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Place-based collaboration: Leadership for a changing world

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Abstract

Placeless power, meaning the exercise of power by decision-makers who are unconcerned about the impact of their decisions on communities living in particular places, has grown significantly in the last thirty years. A consequence is that societies are becoming more unequal. Even in the wealthy global cities modern capitalism is increasing inequality at a formidable rate. In a new book the author provides an international, comparative analysis of the efforts being made by place-based leaders to create inclusive, sustainable cities. This article draws on the evidence presented in the book to suggest that place-based leaders can play a significant role in advancing social justice, promoting care for the environment and bolstering community empowerment. An opening section introduces the idea of place-based power, providing a context for the subsequent discussion. A second section sets out a new way of conceptualising the roles of place-based leaders in any given context, a framework described as the New Civic Leadership. This distinguishes five different realms of civic leadership. The third section provides an example of place-based leadership in action. It outlines the way local leadership has brought about a remarkable transformation of the central area of Melbourne, Australia. A final section presents a comparative discussion of three themes relating to place-based leadership and local collaboration: (i) the changing possibilities for place-based leadership in our rapidly globalising world, (ii) the need for outward-facing local government leadership given the changing nature of public policy challenges and (iii) the role of place-based leadership in bringing about radical public innovation.

Keywords: Civic leadership, local government, collaboration, public innovation

Introduction

Local government in Ireland is facing new challenges. The Local Government Reform Act, 2014, introduced new structures, modified roles and imposed changed budgetary processes. These reforms are, in themselves, radical and they undoubtedly unsettle established ways of doing things. However, the challenges facing elected local governments in Ireland go well beyond the need to adapt to the new legislative requirements. In common with their counterparts in many other countries, local authorities in Ireland are now actively reconsidering the way they lead their communities. Possibilities are opening up for developing new ways of working with other public agencies and stakeholders in society, and there are, perhaps, opportunities for changing the way elected local governments relate to the citizens they are there to serve.

This article, by drawing on recent research on place-based leadership in a number of different countries, offers a contribution to the current debate about how to improve the effectiveness and democratic vitality of Irish local government. The argument unfolds in four steps. An opening section introduces the idea of place-based power, providing a context for the subsequent discussion. A second section sets out a new way of conceptualising the roles of place-based leaders in any given context, a framework described as the New Civic Leadership (NCL). This framework can, perhaps, offer a new way of understanding the nature of modern civic leadership. A new book, written by the author, presents seventeen examples of inspirational place-based leadership (Hambleton, 2015). The third section in this article provides a summary of just one of these innovation stories, outlining the way local leadership has brought about a remarkable transformation of the central area of Melbourne, Australia. A final section presents a comparative discussion of three themes relating to place-based leadership and local collaboration: (i) the changing possibilities for place-based leadership in our rapidly globalising world, (ii) the need for outward-facing local government leadership given the changing nature of public policy challenges and (iii) the role of place-based leadership in bringing about radical public innovation.

Contextualising place-based power

Civic leaders in particular cities do not operate in a vacuum. The power of local governance is shaped by a variety of political, economic, social and environmental forces. These pressures are outlined here. A key theme in this discussion is that the political space available to local leaders is *not fixed* – the frame can be expanded.¹ The first point to stress is that national context matters. Some countries attribute a very high societal value to independently elected local authorities and grant them substantial autonomy – for example, Sweden. In others the central state has weakened local government to the point where the locally elected politicians cannot even decide on the level of local tax they wish to impose on their citizens – for example, the UK. In Ireland the 2014 legislative changes offer opportunities for enhancing the role of elected local governments.

Alongside constitutional and cultural differences, Denters & Rose (2005, p. 243) draw attention to the growing importance of multilevel governance ‘involving complicated patterns of vertical and horizontal relationships between municipalities which cross borders and produce new economic and political spaces’. These patterns, sometimes described as network governance, are shaped by socio-political history and the changing dynamics of local/central relations in any given country. Skelcher et al. (2013, p. 43) remind us that ‘cities have deeply embedded institutional legacies’. These legacies may establish norms, or expectations, that constrain the political space, or agency, for local actors in both fairly direct and subtler ways. While recognising the importance of these influences we should be careful not to overstate the significance of the institutional legacy. Spurred on by local social movements and public pressures, civic leaders can invent new practices that add to, or even replace, the existing normative framework. In the Irish context it can, perhaps, be suggested that the Local Government Reform Act, 2014, is intended to help local authorities move away from past practices.

Urban political science reveals two main logics relating to the power of place in modern societies: an economic logic and a political logic. A third lens will be added in this paper, but let us take the two well-

¹ The notion of political space is well established in urban studies and social geography. For example, Lefevre (2010) discusses the process of building metropolitan areas as political spaces. He defines political space as a space of involvement of political, economic and social players where a legitimate collective action is produced, an action necessary to address existing issues and orient the future.

established perspectives first. Hank Savitch and Paul Kantor (2002) provide a helpful overview of these drivers of urban development, and I draw on their analysis here. The economic logic claims that cities are required to tussle in a competitive marketplace and must strive to promote economic growth at all costs. Tiebout (1956) made this claim over fifty years ago, when he suggested that people and industry choose their locations based upon a simple cost–benefit ratio of goods and services available. Building on this ‘public choice’ perspective, Peterson (1981) suggests that, owing to local resource deficits and the need to maintain their competitive position, localities have become dependent on higher levels of government and private investment for survival. On this analysis urban dependency increases as the world becomes more global. Labour and capital are mobile, people follow jobs, and industry opts to move to more distant locations where the cost of land and labour is lower. A central claim of this economic logic is that cities 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 the 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. Localities 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 placeless capital. Opinions differ on the most appropriate political strategy to adopt. For example, David Harvey offers a Marxist analysis and suggests that:

The traditional city has been killed by rampant capitalist development, a victim of the never-ending need to dispose of over-accumulating capital driving towards endless and sprawling urban growth no matter what the social, environmental, or political consequences. (Harvey, 2012, pp. xv–xvi)

He argues that the whole capitalist system of perpetual accumulation has to be overthrown and replaced. Susan Fainstein, while agreeing with much of Harvey’s diagnosis of the problem, argues for a strategy of ‘non-reformist reforms’. She argues that:

transformational movements aimed at a more egalitarian society must find a rationale based in human motivation rather than historical inevitability and, if not committed to or expecting revolution, must seek to achieve their aims through politics. (Fainstein, 2010, p. 19)

Political parties from across the political spectrum present alternative visions of how to create a fairer, more prosperous society – with some being more convincing than others.

A third logic shaping the space available for place-based leadership is ecological logic. It is essential for civic leaders to build a concern for the natural environment into the *heart* of their approach to urban governance. The rapid increase in greenhouse gas concentrations, and the potentially disastrous climatic consequences, suggests that city leaders, public managers and others need to pay much more attention to the ecological footprint of current policies and practices. Boone & Modarres outline seven pathways to sustainable development (2006, pp. 185–9). They advocate a precautionary approach rather than adopting a blind faith that all will be better. Their suggestions tie in with the advice of others seeking a more sustainable approach to local policymaking and practice (Girardet, 2008; Parkin, 2010; Pearson et al., 2014). These authors, and the many who share their values, recognise that the dominance of market thinking is not contributing to human progress. Tim Jackson puts it this way:

There is a sense... in which individual prosperity is curtailed in the presence of social calamity. That things are going well for me personally is of little consolation if my family, my friends and my community are all in dire straits. My prosperity and the prosperity of those around me are intertwined. (Jackson, 2009, p. 1)

His book is focused on finding a credible vision of what it means for human society to flourish in the context of ecological limits.

This environmental dimension has been seriously neglected in urban political science and public administration, and this limitation needs to be rectified. Some may argue that ecological imperatives do not amount to a distinct perspective – they may feel that the political and/or economic drivers will, for good or ill, carry (or not carry) the environmental arguments. This is to misunderstand the nature of the sustainability crisis now facing modern societies. Nature needs a distinct seat at the urban governance table if cities are to achieve social and ecological resilience.

The New Civic Leadership conceptual framework

The above discussion suggests that place-based leaders are not free agents able to do exactly as they choose. 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 local leaders may be able to accomplish in particular places and at particular moments in time.²

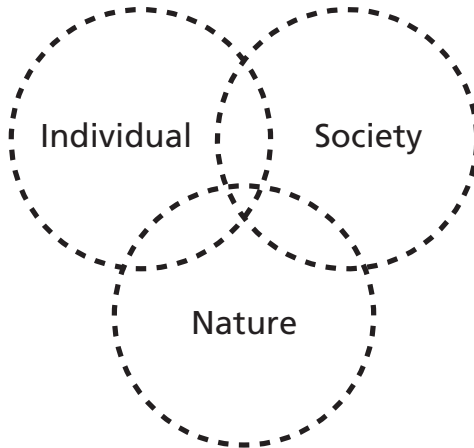
In this section I present, in a series of steps, a new conceptual framework for thinking about civic leadership – a way of thinking that I describe as the New Civic Leadership. As a first step I provide a simple framework developed by Richard Rees, a British urban designer, as it helps to bridge the divide between social scientific and ecological perspectives. Rees argues that the essential elements of contemporary life – the individual, society and nature – have become separated out, and that they need to be reconnected. Figure 1 is derived from his perspective and illustrates a simple way of framing my thinking about sustainable development.³ Dotted lines are used to signal that the boundaries are porous.

Rees argues, consistent with a growing body of writers on resilient cities and communities, that city leaders, urban planners, architects, designers and others need to *embed* a fruitful co-existence with nature into urban policy and practice.⁴ Our relationship with the natural environment should not be regarded as another policy consideration – it needs to be integral to public policymaking.

² Research on the performance of US city mayors lends support to this claim. For example, Ferman (1985, p. 197) shows how ‘leadership strategies must be examined in the context in which they are executed’. And Flanagan (2004), in the light of his examination of the performance of nine American city mayors, highlights how timing is critical – the political space available to civic leaders, the relationship between structural forces and the power of agency, varies over time.

³ This framework departs from the familiar presentation of sustainable development in the literature and in policy circles. The established model of sustainable development also comprises three overlapping spheres – but these are usually labelled as environmental, economic and social. Policy prescriptions stemming from this conceptualisation often advocate thinking in terms of ‘a triple bottom line’ – achieving economic prosperity, environmental quality and social justice (Elkington, 1997). But, as examined in more detail in my book, while many companies and governments may espouse these principles, actual performance in implementing the principles often leaves a lot to be desired.

⁴ Spurred on by concerns about climate change, the wasteful consumption of vast quantities of fossil fuels, fears about food and water shortages, and in recognition of the need to develop renewable energy strategies and a steady state economy, the literature on urban resilience is expanding. A number of useful texts are now available – (*contd.*)

Figure 1: The individual, society and nature

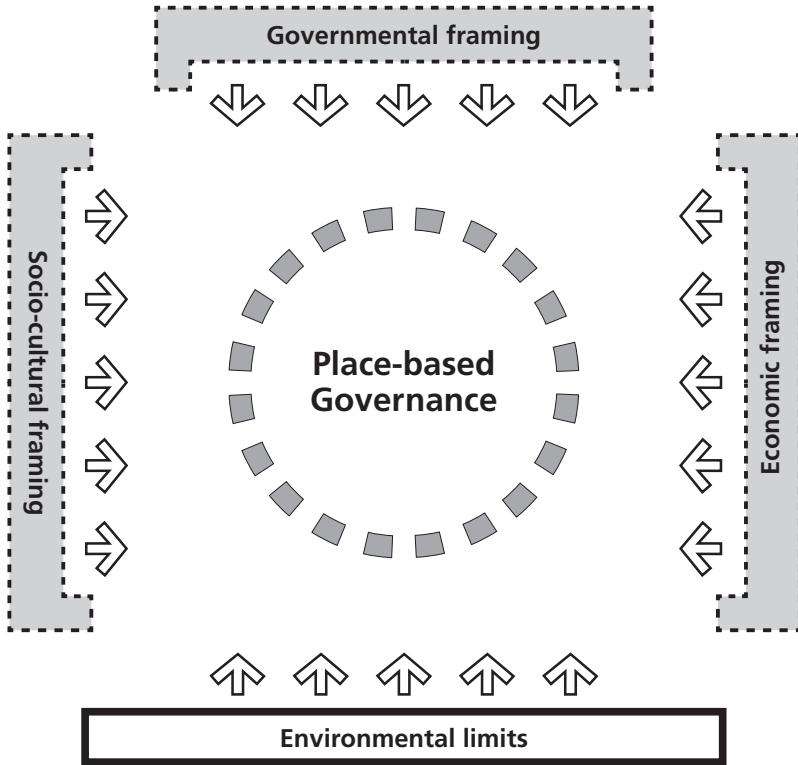
Source: Richard Rees, Urban Designer, UK (Richard Rees and I spoke at a conference on ‘Places in Transition’ in London on 21 January 2010 organised by the UK Resource for Urban Design Information. I draw here, with his permission, from his presentation titled ‘Re-thinking Places: The Individual, Society and Nature in City Design’).

Figure 2 provides a simplified picture of the forces that shape the world of place-based governance in any given locality. To the three forces discussed in the previous section, I add – at the top of the figure – the constraints imposed on localities by laws, regulations and government policies.

Let us run through this figure. At the bottom of the diagram are the non-negotiable environmental limits. Ignoring the fact that localities 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

⁴ (*contd.*) see, for example, Berners-Lee & Clark (2013), Bulkeley (2013), Droege (2006), Flint & Raco (2012), Hopkins (2011), Jackson (2009), Lewis & Conaty (2012), Monaghan (2012) and Newman et al. (2009). For overviews of the city as an ecosystem see Girardet (2008) and Newman & Jennings (2008).

Figure 2: Framing the political space for place-based governance



Source: Hambleton (2015, p. 114).

rich variety of voices found in any locality – including the claims of activists, businesses, artists, entrepreneurs, trade unionists, religious organisations, community-based groups, citizens who vote, citizens who do not vote, children, newly arrived immigrants, anarchists and so on. The people living in an area will have different views about the kind of place they wish to live in, and they will have differential capacity to make these views known. 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 & 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. For example, a detailed study of the governance of London, New York, Paris and Tokyo concluded that:

Global forces are not making the politics of place less important. Globalism and local governance are not mutually exclusive but are deeply entwined... important differences remain in the ways particular world city-regions are mediating international forces. (Kantor et al., 2012, p. 241)

On the top of Figure 2, as mentioned, 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 supranational organisations. For example, local authorities in countries that are members of the 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. As mentioned earlier, these relationships are subject to negotiation and renegotiation over time.

It is clear that Figure 2 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.

Perhaps we need some fresh vocabulary – or modified ways of thinking – that can inject new impetus into the discussion of socio-environmental futures? Firstly, how should we define leadership? My own definition draws on both the leadership literature and on my personal experience of leadership in communities, in government and in higher education in Britain and the US: ‘Leadership involves shaping emotions and behaviour to achieve common goals’ (Hambleton, 2007, p. 174).⁵ This definition puts emotions front of stage and also emphasises the importance of leaders adopting an inclusive approach to the identification of the aims and purposes of collective endeavour.

The realms of place-based leadership

The definition of leadership put forward here 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. It is imaginative and involves risk-taking and ‘being able to put yourself in the situation of someone else’ (Keohane, 2010, p. 89). My approach to the study of place-based leadership is informed by this perspective, and I wish to emphasise 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, p. 175), I 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, p. 177). This idea of emotional engagement is central to the NCL.

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 subregion and beyond. It is helpful to distinguish five realms of place-based leadership reflecting different sources of legitimacy:

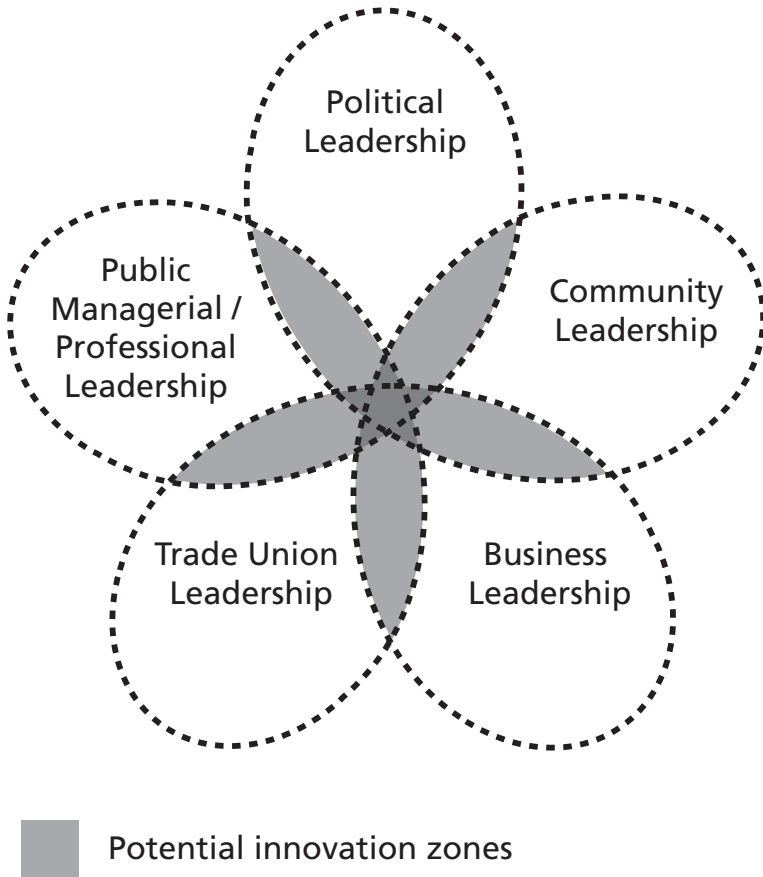
⁵ I recognise that leadership is a contested concept. Discussion of the nature of leaders and leadership should always take account of historical processes and the social context. Nevertheless there is, for the purposes of this article, virtue in a ten-word definition because it provides a reasonable degree of clarity about how I am using this slippery term.

- i. 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. However, we should acknowledge that different politicians carry different roles and responsibilities, and will view their political roles in different ways.
- ii. Public 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 well-being. These officers bring professional and managerial expertise to the tasks of local governance.
- iii. 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. These may be community activists, 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.
- iv. Business leadership – referring to the contribution made by local business leaders, who have a clear stake in the long-term prosperity of the locality.
- v. Trade union leadership – referring to the efforts of trade union leaders striving to improve the pay and working conditions of employees in public, private and voluntary sector organisations. Elected by their members, these leaders enjoy democratic legitimacy within their organisations.⁶

These roles are all important in cultivating and encouraging public service innovation and, crucially, they overlap. I describe the areas of overlap between these different realms of leadership as *innovation zones* – areas providing many opportunities for inventive behaviour (see Figure 3). 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. Civic leadership has a critical role in creating the conditions for different

⁶ The idea of realms of civic leadership was first developed in work I carried out on leadership for the Royal Commission on Auckland Governance (Hambleton, 2009). These ideas were further developed in a report I co-authored with Jo Howard for the Joseph Rowntree Foundation (Hambleton & Howard, 2012).

Figure 3: The realms of place-based leadership



Source: Hambleton (2015, p. 114).

people to come together – people who might not normally meet – to have a creative dialogue, and then to follow through on their ideas. I use dotted lines in Figure 3 to emphasise the connectivity, or potential connectivity, across the realms of civic leadership.

Wise civic leadership is critical in ensuring that the innovation zones – sometimes referred to as the ‘soft spaces’ of planning (Illsley et al., 2010) or ‘space for dialogue’ (Oliver & Pitt, 2013, pp. 198–9) – are orchestrated in a way that promotes a culture of listening that can, in

turn, lead to innovation (Kahane, 2004). New ideas emerging in the field of urban planning resonate with the argument I am putting forward. For example, Balducci & Mantysalo (2013) suggest that successful urban planning involves the creation of ‘trading zones’, meaning arenas within which different stakeholders exchange ideas for action without necessarily developing shared agreement on core values and motives.

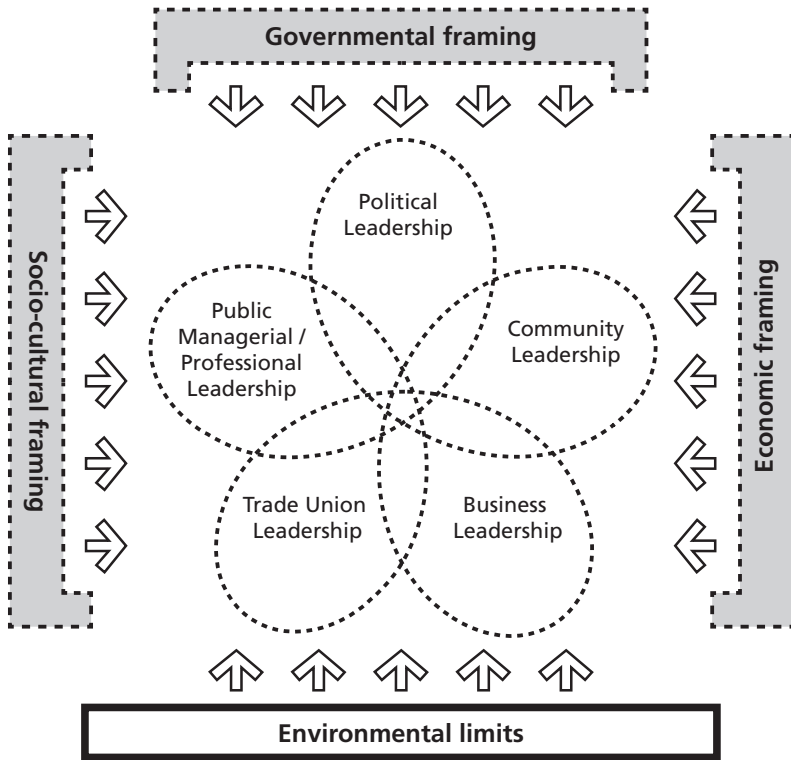
The point I wish to highlight from this discussion of innovation zones, or trading zones, is that place-based leadership can shape the quality of the exchanges that take place in these spaces. It is true that these arenas are often experienced as conflict zones – there are many clashes of values in modern society. The role of leadership is to orchestrate a process of social discovery within these zones that is constructive and forward-looking.

In sum, leadership capacity in modern society is dispersed. Our systems of local governance need to respect and reflect that diversity if decisions taken in the public interest are to enjoy legitimacy. Further, more decentralised approaches – both across localities and within each realm of civic leadership – can empower informal leaders to be part of the dialogue. Figure 3 simplifies a more complex reality. It is not intended to show how the dynamics of local power struggles actually unfold. The relative power of the five realms varies by locality. 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 I believe that the notion of five different realms – with leadership stemming from different sources of legitimacy within each realm – provides a helpful way of framing discussion about civic leadership.

Earlier I explained how various forces shape the context within which place-based leadership is exercised, and set this out in diagrammatic form in Figure 2. Having now explained the five realms of place-based leadership it is possible to advance the presentation by locating the five realms within this broader context (see Figure 4).

In this section I have outlined a conceptual framework for understanding place-based leadership, or NCL. In my book this model is used to throw light on changing thinking relating to public leadership, and seventeen innovation stories of inspirational civic leadership in different cities around the world are presented to illustrate how the model can be applied in practice (Hambleton, 2015). In the next section I provide, in abbreviated form, one of these innovation stories.

Figure 4: Place-based leadership in context



Source: Hambleton (2015, p. 128).

Melbourne makeover⁷

In 1978 the centre of Melbourne, Australia, was a dump. The local newspaper, *The Age*, described Melbourne as having ‘an empty, useless city centre’ – and published pictures to prove it. Leap forward thirty years and *The Economist* praises Melbourne as being ‘the most liveable city in the world’. Indeed, Melbourne has now established itself as an international leader in how to create a people-friendly public realm at the heart of a major metropolis. How did they do it? Answer: strong, place-based leadership.

⁷ The full version of this innovation story appears as ‘Innovation Story 13: Place-shaping: The Melbourne Experience’ in Hambleton (2015, pp. 251–5).

Local leaders from the different realms of leadership contributed to this remarkable transformation. Elected local politicians and community activists played a major part. But, under the leadership of Rob Adams, Director of City Design for the City of Melbourne, city planners and urban designers played a decisive role. The first Melbourne strategic plan of 1985 aimed to switch the whole of the central area from a 12-hour pattern of activities to a vibrant 24-hour centre. The plan set out robust urban design principles and clear priorities for land use, built form, an increased central city residential population, community services and streetscape.

Out went the previous developer-dominated approach to urban regeneration and in came very strong design requirements – for example, insisting on building up-to-the-street frontage, requiring active frontage on all streets and a very protective stance in relation to historic buildings and spaces. Purposeful planning, coupled with an imaginative approach to development control, has reshaped the public realm. The term central business district was discarded and replaced with the idea of a central activities district.

The results are spectacular. The central area residential population rose from 650 dwellings in 1985 to reach 28,000 in 2013. The city is now much greener, there is more pedestrian space, there are many more bicycle routes, a really lively street-cafe culture has been created and local, service-oriented businesses are thriving. The main leadership lessons identified in the Melbourne innovation story are as follows (Hambleton, 2015, pp. 254–5):

- Strong leadership by councillors and officers working together can transform the entire culture of an organisation. In the Melbourne case it proved possible to embed a strong commitment to people-friendly design across city hall departments.
- The quality of the public realm that results from urban development should drive all planning decisions, not the attractiveness or otherwise of individual buildings. This requires high-calibre professionals to articulate public purpose in their dealings with the private sector.
- Public–private partnerships can bring about creative urban development but only if decisions are driven by public purpose. In Melbourne those wishing to develop property must demonstrate a community benefit if they are to win approval.
- A high level of attention to detail and a strong commitment to public participation is a strong feature of the way the City of Melbourne works with residents and other stakeholders in the city.

- Civic leaders in Melbourne engaged in systematic learning from other countries. In particular, the appointment of Jan Gehl Architects, from Copenhagen, as urban design consultants meant that the city was able to learn from examples of high-quality urban planning in Europe.

Melbourne is not alone in demonstrating that powerful place-based leadership can deliver progressive public policies. In my book I record significant achievements in numerous cities – from Copenhagen to Curitiba, from Ahmedabad to Malmö, and from Guangzhou to Portland.

Reflections and emerging themes

In this article I have explored the possibilities for strengthening place-based leadership in a rapidly globalising world. Some of my vocabulary may be unfamiliar, but I hope that the argument I am presenting can stimulate fresh thinking about how to improve the effectiveness and democratic vitality of Irish local government.

My overarching concern is that current economic and social trends are creating increasingly unequal societies, divided societies, unhappy societies, unsustainable societies. In the era of globalisation, the one that we all now live in, placeless 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. This power needs to be challenged, and people living in particular localities need to regain the authority to decide what happens to the quality of life in their area. To reignite the power of communities in particular places may seem a forlorn hope in an era in which multinational companies appear to be taking over the reins of international power.

But the argument presented here is not a pessimistic one. The placeless power of modern capital – the power to shift investments internationally, and engage in the ruthless exploitation of peoples in different countries and places – is no longer seen as reasonable conduct by many people. Growing concerns about climate change and the rapid acceleration of unsustainable development are attracting a backlash against the neo-liberal model of economic development. The need to develop a more responsible form of capitalism now attracts international support, and there is an expanding literature on how to advance prosperity without destroying the planet (Hopkins, 2011; Jackson, 2009).

In this final section I offer some observations on three interrelated topics concerning local leadership that stem from the analysis presented in this paper. These are best seen as reflections, rather than conclusions.

Can place-based leadership take on placeless power?

The discussion at the beginning of this article noted that some scholars appear to believe that the forces of globalisation have all but erased the power of elected local authorities to shape the fortunes of their areas. The claim is made that all local leaders must give priority to serving the interests of private capital – the political space available for them to do anything different has all but disappeared. The evidence presented in my book suggests that this analysis is flawed. It is, of course, clear that international economic forces constrain the exercise of place-based power. But this does not mean that place-based agency has vanished. Much depends on the national and regional context, on community and political organising at the local level, on local feelings of loyalty and identity, and on the quality of place-based leadership. For example, as we have seen, Melbourne City Council has no problem turning away developers who cannot meet their exacting requirements relating to enhancing the quality of the public realm. In this instance global capital has to serve public purpose, rather than the other way round.

It seems clear that very small local authorities are at a disadvantage in responding to placeless power. They lack the capacity and resources to be effective. It follows that the recent local government reforms in Ireland – ones that have created a smaller number of larger, elected local authorities – are heading in the right direction. However, responding effectively to the pressures of placeless power requires more than decent-sized local authorities. The way leaders of local authorities see their role and the ways in which they think and behave are critical. The discussion of ‘realms of civic leadership’ has suggested that people from very different backgrounds can and should contribute to local, place-based leadership. Here, I would like to highlight the valuable roles played by elected local councillors. The Association of Irish Local Government (AILG) can play a vital role in promoting and developing the various roles of councillors. The *Putting People First* report is surely right to stress the importance of lifting the quality of training for councillors to enable them to develop a more outgoing and influential role (Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government, 2012).

The need for outward-facing place-based leadership

Research carried out in the preparation of my book suggests that there is no ‘right’ way to design the institutions of local government. Different models have been developed in different countries and, not surprisingly, they have different strengths and weaknesses. For example, in some countries directly elected mayors are popular. In others, more collective models of leadership are preferred. However, we can identify – if we examine experience on an international basis – some common features of successful place-based leadership.

Firstly, the leadership sees itself as leading the place, *not* leading the council or the local authority bureaucracy. This enables leaders to tap into energies emanating from all of the five realms of leadership shown in Figure 3. Second, effective leadership is multilevel. It is misguided to believe that only those in senior positions are able to exercise local leadership. Localised, area-based community leadership is essential as well as leadership within each realm of leadership. Third, imaginative leaders make an *emotional* connection with citizens and, in particular, they cultivate civic pride. Feelings of local loyalty, which tie in with feelings of place-based identity, are an important resource for progressive leaders. Fourth, effective local leaders articulate a clear vision for their locality, one that advances social justice and promotes care for the environment and the public realm. Melbourne provides but one example of this kind of progressive local leadership.

The role of place-based leadership in bringing about radical public innovation

Confident local leaders set out a vision for their area but, just as important, they try out ideas and learn from experience. The literature on how to lead public service innovation is still relatively young. While a fair amount is now known about how to bring about public service ‘improvement’, much less is known about how to break new ground and discover new possibilities. Much of the literature on ‘innovation’, in both the public and the private sectors, tends to focus on technological innovation and/or managerial change. A key theme in my book is that strategies of this kind limit thinking. Radical public innovation is, as often as not, political and place-based – ‘twas ever thus. If we track back to the origins of modern social, health, education and housing services we usually find inspirational activists who were moved to take action at the local level.

Found in the voluntary sector, in religious institutions, in trade unions, in local businesses, in local government, in local political parties and elsewhere, these change agents were often driven by a passionate belief in their ability to change society for the better, and they acted on their beliefs. These place-based leaders invented entirely new public services and transformed the living conditions of millions of people. In the modern era we find a growing number of cities – and Melbourne has been discussed in this article – that are developing entirely new ways of working, ways that promote the public interest. They value improvisation and foster experimental styles of working.

In summary, this article introduces a new way of discussing place-based leadership, one that aims to advance thinking and understanding relating to leadership while, at the same time, providing practical suggestions for local government leaders.

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