iv More details are provided in Hambleton (2015) pp 298-301.

v The theme of leading public service innovation is examined in Chapter 6 of Hambleton (2015) pp 139-171.