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Place-based Leadership and Radical Innovation

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Introduction

Can place-based leadership bring about successful public service innovation? If yes, what lessons can be drawn from break-through practice? This paper discusses the changing possibilities for place-based leadership in a rapidly globalising world. The author is preparing a book – *Leading the Inclusive City. Place-based innovation for a bounded planet* – for publication in 2014. This paper, which introduces themes that are examined at greater length in book, discusses evolving debates about governance and leadership, sets out a new conceptual model for understanding place-based leadership and, in particular, highlights the role of civic leadership in promoting public service innovation. A final section draws out a series of international lessons on the role of local leadership in fostering experimental behaviour and offers some reflections on the implications for urban governance.

Evolving debates about governance and leadership

The shift from local government to local governance is a familiar theme in modern debates relating to the governance of place (Goss 2001; Denters and Rose 2005; Haus et al 2005; Heinelt et al 2006; Davies and Imbroscio 2009). In broad terms local governance refers to the processes and structures of a variety of public, private, and community and voluntary sector bodies at the local level (Hambleton and Gross 2007). It acknowledges the diffusion of responsibility for collective provision and recognises the contribution of different levels and sectors. As Peters argues:

> *'Governing has never been easy, but it has become all the more complicated… The process of governing now involves more actors, more policy areas that impinge upon one another, and most importantly involves a wider range of goals. With the multiplicity of targets being pursued by public action, designing programmes and processes becomes all the more difficult'* (Peters 2011, p11).

The UK Coalition Government, elected in May 2010, advocates the development of a 'Big Society' (HM Government 2010a; HM Government 2010b). The central idea is to encourage communities to help themselves,

rather than rely on a continuing expansion of state-run services (Norman 2010; Tuddenham 2010). The emerging national policy is, then, clearly aligned with a 'governance' approach. Ministers argue that the state can only do so much. Indeed, they go further and argue that, because of the structural deficit in the national accounts, the state must do less. Some observers detect an anti-state philosophy in the approach the government has adopted thus far. Certainly the scale of the cuts in public spending is unprecedented in recent times.

The implications of the shift from government to governance for local political leadership are significant. Firstly, we can note that, just as approaches to governing have evolved, so too have approaches to leadership in general and local leadership in particular. Changes in society and culture are constantly reshaping the meaning and nature of leadership, and theories of leadership are, not surprisingly, evolving and developing (Burns 1978; Grint 1997; Keohane 2010). Explanations of the evolution of leadership theories are contested. At risk of oversimplifying, we can highlight four major, elements or approaches:

- Personal qualities of leaders
- Leadership and institutional design
- The nature of the leadership task
- The context for leadership

The 'Great Man' (sic) theory of leadership of the 19th century placed the emphasis on the characteristics of the individual leader – 'heroic' figures, with the right personality traits, were the focus of attention. This way of thinking was challenged, in the early 20th century, by the notion of 'scientific management'. This approach – exemplified by the Taylorism and Fordism of production line management in large factories – stressed the important role of leaders in designing procedures and practices in order to establish control over the workforce. In 'scientific management' roles and relationships, as well as tasks, are carefully defined and the monitoring of performance is central. Morgan (1986) suggests that the 'scientific' approach saw the organisation as an instrument of domination. This approach was, however, challenged by a third strategy. Human relations theories gave more attention to the motives and feelings of workers, albeit often with the continuing aim of exploiting them. A fourth theme – one that cross cuts the other three – is the recognition that leaders need to tune in to the context both within and outside their organisation:

> '*The size and culture of an organisation, the expectations of followers, the purposes the organisation is intended to pursue, and its history and traditions are all relevant in considering what kind of leadership is most likely to succeed. Behaviour by a leader that seems perfectly appropriate in some contexts may appear quite out of place in another'* (Keohane 2010 p10)

These four themes are all find expression in modern leadership theory and practice. Thus, some leadership writers focus on the development of the

leadership skills of individuals by drawing lessons from inspirational leaders (Adair 2002). Until relatively recently, this biographical approach dominated discussion of urban leadership within political science (Stone 1995). Some writers have highlighted the role of leadership in shaping strategy, and driving organisational performance through the development of, for example, 'joined up' government, and the imposition of measurable performance targets on public servants (Mulgan 2009). An updated version of the third theme, of human relations, is now deservedly receiving much more attention as both scholars and practitioners have come to recognise the importance of the emotional dimension of leadership (Goleman et al 2002; Heifetz and Linsky 2002; Haslam et al 2011).

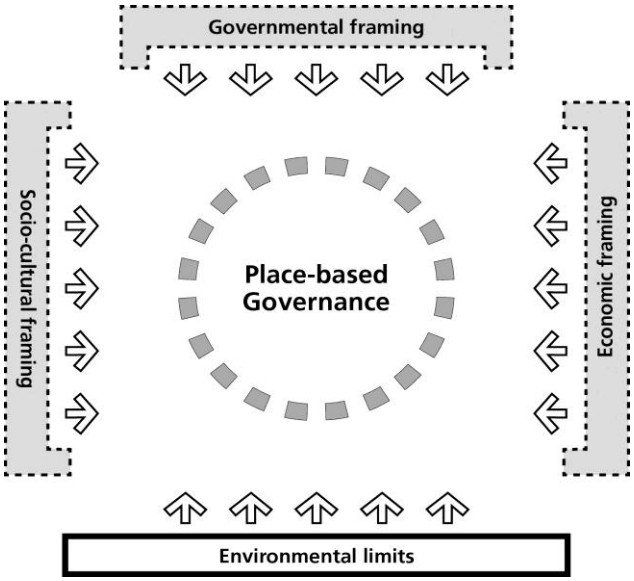
As part of this there has been growing interest in the important distinction, made by Burns (1978), between 'transactional leadership' and 'transformational leadership'. In the former leaders engage in a process of exchange with their followers – for example, a pay rise for outstanding work. Burns argues that the latter is both more complex and more potent – the transforming leader tunes into the feelings and emotions of followers, and seeks to stimulate enthusiasm and commitment through a process that is more like bonding than bartering. The fourth theme of developing context sensitive approaches to leadership, including developing the role of leaders in both responding to and reshaping organisational cultures, is now mainstream thinking in modern leadership programmes in both the private and the public sectors (Sashkin and Sashkin 2003).

All these four themes have influenced debates about local leadership in the UK and in other countries. My book explores the changing nature of civic or place-based leadership and, in particular, attempts to link leadership theories to the notion of place (Hambleton 2014). Urban political science reveals two main logics to the power of place in modern societies: an economic logic and a political logic. In the next section we explore the way these forces frame the political space for the exercise of place-based leadership. And we add to the conventional political science approach by adding in environmental limits, which also shape what local leaders can do.

Framing the power of place

Civic, or place-based leaders, do not operate in a vacuum. On the contrary, various powerful forces shape the context within which civic leaders operate. These forces do not disable local leadership. Rather they place limits on what civic leaders may be able to accomplish in particular places and at particular moments in time. **Figure 1** provides a simplified picture of the forces that shape the world of place-based governance in any given locality.

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



Let's run through this figure. 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. This side of the square is drawn with a solid line because, unlike the other sides of the square, these environmental limits are non-negotiable. 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 know. Some, maybe many, will claim a right to the city (Lefebvre 1996). 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). Recognising the power of economic forces, including the growth in global competition between localities, does not require civic leaders to become mere servants of private capital. 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 imposed 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. This is what conceptual frameworks do. In reality the four sets of forces framing local action do not necessarily carry equal weight, and the situation in any given city is, to some extent, fluid and changing. The space available for local agency shifts over time, 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. The figure 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. Having outlined the 'frame' within which place-based leadership is exercised I now explain in a little more detail what place-based leadership means – and, in particular, I explore the critical role of leadership in bringing about public service innovation.

Place-based leadership and innovation zones

This section provides a brief presentation of a conceptual framework developed to enhance understanding of place-based leadership and, in particular, the role of leadership in promoting public service innovation. It draws on recent research carried out at the Centre for Sustainable Planning and Environments.[i] Civic leadership is 'place-based', meaning that those exercising decision-making power have a concern for the communities living in a particular 'place'. Some of the most powerful decision-makers in modern society are 'place-less' leaders in the sense that they are not concerned with the geographical impact of their decisions. Following Stiglitz I take the view that an unfettered market, especially in the context of globalisation, can destroy communities (Stiglitz 2006). There is now a substantial body of literature on 'social capital' and the role that it plays in fostering a caring society (Putnam 2000; Gilchrist 2004). There are different kinds of social capital and sometimes this capital can be used to exclude groups – the creation of social capital will not necessarily reduce socio-economic inequalities. However, with the right kind of civic leadership – of which more in a moment – it may be possible to encourage the bridging of social ties between different social groups.

As discussed earlier, there is a large body of literature on leadership - on leadership theories, leadership styles and alternative perspectives. In previous work I have defined leadership as 'shaping emotions and behaviour to achieve common goals' (Hambleton 2007 p174). This implies a wide range of activities aimed at generating both new insights and new ways of working together – it prizes respect for the feelings and attitudes of others as well as a strong commitment to collaboration.

Our approach to the study of place-based leadership is informed by this perspective and, in particular, we believe that the feelings people have for 'their' place have been seriously neglected in both the leadership literature and the public service innovation literature. Following Hoggett (2009 p175) we take the view that approaches to leadership need to develop a form of 'passionate reason'. How we feel is not a distraction from reason – on the contrary: 'Not only are our feelings essential to our capacity for thought but they are themselves a route to reason' (Hoggett 2009 p177).

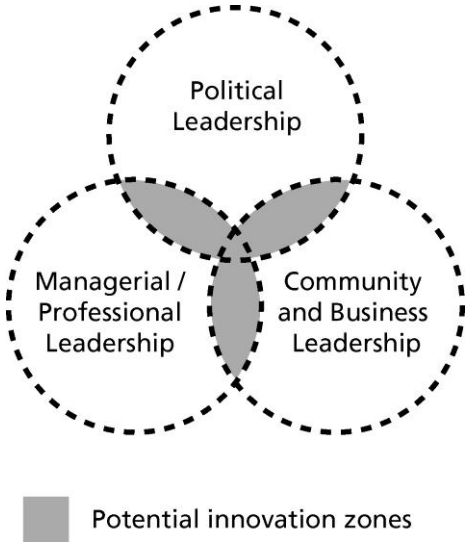
Civic leaders are found in the public, private, and community/voluntary sectors and they operate at many geographical levels – from the street block to an entire sub region and beyond. We believe it is helpful to distinguish three realms of place-based leadership reflecting different sources of legitimacy:

- **Political leadership** – referring to the work of those people elected to leadership positions by the citizenry. These are, by definition, political leaders. Thus, directly elected mayors, all elected local councillors, and Members of Parliament are political leaders. Having said that we should acknowledge that different politicians carry different roles and responsibilities and will view their political roles in different ways.
- **Managerial/professional leadership** – referring to the work of public servants appointed by local authorities, central government and third sector organisations to plan and manage public services, and promote community wellbeing. These officers bring professional and managerial expertise to the tasks of local governance.
- **Community and business leadership** – referring to the work of the many civic-minded people who give their time and energy to local leadership activities in a wide variety of ways. These may be community activists, business leaders, trade union leaders, social entrepreneurs, voluntary sector leaders, religious leaders, higher education leaders and so on. The potential contribution to civic leadership of an independent and engaged voluntary and community sector is important here, and also engaged and locally embedded businesses.

These roles are all important in cultivating and encouraging public service innovation and, crucially, they overlap. We describe the areas of overlap between these different realms of leadership as **innovation zones** – areas providing many opportunities for innovation – see **Figure 2**. This is because **different perspectives are brought together** within these zones and this

can enable active questioning of established approaches. Heterogeneity is the key to fostering innovation. We are suggesting that civic leadership has a critical role in creating the conditions for different people to come together – people who might not normally meet – to have a creative dialogue, and then to follow up their ideas. We present the circles in **Figure 2** as dotted lines as we seek to emphasise the connectivity, or potential connectivity, across the realms of civic leadership.

Figure 2: Realms of civic leadership



It can be claimed that the areas of overlap that we have identified in **Figure 2** are 'conflict zones', not 'innovation zones'. It is certainly the case that these zones often provide settings for power struggles between competing interests and values. And it is important to acknowledge that, within these settings, power is unequally distributed. It is possible that formalized partnership settings can operate as innovation zones, but in our experience this is often not the case. Our research on public service innovation suggests that it is the more informal, open-ended, personal interactions that matter in a creative process (Hambleton and Howard 2012). This creativity can be cultivated if leaders step out of their own 'realm' of authority and engage with the perspectives and realities of others. This means going into what one public service leader described to us as one's 'ZOUD' – or Zone of Uncomfortable Debate. Here, different approaches, values and priorities collide, and leaders need to be prepared to work in this 'zone' and to support others to do so.[ii]

Wise civic leadership is critical in ensuring that settings of this kind – sometimes referred to as the 'soft spaces' of planning (Illsley et al 2010) – are orchestrated in a way that promotes a culture of listening that can, in turn, lead to innovation (Kahane 2004). Inventive place-based leaders can reconfigure conflict zones into innovation zones and, indeed, this is one of the main challenges that they face.

In sum, leadership capacity in modern society is dispersed. Recent work in the UK by NESTA supports the findings of our own research. Facilitative leadership skills are becoming increasingly important:

> 'In more open, emergent systems, with many players operating in more fluid environments, and where the task is to create solutions rather than repeat tasks, then successful leadership will be more like leading a community of volunteers, who cannot be instructed. Leadership is likely to be far more interactive and distributed rather than concentrated and instructional' (Leadbeater 2013, p50).

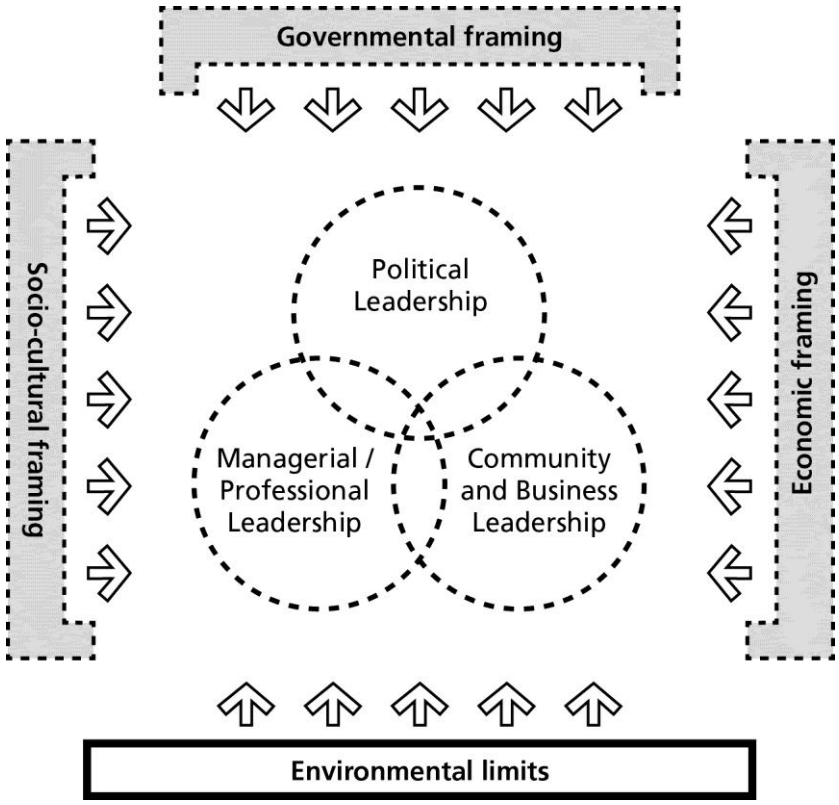
Our systems of local governance need to respect and reflect that diversity if decisions taken in the public interest are going to enjoy legitimacy. Further, more decentralized approaches - both across localities and within each realm of civic leadership - can empower informal leaders to be part of the dialogue.

Figure 2 represents a drastic simplification of a more complex reality. It is not intended to show how the dynamics of local power struggles actually unfold. The relative power of the three realms varies by locality and this would imply different sized circles, whereas we have kept them all the same size. Moreover, the realms shift in influence over time. The interactions across the realms are also complex and, of course, there are many different interests operating within each realm. Nevertheless we believe that the notion of three different realms – with leadership stemming from different sources of legitimacy within each realm – provides a helpful way of framing discussion about civic leadership.

Place-based leadership in context

Earlier in this paper I explained how various forces shape the context within which place-based leadership is exercised and I set this out in diagrammatic form in **Figure 1**. Having now explained the three realms of place-based leadership it is possible to advance the presentation by locating the three realms within this broader context – see **Figure 3**.

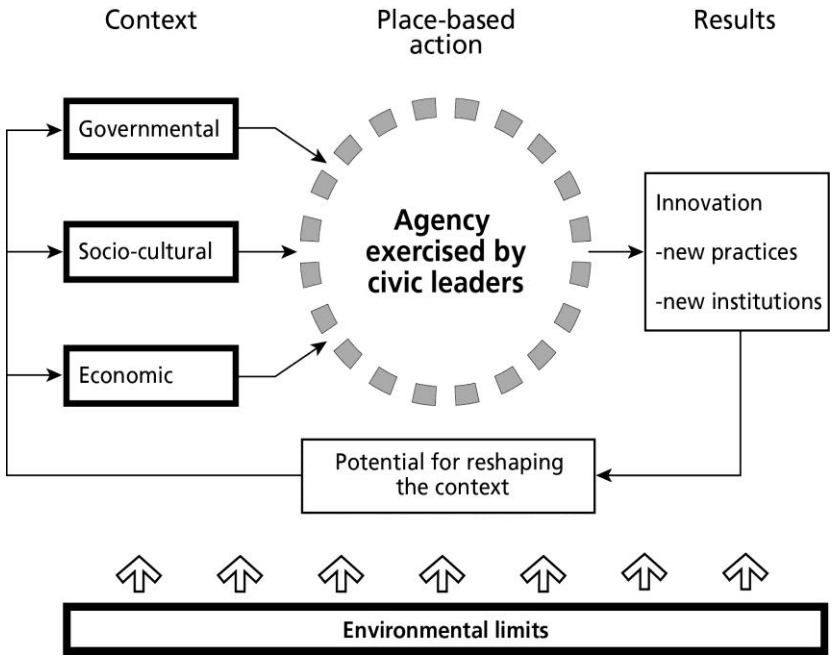
Figure 3 Place-based leadership in context



Skelcher et al (2013 p24) provide an interesting framework, a kind of flow chart, for the analysis of governance transitions. In their model they identify two forces shaping the agency exercised by local actors: 'ideational context' and the 'institutional legacy.' They argue that, aside from the imaginative agency of individuals and groups, governance change is driven by two factors – the big ideas that take hold within a community of actors (the ideational context) and the normative logics inherent in the institutions of government (the institutional legacy). An attractive feature of their model is that they show how emergent practices can, in turn, reshape the big ideas and the institutional legacy.

My own model is closely aligned with their approach – see **Figure 4**. The main differences are that I suggest that four forces, not two, shape the space for local action. My analysis suggests that environmental limits are critical, and I also try to bring out the tensions between the political and the economic drivers of local change (rather than collapsing them into one 'ideational' driver). **Figure 4** has the benefit of highlighting the dynamic possibilities for place-based leadership.

Figure 4 A process model of civic leadership



In the next section I draw attention to two important matters – the purpose of place-based leadership and the need for local leadership to transcend parochialism.

Purpose-driven local leadership

Leadership is inextricably linked with purpose. Stone (1995) examines modern urban politics and observes that aimless interaction requires no leadership. In contrast, in cases where a compelling vision emerges from an inclusive process and is then articulated by a leader or leaders, the results can be inspiring. A clear statement of purpose (or mission) can provide a formative experience, shaping the identity of group members, and articulating shared values and aspirations. In the mid-1990s Sir Steve Bullock, who is now the directly elected mayor of the London borough of Lewisham, and I were commissioned by UK local government to develop national guidance on local political leadership (Hambleton and Bullock 1996). In carrying out this research we asked leading figures in UK local government what they thought constituted successful local authority leadership, and the indicators of good political leadership that emerged are summarised in **Figure 5**.

Figure 5 Indicators of good local political leadership

- *Articulating a clear vision for the area*

  Setting out an agenda of what the future of the area should be and developing strategic policy direction. Listening to local people and leading initiatives.

- *Promoting the qualities of the area*

  Building civic pride, promoting the benefits of the locality and attracting inward investment.

- *Winning resources*

  Winning power and funding from higher levels of government and maximising income from a variety of sources.

- *Developing partnerships*

  Successful leadership is characterised by the existence of a range of partnerships, both internal and external, working to a shared view of the needs of the local community.

- *Addressing complex social issues*

  The increasingly fragmented nature of local government and the growing number of service providers active in a given locality means that complex issues that cross boundaries, or are seen to fall between areas of interest, need to be taken up by leaderships that have an overview and can bring together the right mix of agencies to tackle a particular problem.

- *Maintaining support and cohesion*

  Managing disparate interests and keeping people on board are essential if the leadership is to maintain authority.

Source: Adapted from Hambleton, R. and Bullock, S. (1996) *Revitalising Local Democracy – The Leadership Options.* London: Local Government Management Board.

There is no suggestion here that the indicators listed in **Figure 5** are comprehensive or appropriate in all settings. Rather they are offered as a possible set of aspirations for local political leadership and to stimulate fresh thinking.

Transcending parochialism

Back in 1975 US Senator Mark Hatfield (Republican – Oregon) advocated the introduction of neighbourhood government legislation in the USA – the Neighbourhood Government Act 1975. His aim was to bring about a massive

transfer of tax monies from higher levels of government to the neighbourhood level. The legislation went nowhere, but it provides us with a warning note. This Act was intended to make rich neighbourhoods formidably wealthy at the expense of less well off areas. In advocating a much stronger role for place-based leadership in urban governance I am not seeking to promote this kind of selfish, parochial behaviour. Rather, following George Frederickson (2005), I am suggesting that place-based leaders should be guided by 'instincts of appropriateness' and what is understood to be right and fair. Place-based leadership calls for the ability to hold onto the ethical purpose of governance while also containing the uncertainties and complexities inherent in the leadership role.

Frederickson, as well as grasping the importance of facilitative leadership in the modern city, also makes a strong case for leaders to transcend the geographical limitations of municipal boundaries:

> 'Although they are working from the vantage point of particular jurisdictions, leaders practicing ... governance see the big social, economic, and political context in which they are embedded... To serve a city well, its leaders must transcend the city' (Frederickson 2005 p6)

It follows that civic leaders must be able to build strong grassroots relationships alongside their horizontal and vertical relationships. Local leaders need to be able to see the bigger picture, but at the same time remain connected with people across the city, in ways that empower them to take action.

Conclusions

Some writers contend that cities and localities are helpless victims in a global flow of events. This neoliberal perspective argues that labour and capital are mobile, people follow jobs, and industry opts to move to distant locations where the cost of land and labour is lower (Peterson 1981). A central claim of this economic logic is that cities and localities must conceive of themselves as business corporations – as efficiency-maximising organisations, which must strive to enhance economic productivity as determined by the needs of capital.

A contrasting way of explaining the behaviour of cities is provided by a political logic. This suggests that cities, far from being business corporations, are political entities with, in democracies, elected civic leaders who are accountable to their citizens. Cities have particular socio-cultural values, histories, traditions and identities. It follows that civic leaders should be expected to pursue policies and practices relating to the needs and values of their residents, not the requirements of place-less capital.

In this paper I have suggested that, within constraints, place-based leaders can exercise purpose-driven leadership. The paper offers a way of visualising the political space available to local leaders, and I hope that it may help leaders consider how to expand the political space available to them. The

narrative has emphasised the fact that local leadership can emanate from any of three main realms of leadership in any given locality – the political realm, the managerial/professional realm and the community and business realm.

As well as drawing attention to the potential of place-based leadership to bring about significant change, the paper has highlighted the role of local leadership in creating innovation zones – areas of overlap between the realms of civic leadership. It is often in these zones, areas of inventive connectivity, where new ideas can be nurtured into practical proposals for public action. My book provides many examples of place-based leadership in action. Here I have chosen to focus on the concepts underlying this approach to local governance and I welcome comments on the strengths and weaknesses of this presentation.

Acknowledgements

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Endnotes

[i] I would like to acknowledge the contribution of Joanna Howard to the development of this conceptual framework. The framework was first created in work I carried out for the Royal Commission on Auckland Governance (Hambleton 2009), further developed in a scoping report for the Local Authority Research Council Initiative (LARCI) (Hambleton et al 2009) and then tested out more thoroughly in an Anglo-Dutch research project. Thanks are due to Bas Denters, Pieter-Jan Klok and Mirjan Oude Vrielink for their major contribution to the Anglo-Dutch study – they participated in our international workshops, helped to develop the model and also wrote Chapter 4 of the research report (Hambleton and Howard 2012; 2013).

[ii] I am grateful to Katherine Rossiter, Managing Director of the Society of Local Authority Chief Executives and Senior Managers (SOLACE), for this insight, provided at our Anglo-Dutch Workshop on Place-based Leadership (9 November 2011). SOLACE would like to acknowledge the source of this concept as The Cranfield School of Management. For further information and to read Dr Catherine Bailey's discussion of the 'ZOUD', go to: http://www.som.cranfield.ac.uk/som/dinamic-content/media/knowledgeinterchange/topics/20110404/Article.pdf