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## **Leading localities as if communities matter**

**Robin Hambleton**

### **Abstract**

This paper takes inspiration from the influential critique of Western economics set out by E. F. Schumacher in his influential book 'Small is beautiful. A study of economics as if people mattered' published in 1971. It argues that societies need to strengthen the power and influence of 'place-based' leadership if city governments are to serve more effectively the needs of the communities who live in them. In a rapidly globalising world the demands placed on civic leaders have changed and this means that leaders need to develop new skills and approaches if they are to be successful. The paper examines these changes in the context of the shift from 'government' to 'governance' in modern public policy. The paper then considers two leadership themes: the changing nature of civic leadership, and the multiplicity of leadership roles in the modern city. The final section attempts to draw out the implications of the discussion for the future practice of leadership in the modern city. It is suggested that, provided it is handled with great sensitivity, there are considerable opportunities for cross-national exchange in relation to leadership development in cities and that planning academics can play an important role in this.

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## Introduction

This paper takes inspiration from the classic critique of Western economics set out by E. F. Schumacher in his influential book ‘Small is Beautiful. A Study of Economics as if People Mattered’. (1) Over thirty years ago Schumacher argued that the blinkered pursuit of profit, which promotes giant organisations and increased specialisation, has resulted in gross economic inefficiency, environmental pollution and inhumane working conditions. He asks: ‘What is the meaning of democracy, freedom, human dignity, standard of living, self-realisation, fulfilment? Is it a matter of goods, or of people? Of course, it is a matter of people.’ In his wide-ranging analysis he sought to focus the attention of policy makers on the needs of people, not products and the requirements of capital accumulation. And, inter alia, he argued for ‘smallness within large organisation’.

In many cities across the world the needs of capital have come to dominate approaches to planning and development at the expense of the needs of citizens. This is troubling as the owners of capital, and particularly the multi-national owners, rarely concern themselves with the fortunes of particular communities and places. This is not surprising as they are accountable to share holders, not local citizens. A consequence is the emergence in many cities of a ‘could be anywhere’ urban public realm and, in many countries, a fragile system of local democracy. In this paper it will be argued we need to develop a range of strategies to strengthen ‘place-based’ leadership. Urban planning scholars have, alongside their colleagues in other social science disciplines, contributed to our understanding of social and environmental trends and the politics of urban development. But we have, perhaps, paid insufficient attention to the changing dynamics of urban leadership. This paper is a small contribution to the leadership debate. It argues that we need to develop approaches to locality leadership as if communities matter. (2)

It will be suggested that the dynamics of modern change have implications for the very way we conceptualise ‘civic leadership’ as well as for the leadership roles of elected politicians, appointed officers and the various ‘community-based’ leaders representing the interests of different stakeholders in society – for example, private sector leaders, religious leaders, university leaders, community activists and so on. The paper discusses four related themes in the first four sections:

- The changing context for civic leadership. Over the years governments across the world have been required to reconsider and update arrangements relating to local government – and, in particular, metropolitan government – in order to adapt to changing economic, social and urban trends. Present and emerging challenges imply a need to put in place strong, outward facing city leadership arrangements.
- From government to governance. In this section we examine the debate about the so-called shift from ‘government’ to ‘governance’. This is a comparatively recent development and the implications for local leadership are significant.

- Understanding civic leadership. In this section we discuss the nature of civic leadership in more detail and examine four dimensions of leadership.
- The multiplicity of leadership roles. Many different players or stakeholders exercise civic leadership in the modern city and we provide a concise overview.

Against this background we then examine the modern civic leadership agenda as derived from experience in a range of countries. Cultures, histories, legal systems and geo-political factors vary enormously among nations. It follows that it is misguided to believe that a models of leadership and governance that are felt to be successful in one country can be readily transposed to another. However, in a rapidly globalising world, it is clear that cross-national research and analysis on leadership and governance can repay dividends. Comparative, engaged scholarship on urban leadership and governance can generate new insights and provoke fresh thinking – to the advantage of policy and practice as well as academic understanding.

Before we embark on the argument, a word on some definitions. We provide detailed explanations of the leadership terms used later in the paper. But, in order to avoid needless confusion, it may be helpful at the outset to note that we distinguish three overlapping leadership roles as follows:

- **Civic leadership** is defined in very broad terms – it is taken to mean all leadership activity that serves a public purpose in the city region. This broad definition recognises and values the leadership contribution of individuals both inside and outside government.
- **City leadership** refers to those people elected to leadership positions by the citizenry. These are, by definition, political leaders. Thus, all elected local councillors can, to some degree, be seen as city leaders although we should acknowledge that different councillors carry different roles and responsibilities.
- **Managerial leadership** refers to the work of public servants appointed by local authorities or central government and its agencies to plan and manage public services and promote community wellbeing. These officers bring professional and managerial expertise to the task of governing the city region.

## 1) The changing context for civic leadership

The growing interest in civic leadership reflects a desire on the part of governments – local and central – to update the way they organise local democracy to cope with changing circumstances. There is a link, although not always an explicit one, between local leadership debates and local government reorganisation debates.

It should be recognised at the outset that reorganizing the government arrangements of metropolitan areas and cities is not a new phenomenon. On the contrary ‘reorganisation’

has been an issue ever since cities began sprawling over their original municipal boundaries in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. A first approach to the problems created by jurisdictional fragmentation was annexation of the suburbs. Indeed, this model of local government reorganisation is still highly influential in many countries. In the USA, for example, where many metropolitan areas are extremely fragmented, ‘city-county’ consolidation and local authority mergers are very much alive and well. (3) However, a second approach, pursued in many countries in the 1960s and 1970s, involved the creation of two-tier metropolitan governments. In this model certain powers and policy-making competences are transferred to the metropolitan scale – an approach adopted in several European capitals, for example, Berlin, Paris and London. (4)

It can be claimed that metropolitan reforms following these two patterns – the ‘consolidation’ route and the ‘two-tier’ route – did not necessarily require a radical rethink of the nature of the city leadership task. After reorganisation the main focus of attention for city leaders would still be the organisation and delivery of high quality public services to meet the needs of the local population in a democratically accountable way. True, the introduction of an ‘upper tier’ of government was intended, in many cities, to enhance the capacity of government to think and operate in a more strategic way and to engage more effectively with major stakeholders in the private sector. But it can be claimed that all pre-1990 metropolitan reorganisations were ‘pre-global’.

A recurring theme in this paper is that the world has changed remarkably in the period since 1990 and, more specifically, that global economic restructuring and societal changes have altered the terms of the debate relating to city leadership. We will revisit the notion of a shift from ‘government’ to ‘governance’ in the next section but, in summary, we can record that the globalisation of the economy has turned cities into powerful engines of economic growth. This has, to some extent, blurred the boundaries between public and private interests and this new economic context has led to the creation of new urban institutions in many countries. (5)

These changes have important implications for ‘civic’ leadership. First, we will consider the implications for ‘city’ leadership. Here we define ‘city’ leaders as those people elected to leadership positions by the citizenry. These are political leaders who are accountable in some shape or form to the electorate. They may be leaders of particular municipalities within the metropolis and/or they may have leadership roles in the government of the entire metropolis. In the third section below we will expand our discussion of ‘civic’ leadership to include other important leaders in the metropolis – including appointed officers, business leaders, community leaders and so on. It is helpful first, however, to focus on the changing roles of political leaders.

In the academic literature there are two main perspectives on city leadership which we describe here as the ‘global approach’ and the ‘place-based approach’. (6) The global approach scrutinises the wider context within which cities operate and, more often than not, draws attention to the constraints on local leadership. Some, but not all, commentaries adopting this perspective conclude that the scope for city leadership in the modern world is pretty much trivial. Thus, according to Paul Peterson, one influential

American urban scholar, cities are heavily constrained by local and regional economic competition and must give priority to policies that promote inward investment and stimulate economic growth. (7) In his view cities that do not comply with these forces will be punished by loss of private investment, jobs, and tax revenue. Acceptance of this analysis has led city leaders in some countries, and this is particularly noticeable in the USA, to conclude that their central role is to project the advantages of their city to would-be investors. In extreme form the argument suggests that traditional concerns about democratic accountability and transparent decision-making need to be set aside. Because global competition for capital investment is so intense city leaders should, according to the tenets of what the Americans call 'civic boosterism', take steps to create business-friendly decision making arrangements that can attract footloose capital.

A second approach to city leadership rejects this perspective claiming that it overstates the constraints within which political leaders actually operate. The place-based approach starts from an examination of the forces creating the particularities of a specific place – its economic base, its social make up, its constellation of political interests and so on. In this formulation local political leaders (and, indeed, civic elites) are not seen as victims of global economic forces. Rather they are seen as community leaders who can have a considerable impact on the fortunes of their city by taking advantage of the strengths of the local population and the distinctive history and characteristics of their city. Scholars adopting this perspective argue that Peterson, and commentators who share his views, have overemphasised the role of 'footloose capital' in shaping urban fortunes. They argue that prosperity can be driven by place-based attributes, and that multi-national companies are not necessarily crucial to the economic success of a city.

This division of views is, to some extent, revealed in the diversity of approaches cities are currently pursuing in relation to local economic development in different countries. Thus, the traditional place marketing approach of striving to attract new businesses is now challenged by approaches that stress other routes to economic prosperity – for example, supporting local businesses with a low-carbon footprint. Indeed, some cities take the view that is better to support and attract creative and inventive people rather than multi-national companies that are, at root, unconcerned about the fortunes of particular places. Answerable to shareholders in far off lands they can have a habit of disappearing at short notice. Thus, some writers, for example, Richard Florida, suggest that city leaders may be better off making their cities 'people friendly' rather than 'business friendly'. (8)

In practice both these perspectives on city leadership are helpful. The same city can be regarded as part of a totality and as a unique outcome of its particular history. Comparative academic studies that combine both a global and a local perspective are now on the increase and this combination of perspectives is leading to a better understanding of the scope for and limits on city leadership. (9)

Enough has been said, however, to suggest that the nature of the city leadership task is in the process of being transformed. In the past city leaders could legitimately focus their attention on meeting the needs of the local population by working with their officers to

plan and deliver high quality public services and by encouraging the self-organising capacity of local communities. Global changes are now creating additional challenges for city leaders. The changes we have outlined here suggest that effective approaches to achieving good community outcomes will require an approach to city leadership that is more outgoing, more visible and more influential.

### **3) From government to governance**

In this section we will consider the suggestion that we are moving from an era of ‘government’ to one of ‘governance.’ (10) But what do these terms mean? For the purpose of this discussion *government* refers to the formal institutions of the state. Government makes decisions within specific administrative and legal frameworks and uses public resources in a financially accountable way. Most important, government decisions are backed up by the legitimate hierarchical power of the state. *Governance*, on the other hand, involves government *plus* the looser processes of influencing and negotiating with a range of public and private sector agencies to achieve desired outcomes. A governance perspective encourages collaboration between the public, private and non-profit sectors to achieve mutual goals. Whilst the hierarchical power of the state does not vanish, the emphasis in governance is on steering, influencing and co-ordinating the actions of others.

Moving to the local level *local government* refers to democratically elected authorities. *Local governance* is broader – it refers to the processes and structures of a variety of public, private and community and voluntary sector bodies at the local level. It acknowledges the diffusion of responsibility for collective provision and recognises the contribution of different levels and sectors. In a recent international volume, *Governing Cities in a Global Era*, bringing together contributions from scholars examining urban governance in all continents, the nature of this so-called shift from ‘government’ to ‘governance’ is examined in some depth. (11) We draw on this discussion here to summarise some of the main arguments.

Twenty years ago the literature on local government focused on ‘government.’ The word ‘governance’ was rarely used and was certainly not a central part of the political or the academic discourse relating to local democracy and public service improvement. Much of the discussion about potential reforms focused on local government structures and how to improve policy and management processes – by, for example, strengthening public involvement in decision-making. On the whole, local government was perceived narrowly as an arm of the state operating in the locality and, in those days, many countries placed great faith in the role of the state to solve societal problems.

While varying cross-nationally in scale and scope, we can see the emergence – in the 1980s and the 1990s - of a case for moving from ‘government’ to ‘governance’. The oil shocks of the late 1970s, the recessions in the 1980s and the 1990s, and global economic restructuring, left many governments facing funding shortfalls. Couched differently in different countries common themes in the debates that brought about this shift were: a recognition that the state cannot go it alone; that working in partnership with other

stakeholders can improve problem-solving capacity; that no one organization has a monopoly of wisdom in relation to solving urban challenges; and that new and more inclusive approaches to community representation and leadership need to be developed. Driven by public purpose all these motivations signaled a desire to strengthen the capacity of government to work with a range of stakeholders to solve societal problems.

However, at the same time as these arguments were being put forward, some protagonists sought a shift from ‘government’ to ‘governance’ for ideological reasons. Politicians on the political right – and this was particularly noticeable in the US and UK during the Reagan and (1981-1989) Thatcher years (1979-1990) – were attracted to the notion of ‘governance’ because they saw it as a way of ‘rolling back the state’ and enhancing the role of the private sector in public affairs. Strongly influenced by public choice theory, these politicians advocated the importation of private sector management techniques into the public sector. In the academic literature on public management these reforms have come to be described as ‘New Public Management’ (NPM). (12) While it should be recalled that these ideas were implemented in different ways in the different countries that adopted them – and many did not - it can be noted that common features were an effort to downsize government, to privatize public services and to introduce private sector approaches from contracting to performance management.

What lessons for civic leadership can we draw from this discussion of the movement from government to governance? First, and this will be explored further in the next section of this paper, we can surmise that the legitimacy needed to exercise bold and effective metropolitan leadership in modern times is likely to flow from an approach that combines multiple actors drawn from local government and civil society, from the public, private and non-profit sectors. This is not to advocate an abdication of responsibility on the part of political leaders. Rather it is to recognize the value of partnership working and the importance of bringing together ‘government’ and ‘governance’ models.

Stated simply, governance in the absence of government, risks throwing political leadership into crises of legitimacy. There are risks with governance models. Thus, if citizens come to believe that decision making is less than transparent and that lines of accountability for making decisions about public spending are becoming blurred, it will not be surprising if they come to question the legitimacy of those taking decisions. On the other hand, a government that is inward looking, that ignores the governance challenge and fails to engage with the various communities of interest and place that exist in the city region, risks creating a crisis of capacity. Put bluntly, local governments cannot ‘go it alone’. While they clearly enjoy a democratic mandate granted by citizens at the ballot box, political leaders need the support of **other** stakeholders in the city to accomplish their objectives.

It follows that the old hierarchical model of city leadership - the city ‘boss’ determining policy for services controlled and delivered by the state – is long past its ‘sell by’ date, even in cultures where the city ‘boss’ style of leadership had become fairly embedded. Thus, for example, we can note a complete contrast in leadership style between Mayor Richard J. Daley, who ruled Chicago from 1955 until his death in 1976, and his oldest



son, Mayor Richard M. Daley, who has been Mayor of Chicago since 1989. (13) The present Mayor Daley is one of the most respected city leaders in the USA but his style of leadership is much more consensual than that of his famous father. An important challenge for all city leaders is to develop their skills and effectiveness as facilitative leaders, rather than 'top down' leaders. The importance of being able to reach out to other stakeholders and local people in an effort to influence decisions made by **others** in order to improve the local quality of life is difficult to over estimate. In summary, then, it is suggested here that modern political leaders can take the debate **beyond** an unhelpful divide between 'government' and 'governance' models and can use the legitimacy of their elected position to orchestrate new approaches to metropolitan leadership. We turn to this challenge in the next section.

#### 4) Understanding civic leadership

Local government stands for a number of important values including the notions of democracy, community and public service. Gerhard Banner, for example, has suggested that the purpose of local government is 'to organise the common good at the local level with reference to democracy (political liberty), community (social cohesion) and public services (quality which can withstand competition and/or comparison). (14) In relation to decision-making there are clear expectations about transparency, accountability, effective resource use and responsiveness. These are all important considerations and effective political leaders need to develop approaches that maximise these values.

Clearly, then, political leadership involves considerations that are not to be found in the private sector and this is one of the reasons why leadership concepts and models developed in business settings do not usually translate well into the local government arena. Business management books are largely unconcerned with the politics of decision-making as encountered in local government. While they can contribute helpful insights relating to what we call here 'managerial leadership' of public services, of which more shortly, they offer little of value to thinking creatively about civic leadership in a highly charged political environment. In the discussion that follows we will draw on the business management literature relating to leadership, but the political science literature and the social psychology literature is probably more important for our purposes. (15)

In this section we set out to build an understanding of civic leadership by discussing the four dimensions of leadership as identified in the literature.

##### *i) Personal characteristics*

First, the **personal characteristics** of individual leaders matter. Qualities like vision, strength, stamina, energy, inventiveness and commitment are associated with successful leadership. There is a well-established tradition within leadership studies that adopts the biographical, or case study, approach to the study of leadership. (16) These studies can, by examining the conduct and behaviour of known leaders, provide valuable insights on the exercise of leadership.

In the field of urban politics there is, in fact, a considerable body of literature built around this approach. For example, the ‘fly on the wall’ study of Ed Rendell when he was Mayor of Philadelphia in the period 1992 to 1997 provides an excellent, albeit journalistic, picture of personal emotion and energy in city leadership (17). Other more academic studies of US city leaders include books on Robert Moses of New York City (18), Mayor Richard J. Daley of Chicago (19) and Mayor Harold Washington, also of Chicago (20). A similar tradition exists in Europe with, for example, studies of Joseph Chamberlain, the Mayor of Birmingham (21) and Herbert Morrison, leader of the London County Council (22). These and other studies lend some weight to the idea, discussed earlier, that ‘place-based’ leadership can make a difference.

*ii) The context for leadership*

The second aspect of leadership that should be stressed is that **context** matters. An effective approach to leadership in one setting might not be appropriate in another. On this analysis the accomplishments of individual leaders may be less important than forces - economic, political, institutional and cultural - shaping the context within which they exercise leadership. Sometimes called situational leadership, at other times contingent leadership, this approach has become popular within the field of management studies as well as political science. (23)

A recent UK study of leadership in urban governance, built around an examination of approaches to leadership in three localities, highlights the impact of contextual factors (24). By comparing experience in different parts of the country this study shows that the institutional design of the governance system of a city can be an important factor either hindering or supporting the exercise of city leadership. The research shows, for example, that the constitution of the Greater London Authority provides a platform for high profile, outgoing leadership by the directly elected mayor of London (25). This institutional design, comprising an elected strategic authority headed by a directly elected mayor, provides both a strong legitimacy for leadership and a clear focus for leadership. The mayor enjoys a mandate from the citizens of the entire metropolis and is recognised by all concerned as the leader of the capital.

This institutional design contrasts with the governance arrangements in Bristol, in the south west of England, where confusion reigns. Hardly anybody knows who the political leader of any of the local authorities is. The poor institutional design of the governance of Bristol – it is a fragmented city region with confusing municipal boundaries and a proliferation of complex partnerships with overlapping responsibilities - constrains leaders. Political leaders in the Bristol city region are held back by the absence of suitable metropolitan governance arrangements. They are forced into an endless process of negotiation with diverse stakeholders. Nobody has the legitimacy to exercise strong leadership for the city region as a whole with the result that even modest changes require leaders to participate in a delicate dance. This partly explains why the public transport in the greater Bristol area is so poor.

### *iii) The nature of the leadership task*

Our third dimension of leadership concerns the **nature of the leadership task**. James MacGregor Burns, in his classic book on leadership, draws a helpful distinction between transactional and transformational approaches to leadership. (26) Stated simply the old paradigm defined leadership as a ‘transaction’ between a leader – often described as the ‘boss’ – and a follower, or ‘subordinate’. A typical exchange is pay for doing a job but other exchanges can take place – such as the favours and feelings psychologists suggest are traded in social exchange theory.

Transformational leadership is different in nature from transactional leadership. It has been described as a process of ‘bonding’ rather than ‘bartering.’ (27) Burns argues that leadership is about transforming social organisations, not about motivating employees to exchange work efforts for pay. Sashkin and Sashkin, in their excellent articulation of transformational leadership, build on the argument advanced by Burns and suggest that a shared approach to vision building is crucial. (28) In addition, transformational leaders couple self-confidence with an orientation toward the empowerment of others and recognise the importance of building a caring organisational culture. These ideas resonate with the idea of the ‘servant leader’ and remind us that effective leaders pay a high level of attention to the emotions and feelings of others. (29)

This discussion of the difference between transactional and transformational approaches to leadership resonates with another distinction found in the literature on leadership. In some languages the word ‘leader’ is derived from the image of the ‘head’ of the body. Framed in this way the ‘leader’ sits on top of the body and is clearly seen as the most important person. The Anglo-Saxon origins of the word are rather different. The root of the word ‘leader’ is ‘laed’, which means a path or road. This notion of ‘lead’, meaning to find the path or shape the journey, is found in other languages too – for example, Greek, Roman, and Egyptian. As Adair explains, the two metaphors of the ‘head’ and the ‘journey’ have very different connotations - one is vertical and the other is horizontal, one implies hierarchy while the other does not. (30) The key point that emerges from this literature is that the way leadership is conceptualised has profound implications for the way leadership is exercised.

### *iv) The interplay between leadership and management*

The fourth important consideration to highlight from the leadership literature concerns the **interplay between leadership and management**. Some writers attempt to draw a sharp distinction between ‘leadership’ and ‘management’. As Bennis and Nanus put it ‘managers do things right, and leaders do the right thing’. (31) Kotter sees managers planning, organising and controlling while leaders focus on the change-oriented process of visioning, networking and building relationships. (32) But Gardner counsels against contrasting management and leadership too much: ‘Every time I encounter utterly first-class managers they turn out to have quite a lot of the leader in them. Even the most visionary leader is faced on occasion with decisions that every manager faces: when to

take a short-term loss to achieve a long-term gain, how to allocate scarce resources, whom to trust with a delicate assignment'. (33)

This interplay between leadership and management is vital in local government. It is, as we shall see shortly, misguided to claim that politicians 'lead' and officers 'manage'. Both have roles in leadership and management but the received models of political/administrative relations fail to recognise this. It has reached the point where these out of date models are impairing the development of effective locality leadership in many countries.

## 5) The multiplicity of leadership roles in the modern city

We now turn to consider the multiplicity of leadership roles encountered in the modern city. It will be suggested that many leaders – great and small, formal and informal, celebrated and unsung – comprise the 'civic leadership' of any given city. Earlier it was suggested that 'place-based' approaches to leadership can make a difference in our modern, rapidly globalizing world. If this argument is accepted, then it becomes critical to consider how to nurture and strengthen leadership talents in all cities. Effective 'civic leadership', defined broadly, can play a crucial role in ensuring that different voices are heard and that decisions are made at the appropriate level within the governance system. We can now expand on the definition of the three terms we outlined in the introduction.

First, **civic leadership** is defined here in very broad terms – it is taken to mean all leadership activity that serves a public purpose. This broad definition recognises and values the fact that many individuals, from a wide range of backgrounds, give their time freely to serve the public interest. These leaders range from community activists campaigning to improve public safety in their neighbourhood through to large-scale voluntary organisations striving to protect the natural environment. Important civic leaders are, of course, found hard at work in the Town Halls of the city region, but many important civic leaders are not part of the formal government system. This broad definition resonates with the notion of 'community' leadership that is now well established in British local government. (34)

As mentioned earlier, in this paper we are using the term **city leader** to refer to those people elected to leadership positions by the citizenry. These are, by definition, political leaders. Thus, all elected local councillors can, to some degree, be seen as city leaders although we should acknowledge that different councillors carry different roles and responsibilities. Some councillors may see themselves very much as community representatives and will focus their efforts on the needs of their ward. Others can be found exercising much broader leadership responsibilities relating to policy making for their local authority as a whole – or even for the entire metropolis.

If we return, for a moment, to a distinction we made earlier between government and governance, we can note that, within government, there are two main sets of players – elected politicians and appointed officers. As just mentioned it is normally the elected

politicians who are seen as the main leadership figures in a locality. They enjoy a political mandate from local citizens and, even if voter turnout in local elections is not very high, their legitimacy to make decisions and to speak out on behalf of local people is difficult to challenge. In practice, elected politicians exercise a range of leadership roles in their locality and the nature of party politics can have a profound impact on the way councillors operate. In many European cities the party group is enormously powerful, in other situations the political leader may have a wide area of discretion. In some countries individual leaders – for example, the directly elected mayor – may be pivotal. In others the city may be led by a group of senior politicians – sometimes described as a cabinet. And in some countries – for example, England and the US - the institutional design of local leadership arrangements varies by locality. (35)

A third important group of leaders are the **managerial leaders**. These are the public servants appointed by councils (or, more accurately, for those below CEO level, by the CEOs acting on behalf of the councils) to plan and manage public services and promote community wellbeing. A long-standing myth in local government is that there is a sharp separation of roles between politicians and officers. The old adage that politicians decide on policy and officers implement it was challenged over twenty years ago by research on policy implementation. This showed that implementation is an interactive and negotiative process between those seeking to put policy into effect and those upon whom action depends (36) More recently James Svara, a respected American political scientist, has demonstrated how early contributors to the field of public administration acknowledged a policy role for administrators that has often been ignored partly because, over the years, the dichotomy became a ‘useful myth’ (37) The dichotomy idea shields administrators from scrutiny and serves the interest of politicians who can pass responsibility for unpopular decisions to administrators (38) A more sophisticated conceptualisation of the politician/officer interface recognises that **both** groups contribute to **both** policy development and local management.

Mouritzen and Svara provide a valuable cross-national analysis of ‘leadership at the apex’ of local government in fourteen countries. (39) The authors do not examine the role of leaders outside the institution of local government. Rather they provide a detailed and fascinating picture of the roles of mayors (and other leading politicians) and the way they interface with their Chief Executive Officers (CEOs). This research shows that overlapping leadership roles between senior politicians and CEOs is the norm – a view confirmed by other scholars of local government. (40) We will revisit this notion of overlapping leadership roles between elected members and officers in the next section. Getting this balance right is crucial to effective civic leadership.

Moving outside local government to consider the broader pattern of local governance, it is clear that attention needs to be given to the leadership contribution that business interests can bring to the table. Many business leaders are well informed about international trends and developments and, given the remarks made earlier about the significance of global forces, it is clear that business leaders can play an important role in widening horizons. A variety of other players may, depending on the local context, be in a position to exercise decisive leadership.

As it becomes clearer that city regions form the effective spatial unit in an era of global economic competition, leadership arrangements for relatively large metropolitan regions, having been neglected for decades, are now receiving increased attention from national governments in Europe and elsewhere. It is also the case that many important decisions affecting particular localities are made at higher levels of government and this points to the value of understanding how cities fit within the multi-level system of governance. (41)

In some countries the non-profit (or community and voluntary sector) plays a vital role in local civic leadership. Religious groups, trade unions, voluntary organisations and, at times, universities, as well as charitable foundations can make a significant contribution in helping to set the local agenda as well as in relation to specific community projects. At the local level community based leaders can come to play a particularly important role, not least in areas experiencing rapid demographic change. Research on community leaders in area regeneration partnerships in the UK suggests, however, that state agencies are still not that skilled at working with local people in ways which support their neighbourhood leadership role. (42) Marilyn Taylor, a leading authority on community involvement in the UK, also shows how community based leaders can be caught in a kind of no man's land between their communities and the decision makers, accused on the one hand of failing to deliver and on the other of being unrepresentative. (43) Research on ethnically diverse city regions suggests that the rapid arrival in an area of significant numbers of people from another country can create significant additional challenges for local democratic systems. Jill Gross and I have described the nature of 'dynamic diversity' and its implications for local government elsewhere. (44) It is clear that many cities are struggling to cope with dynamic diversity – that is, the very rapid arrival in an area of peoples from different countries. In Germany, for example, there is evidence that immigrant residents are severely under-represented in local decision-making. (45) Many US cities face similar problems relating to the inclusion of ethnic minorities and this has become a key challenge for public service managers. (46)

In summary, local leaders comprise a mixed bag. In some situations a powerful, directly elected mayor or council leader can give the impression of exercising decisive leadership of the entire city with other actors having relatively minor roles. This discussion has suggested, however, that it is more than likely that, in any given city, there is a pattern of **dispersed leadership**. In modern conditions of social complexity power is fragmented and this means that civic leadership involves a process of connecting the fragments. Elected politicians, appointed officers, business leaders, non-profit organisations, religious groups, community representatives and figures from higher education can all be found carrying out leadership roles in modern systems of urban governance.

## 6) The modern city leadership agenda

In this section we discuss the modern city leadership agenda in a little more detail. That is, we are now focussing mainly on the **political leadership** of local and metropolitan

authorities. In the UK there has been a wide-ranging debate about new local government leadership models during this last ten years or so. And, more important, there has been some bold innovation in practice. By drawing on this experience we highlight some of the strategic choices that probably face other cities. We divide the section into four parts:

- The UK local leadership debate
- The notion of purpose driven political leadership
- The emergence of leadership development programmes
- Civic leadership and local democracy

*i) The UK local leadership debate*

Various UK academics have been advocating the idea of introducing stronger political leadership models – including directly elected mayors - into UK local government since the 1970s. (47) These voices were ignored until, in 1991, Michael Heseltine, then Environment Secretary in the Conservative government led by John Major, floated the idea of introducing directly elected mayors in a government consultation paper on ‘the internal management of local authorities’. (48) Fearing the creation of strong local leaders in their areas Tory MPs resisted the proposals and the idea vanished from the political landscape.

Fast forward six years to 1997 and we find newly elected Prime Minister Tony Blair giving the mayor agenda a rocket boost. Always veering towards a presidential style in his own approach to leadership, he published a booklet: ‘Leading the Way. A new vision for local government’. (49) It was unprecedented for a serving Prime Minister to take such an interest in local government and, not surprisingly, his views, and this paper in particular, had a massive impact on the direction of the English local leadership debate. (50) Blair advocated the introduction of directly elected mayors to give localities a clear sense of direction, to unify the management and delivery of local services and to provide high profile, outgoing local leadership. This time the idea, despite a distinct lack of enthusiasm in local government circles, had momentum and led to two important acts of parliament.

First, the Greater London Authority Act of 1999 created an entirely new form of metropolitan government for a world city of seven million people. Introducing a strategic metropolitan authority headed by a directly elected mayor was, when compared with the highly fragmented systems of city government found in many major cities across the world, a startling break through in institutional reform. And it is a reform that has captured the public imagination. The recent contest for the position of directly elected Mayor of London has stimulated unprecedented interest in a UK local government election. (51)

By comparison the Local Government Act 2000 has been disappointing. Yes, it did bring the idea of directly elected mayors into mainstream local government – all local authorities (except those with a population of less than 85,000) were required to modify their political management structures and to at least consider introducing a directly

elected mayor. The trouble is only 3% opted for the mayor model (known as the mayor/cabinet model) – we still have only 13 elected mayors, including Boris Johnson, the recently elected Mayor of London.

Ministers are now contemplating a third run at the local leadership agenda and a White Paper from Communities and Local Government Secretary, Hazel Blears, expected in July could well include radical proposals. Various options, including the idea of imposing the directly elected mayor model on all urban authorities, are now circulating in the UK local government policy networks. (52)

*ii) Purpose driven city leadership*

Leadership is inextricably linked with purpose. Stone examines modern urban politics and observes aimless interaction requires no leadership. (53) 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 local government to develop national guidance for the UK on local leadership. (54) 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 leadership that emerged are summarised in **Figure 1**.

[see next page]



## Figure 1 Indicators of good political leadership

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- **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 maximizing 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 which cross boundaries, or are seen to fall between areas of interest, need to be taken up by leaderships which have an over view 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.

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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 1** are comprehensive or appropriate in all settings. Rather they are offered as a possible set of aspirations for local leadership. The substantive objectives of leaders will, of course, vary depending on local trends, political preferences and context. Leaders who can set out a convincing and hopeful vision for their area – and follow through with specific and practical actions in

line with the vision - can be expected to enjoy stronger electoral support than those who seem more interested in obtaining and holding onto the power of office. All leaders and aspiring leaders will claim to have a vision for the area but only some will actually mean it.

This relatively early work on local leadership has been followed up in the UK context by more specific guidance from the Improvement and Development Agency (IDeA) for local government in England and by central government. (55) In 2005 a Leadership Centre for Local Government was created to improve political and managerial leadership in English local government and leadership development programs are now expanding.

### *iii) Leadership development programmes for local government*

A number of countries are in the process of developing leadership programmes for local governance. In some cases established programmes are being updated, in other cases entirely new programmes are being created. The growth and development of these leadership programmes is to be welcomed as it is clear that there is a significant 'civic leadership gap' in many countries. The gap arises because the world is experiencing unprecedented urban growth and because the nature of the leadership challenges confronting locality leaders – as discussed in some detail above – are changing dramatically. Here we will highlight some of the work now taking place in the UK and, in particular, the work of Andrew Holder, one of the leading local government management consultants in England. (56) We offer brief comments on each of the three categories of leadership we have identified in this paper.

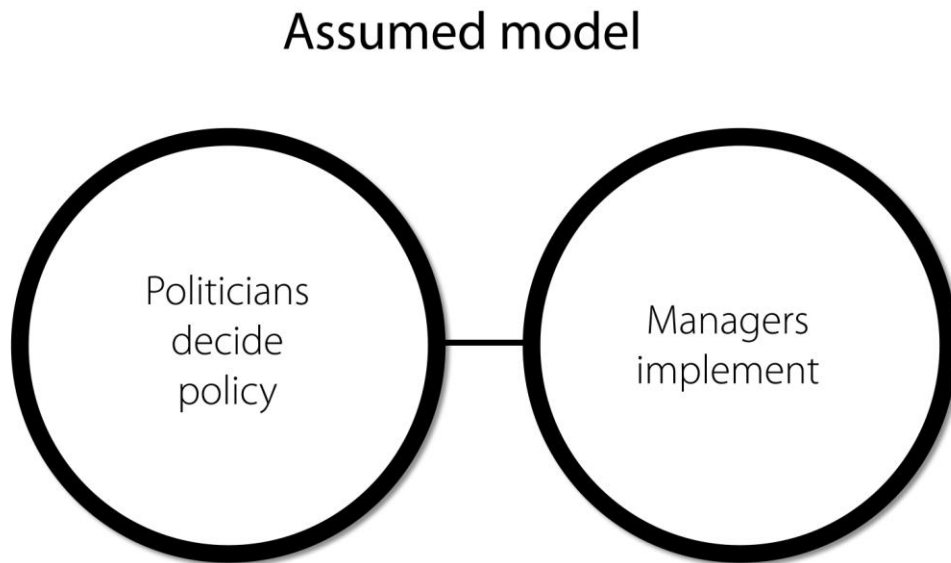
In relation to **civic leadership** we can discern the emergence of new leadership programmes designed to bring together leaders and potential leaders from different sectors to engage in shared learning and idea exchange. One example is provided by the UK-based organisation known as Common Purpose. Founded in 1989, and with an initial core of four staff, the organisation provided geographically based leadership programmes bringing together potential future leaders from a given city. The model creates a 'learning set' with individuals from different backgrounds working together to develop their understanding, knowledge and skills. Now Common Purpose has over 150 staff scattered across the UK and runs a large number of leadership programmes – from programmes for teenagers through to advanced programmes for experienced leaders. (57) There are similar programmes in the US and in other countries.

In relation to **city leadership** and **managerial leadership** we can note that many countries have leadership programmes for elected councillors and for appointed officers. In the UK context the Improvement and Development Agency (IDeA) for local government has run a Leadership Academy for councillors for many years and it also provides a range of management development programmes for officers. One key feature of the IDeA approach to local government is 'peer review'. In essence, this model involves respected 'peers' visiting and working with a council for an intensive period. For example, a political leader, a CEO and some senior managers from a range of other local councils would act as 'peers' for a given 'client' council – they might sit in with the

‘client’ council for a week to review approaches and processes in a collegial way. This model has proved extremely effective as it involves ‘leader to leader’ exchange and development. (58)

Earlier, in Section 4), we referred to the interplay between political leadership and managerial leadership. Getting this relationship right is crucial for the development of successful civic leadership and, in too many councils, this relationship is not as good as it should be. (59) Andrew Holder has helped the IDeA develop an approach that combines leadership development for councillors and officers. This work has led to detailed guidance - *Inside Top Teams. A Practical Guide*. (60) **Figure 2** presents the ‘assumed’ model of joint local leadership. Consistent with the research findings outlined earlier, it gives the impression that politicians decide policy and officers implement it. This is a flawed understanding and creates much confusion in local politics. As we explained in Section 4) these roles overlap.

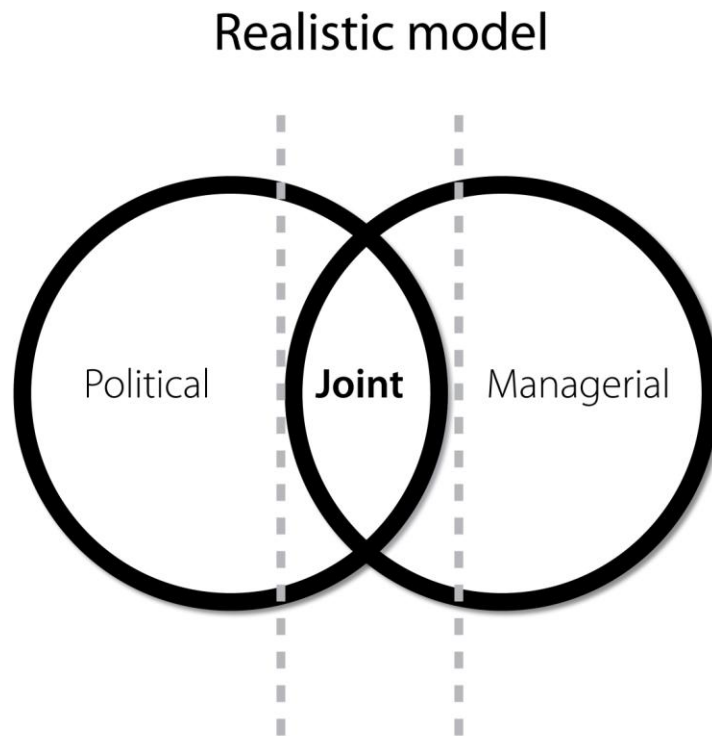
**Figure 2: Joint local leadership – assumed model**



Source: Andrew Holder, AHA Consultancy UK (2006) in ‘Inside Top Teams - A Practical Guide’, Improvement and Development Agency (IDeA).

In practice, the actual relationships between political and managerial leaders in local government resemble the situation shown in **Figure 3**. This highlights the **overlap** in leadership roles between members and officers. A central task of good leadership programmes is to assist officers and managers work out how to operate in a high performance way in the areas of **joint** leadership.

**Figure 3: Joint local leadership – realistic model**



Source: Andrew Holder, AHA Consultancy UK (2006) in 'Inside Top Teams - A Practical Guide', Improvement and Development Agency (IDeA).

**Figure 4** provides a little more detail by outlining the Leadership Capacities Framework as developed by the IDeA. This distinguishes seven leadership capacities and the Top Teams programmes use this framework to negotiate – through interactive workshops and team building efforts - effective joint leadership in specific councils.

**Figure 4: Leadership capacities framework**



Source: Andrew Holder, AHA Consultancy UK (2006) in 'Inside Top Teams - A Practical Guide', Improvement and Development Agency (IDeA).

#### *iv) Civic leadership and local democracy*

Reference was made in Section 2) to the growing impact of global forces not just on urban economies but also on the quality of life in cities. In too many cities global changes are creating social divisions and there is evidence to show that an increasing number of people feel disempowered. Indeed, in some cities, whole communities feel so excluded that residents have taken to the streets in public protest. Thus, social tensions and outbreaks of civil unrest are to be found in housing estates on the outskirts of cities, like Paris, as well as in the inner cities of conurbations in both developed and developing countries. At a major International Conference on City Futures held in Chicago in 2004 over 200 scholars from 36 countries examined future urban scenarios. (61) The papers to this conference, and other research, suggest that it is not far fetched to envisage a disaster scenario for cities. This gloomy scenario sees cities becoming balkanised with consumers living isolated lives in separate fortified enclaves or 'gated communities'. Political tensions draw forth the erosion of civil liberties as governments struggle to manage the 'ungovernable' city.

If these concerns are justified it follows that a, if not the, central task of civic leadership is to resist these trends – to offer a more uplifting view of urban life and to create livable, exciting cities that respond to the needs and aspirations of all inhabitants. Civic leaders will have their own distinctive visions of the kind of city they want to create, but we can expect that few will knowingly strive to bring about the gloomy scenario just outlined. To create a city that serves the interests of the people who live there requires a strong, vibrant and healthy local democracy. This is why strengthening local democracy, strengthening the power of place in a world increasingly dominated by 'placeless' forces, becomes the central task of civic leadership for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. It is difficult to overstate the significance of this task for civic leaders.

A study of civic leadership in nine countries throws new light on the challenges leaders face in facilitating and encouraging community involvement in local decision-making. (62) Funded by the European Union and known as the PLUS project – as it examined Participation, Leadership and Urban Sustainability (PLUS) – the study involved eighteen local councils and nine universities. The study, which included two New Zealand cities, explored different combinations of urban leadership and community involvement and, through case studies, shows how innovative cities have coped with the shift from 'government' to 'governance' we outlined in Section 3). This research shows how successful civic leadership needs to combine: legitimacy with capacity; vision with democratic accountability; and foresight with responsiveness. It provides examples of how civic leadership can contribute to the development of local democracy.

## **Conclusion**

The arguments set out in this paper have significant implications for planning education. If new approaches to 'place-based' leadership are needed we need to ensure that courses educate students in relation to the new leadership challenges localities face, as well as develop their individual and group leadership skills. Moreover courses need to help

planners develop a range of understandings – from cultural competence and gender awareness through to power analysis – so that they can help others develop their civic leadership skills. If planning education can address this theme in both postgraduate and continuing education courses it will help future and existing planners play a part in leading localities as if communities matter.

As part of this strategy for increasing the level of attention given to locality leadership in planning education planning schools should be encouraged to consider expanding their work on cross-national policy learning and exchange. Governments often engage in poor practice in this area – too often policy makers can be found searching for ‘quick-fix policy imports’. This does not provide a sound way forward and, worse than that, it may bolster the use of policies and practices determined by the Washington Consensus at the expense of other models and approaches. Alternative routes to cross-national policy transfer are available – approaches that search for ‘relevant practice’ rather than ‘best practice’. (63) But detailed consideration of these approaches is for another time.

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  - 57) More information on Common Purpose: [www.commonpurpose.org.uk](http://www.commonpurpose.org.uk)
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