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The Community Leadership and Place-shaping Roles of English Local Government

Synergy or Tension?

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Abstract

'Community leadership' and 'place-shaping' embody the outward-facing orientation of English local government to engage local communities in deliberative governance. The apparent synergies between them suggest they might be complementary roles yet one emphasizes 'sense of direction' while the other stresses 'sense of place'. What do they mean in practice? Evidence of the impact of community leadership since 2000 suggests the engagement of communities into community governance spaces such as Local Strategic Partnerships (LSPs) has been partially successful. Rather than empowering participation in governance spaces, community power has been concentrated into the hands of political and managerial elites. Policy statements since 2006 have emphasized a need for councils to exert strong local leadership. Do community leadership and place-shaping provide a complementary governance framework, or does place-shaping indicate a shift away from a normative and problematic model of community empowerment? Using Bourdieu's notion of the social space, this article considers the nature of 'governance space' and its role in a changing model of community governance.

Keywords community governance, community leadership, place-shaping

Introduction

Local government plays a key role in the relationship between the individual and the state. Since 1974 this role has been reformed in a number of ways, culminating in 2000 with a range of policy initiatives aimed at creating a 'new democratic legitimacy' derived from a more inclusive approach to communities (Blair, 1998).

The enduring vision for the institution of English local government has involved the redistribution of community power between and among the different 'layers' of stakeholders involved in community governance, in which communities are perceived as part of 'the reinvention of government' (Imrie and Raco, 2003). The vision has been mainly articulated through the community leadership role of local government, and elucidated into a model of community power by the Audit Commission (2003), which describes the three overlapping fields of 'local democratic leadership', 'leadership through partnership', and 'local community leadership'. It is in the intersecting spaces between these fields that new community power structures, such as Local Strategic Partnerships (LSPs) have been formed and which give rise to new forms of *facilitative* and *distributed* leadership (Audit Commission, 2003; Gains et al., 2007). The goal has been

... to ensure that councils are truly at the centre of public service locally, and that they are able to take the lead in developing a clear sense of direction for their communities and building partnerships to ensure the best for local communities. (DETR, 1998, para. 8.7)

Since 1998 the role of English local government has evolved in different ways. For example, concerns about the quality of English communities as liveable places have employed the notion of 'placelessness' as a public policy concern. Fears about violent extremism and radicalization following the attack on the World Trade Centre in 2001 and a series of riots in the North of England are expressed within the community cohesion agenda prompting anti-terror legislation in 2004. The concerns of coherence and cohesion in terms of 'non-places' (Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment [CABE], 2002) and the response to this involved a renewed emphasis on the importance of a 'sense of place' in achieving the goal of more cohesive and sustainable communities. Lyons (2007) defines this emerging 'place-shaping' role of local government as 'anything which affects the well-being of the local community', stressing the place-specific nature of this role. While the emphasis on 'place-shaping' has emerged quite recently the Leadership Centre for Local Government states 'leadership of place is nothing new, it is actually a return to the historic role of local government' (Leadership Centre for Local Government, 2008, p. 1).

As much as local government may always have fulfilled community leadership and place-shaping roles in the past, their emphasis in the context of reformed local government begs many questions, and not least about how these traditional yet evolving roles relate to one another, conceptually and in practice. For example, both concepts emphasize the outward-facing orientation of local authorities and seek to build a consensual basis for agency within new deliberative governance arenas or *spaces*. They are also premised on the idea that by building social capital, community interests can be better represented within these *spaces* as a result of communities *leading themselves*. However community leadership and place-shaping are distinctive policy categories; one appearing to value change and emphasize 'sense of direction', while the other values stability, and 'sense of place'.

My aim in this article is to explore these synergies and tensions and to raise a number of questions about the implications they have for the nature of new deliberative governance spaces. For example, is the emergence of the policy narrative around place-shaping, with its emphasis on strong leadership, likely to affect the more transformational and inclusive approach implicit in community leadership? And, are communities likely to share the understanding of the need for this? If building social capital is an adequate tactic to bring communities into these spaces, how might one explain the troubling lack of progress with the goal of redistributing community power as indicated by the findings of the Local Government Modernisation Agenda (LGMA) meta-evaluations into community leadership and other evaluation reports?

Despite the emphasis on the shared aspects of these governance spaces, such as the rules and assumptions that structure them (Ostrom, 1999; Skelcher et al., 2005), these are not smooth spaces in terms of function or purpose (Barnes et al., 2006). So how might they be better conceptualized in a way which recognizes the challenges and conflicts facing local government in making them more inclusive? Bourdieu's notion of the 'social space' provides a provocative device with which to explore the challenges and conflicts of redistributing community power away from the sites where it has been traditionally concentrated, and to expose the texture of relations within governance space beyond a simplistic production and exchange model of social capital. Rather than being sites of shared values, the social space is more realistically described as 'constructed on the basis of principles of differentiation or distribution constituted by the set of properties active in the social universe' (Bourdieu, 1991, p. 229). From this perspective, the limited redistribution of community power as indicated in various LGMA evaluations suggests that rather than act as a mechanism to address local tensions within the community power debate, in practice the community leadership role has perpetuated these tensions by serving to reproduce existing positions of power in new governance spaces. So rather than create synergy, place-shaping represents a move away from community leadership as a model to redistribute community power: place-shaping is about local authorities being back in charge of their localities.

Community Leadership and Place-shaping Roles of Local Government

Stoker (2004, p. 62) states that, '[community] governance demands of elected local government a new role as community leader rather than service provider'. Through its reform programme, New Labour articulated its vision for a more democratic community leadership role but not within the traditional or 'sovereign' leadership mould (Blair, 1998). The vision of community leadership was presented as the transformational mechanism for the role of modern English local government and the relationships between local authorities and their local communities, 'in the reverse sense of leader and follower' (Gains et al., 2007). In 2004,

the local government minister, Nick Raynsford, stated in a speech to the Local Government Association:

This community leadership role calls for local government to play many parts, not just one of 'leading from the front'. A 'command and control' model will not encourage participation and engagement. Telling people in the community what to do and what's best for them is not a recipe for successful, inclusive leadership in this day and age. In fact, leaders will need to surrender some control to gain influence and involvement.

This conceptualization of community leadership 'in the reverse sense of leader and follower' reflects the notion of *transformational* leadership, defined as a dialectical process that transforms leaders and followers alike (Grint, 2005; Northouse, 1997). The Audit Commission's (2003) tridimensional model of community leadership was developed within the context of the new Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA) audit regime as a way to address the challenges facing local authorities in managing public resources in these transformed local relationships (Downe and Martin, 2006). Based on evidence from the first CPA assessments the model was described as comprising three distinctive yet overlapping fields:

1. *local democratic leadership*, the purpose of which is to enable councils 'to bring people together, develop a vision for their areas, produce a community strategy and deliver improvements in the quality of life for local people' (Audit Commission, 2003, p. 2).
2. *leadership through partnership*, which is enacted mainly in the remit of Local Strategic Partnerships (LSPs), but also through a number of other collaborative arrangements depending on local circumstances (Geddes, 2005). LSPs are described as non-statutory organisations which '[bring] together at a local level the different parts of the public sector as well as the private, business, community and voluntary sectors so that different initiatives and services support each other and work together' (DTLR, 2001, p. 4).
3. *communities leading themselves*, which relates to the building of capacity and social capital within communities to participate in the first two aspects of the model. Based on Putnam's notion of social capital as the basis for building community capacity, social capital is defined as concerning 'trust and understanding, shared values, networks and behaviours than can enable co-operative action' (Russell, 2008, p. 12). Community involvement and capacity building may thus be achieved through different forms and different points of contact between communities and local government (Purdue, 2005).

Figure 1 portrays community leadership as a product, or 'expression', of different types of leadership emerging from these different fields (Audit Commission, 2003). The porous nature of these fields reflects the conceptual fluidity and 'elasticity' of community leadership (Sullivan and Sweeting, 2005). Indeed there are several definitions of community leadership which might be inserted here, but most of them essentially grapple with the core paradox of community governance

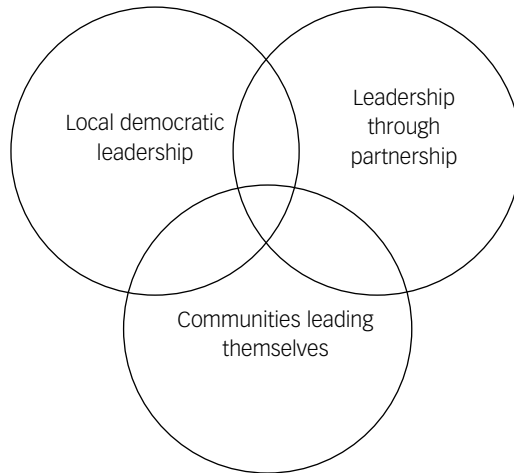


Figure 1 **Representation of Audit Commission's Model of Community Leadership (2003)**

first articulated by Hunter (1953), and others (most recently Lyons, 2007). This paradox concerns how it is possible to distribute community power in order to be inclusive while concentrating it into strategic position in order to be effective (Stone, 1989).

As an underpinning concept, *distributed leadership* suggests that leadership qualities are found distributed across the many rather than among the few 'charismatic' or heroic elite (Grönn, 2002). Northouse (1997) also suggests that transforming leadership can be exhibited by anyone (follower or leader) in an organization who engages with others and creates a connection that raises the level of motivation and morality in both the leader and the follower. This 'empowering' nature of transformational leadership is intended to derive from a change in the awareness of followers about the importance of certain goals that require action beyond the fields of their own interest.

By 2004 a number of policy documents had begun to address apparent weaknesses in the community leadership model, most of which focused on concerns about the lack of a distinctive leadership role of local government (Office of the Deputy Prime Minister [ODPM], 2005). Two reports warned of the dangers of the loss of local identity in a 'clone town Britain' (Conisbee et al., 2004) while others raised the bleak notion of 'placelessness' (Egan, 2004). Community leadership had been primarily about generating a 'sense of direction' but various policy documents began to emphasize local government's role as creating a 'sense of place' through the inclusive leadership of whole localities, rather than fragmented communities or neighbourhoods (ODPM, 2005). Egan (2004) commented:

... in too many places our current approach and systems are failing to deliver what people want. (Egan, 2004, p. 3)

Defining place-shaping as 'the creative use of powers and influence to promote the general well-being of a community and its citizens', Lyons (2007, p. 3) states that this requires that local authorities *convene* the viability of whole localities in order to make localities more competitive places to live and work, and to minimize adverse area or 'neighbourhood effects' on social and economic outcomes. Although he adds that 'good leadership extends far beyond the walls of the town hall', place-shaping requires that local government be the *champions* of local communities, scrutinizers of partner agencies, key service providers and commissioners, using other opportunities for collaborative and cross-boundary working.

The issues that affect communities and the lives of individual citizens are not confined to the organisational limits and boundaries of different service agencies. The work of these different agencies therefore needs to be brought together. That requires not just the joining-up of resources and activities, but also a leadership and influencing role to ensure that the efforts of all agencies are focused on the outcomes of greatest importance to local people. Local government is well-placed to play this convening role. (Lyons, 2007, p. 2.47)

Synergy or Tension?

Community and Place

Many have commented that 'community leadership' and 'place-shaping' have always been inherent aspects of local government in some way or other (Audit Commission, 2003; Leadership Centre for Local Government, 2008). Although both use the slightly different terminology of 'community' and 'place', broadly similar ideas are conveyed about the 'natural area' in which people live (Figueira-McDonagh, 2001). In the wider policy discourse community and place provide the integrating mechanisms of civic and civil society (Imrie and Raco, 2003; Purdue, 2005; Russell, 2008). This apparent synergy suggests that the terms might be used interchangeably to mean much the same thing. In fact local authorities employ much the same structures and processes to fulfil their community leadership and place-shaping roles, including Sustainable Community Strategies, LSPs, Local Area Agreements (LAAs), Local Development Plans (LDPs), as well as a wide range of executive arrangements and powers.

However, the concept of 'place' conveys an implicit critique of 'community'. Cooke (1989) has argued that a focus on community produces overly inward and reactive concerns. As a mainly structural idea, it can be too narrow in terms of 'spatial reach' but too broad in terms of social connotations. Suggesting that community symbolizes little more than collective sentiment, Delanty (2003) adds that the only enduring purpose of the community concept is its capacity to convey a sense of *belonging*, but a sense which can in certain circumstances yield

‘uncivil goals’ (Figueira-McDonagh, 2001, p. 163). ‘Place’ however permits the convergence of different debates about localities as potentialities for interaction and cohesion (BTEG, 2006), and as the keystone in the government’s goals for devolved and localized choices (Milliband, 2006).

Governance Space

Both community leadership and place-shaping also depend upon local government to approach community governance as a ‘democratic design issue’ about how best and at what level (community or place) to achieve public value (’t Hart et al., 2008). As new ‘political opportunity structures’ for community participation (Bailey, 2003), Barnes et al. (2006) suggest that these spaces contribute to the formation of new *collective identities* through ‘organisation, communications and leadership’ (Barnes et al., 2006, p. 201). Lyons (2007, para. 5.38) view is that local government can best lead their localities by creating new spaces *within* existing structures for setting local priorities and making decisions ‘to reflect on best the solution for local people’. In the place-shaping role governance spaces provide ‘freedom from constraints’ and the freedom to govern localities based upon a much wider spatial approach (Lyons, 2007). As community leaders local authorities seek to exploit spaces for the reinvigoration of local democracy, by engaging communities in a range of collaborative arrangements such as LSPs, community partnerships, forums, and so on, to build transparency and trust (Simmons et al., 2007).

Governance space thus indicates a social space, a space of relations, ‘as real as a geographical space, in which movements [change] have to be paid for by labour, by effort and especially by time’ (Bourdieu, 1991, p. 232), and which have a structuring effect on localities. In their community leadership and place-shaping roles local authorities ‘make sense’ of complex institutional environments, which requires the leadership role to embody ‘an explanatory function for others’ (Pye, 2005, p. 46). However, as community leaders and place-shapers they are challenged to impart different senses about their locality and their role within it. By emphasizing ‘sense of direction’, community leadership symbolizes transformation in local relations through redistributed community power and a greater engagement of communities in deliberative governance. Place-shaping emphasizes ‘sense of place’, delivered by strong local leadership derived from stability, cohesion and greater executive freedoms (DCLG, 2006b; ODPM, 2005).

Bourdieu and ‘The Social Space’

Bourdieu’s notion of the social space provides an opportunity to reflect on the competing values between community leadership and place-shaping by offering a way to explore the dispositional preference of local authority leadership for stability over change. Bourdieu (1991, p. 229) states that, ‘the social world can be represented in the form of a (multi-dimensional) space constructed by the set of

properties active in the social universe under considerations, that is, able to confer force or power on the possessor in that universe'. The social space is thus

... a field of forces: in other words as a set of objective power relations imposed on all those who enter this field, relations which are not reducible to the intentions of individual agents or even to direct *interactions* between agents. (Bourdieu, 1991, p. 230)

The social space is composed of a number of differently structured social contexts, or *fields* of action (education, culture, politics), in which position is determined by the volume and composition of different types of capital possessed by agents. This focus on the political field as a series of power relations opens up tacit assumptions about governance spaces, such as the way that informal rules and assumptions about access, influence, and movement within them are developed, forcing a reconsideration about the way that the governance space is structured. Central to Bourdieu's assessment of the social space is that social relations and structure cannot be understood simply at the level of individual agency or at the structural level (Jenkins, 1992, 2000 edn). They are the result of the interaction between individual, group, or institutional preferences as historical products, (which Bourdieu states are inscribed in the *habitus*, a set of generative dispositions to act in certain ways), and the permeable structure of the particular field in question (Bourdieu, 1990). Agency can neither be guided by a rationality in every situation, nor is it wholly random. The texture of the social space is thus structured by the struggles for the distribution of material, political, economic, cultural, and – above all – symbolic capital. Symbolic capital (language, prestige, power), represents the accumulation of the resources necessary to reorder or preserve the social space, embodied in those who fulfil the local leadership role.

The LSP as Deliberative Governance Space

General approaches to deliberative governance spaces suggest that the spaces in which agents interact to make decisions about resources and services is structured by shared rules, norms and strategies (Lowndes and Leach, 2004; Ostrom, 1999). The institutionalist perspective tends to emphasize the rule-driven structure of community governance, both at a formal and informal level. Bailey (2003, p. 445) describes LSPs as 'collaborative arrangements between different agencies and sectors which can only achieve their objectives through game-like interactions between network members'. Munro et al. (2008) state that LSPs are characterized by informal rules of engagement 'located in the collaborative space rather than being structured within the formal institutions of government' (Skelcher et al., 2005, p. 574). Yet Bourdieu (1990) suggests the idea of rule-governed behaviour renders agency as an 'epiphenomenon' of structure and the actors within it as semi-powerless.

Lowndes and Leach (2004) state that the nature of local authority leadership is largely dependent upon the local context, yet factors such as community diversity and civic traditions are *less* important in shaping the governance space than

the structuring interests of those in positions of power. How do these structuring interests contribute to the nature of the governance space which is the LSP? For example, rather than being consensual, are LSPs more accurately depicted as sites of struggle between interests, and what role do community interests therefore play in structuring them? Do LSPs preference certain types of interests over others?

Bourdieu's (1991) analysis of the social space provides different levels at which it is possible to consider the texture of governance space and the preference for interests within it (Jenkins, 1992, 2000 edn). First, in terms of the *context and flow* of institutions. Bourdieu does not use the idea of *institution* in any ordinary sense, but deems it to refer to 'any relatively durable set of social relations which endows individuals with power, status and resources' (Thompson, 1991, p. 8). The institutional context is thus a historical product embedded in the *habitus* of all those who act within it, whether dominant or dominated. Its structure conveys a sense of the past and serves as a probability statement about limits and what is possible. This contrasts with Lowndes and Sullivan (2004) who downplay the political institution, suggesting it provides little other than a backdrop to agency (although they probably intend a slightly different meaning of *institution* to Bourdieu). Time is also a fundamental issue to the nature of the social space, not calibrated in terms of the synchronized events of the calendar, but in the 'rhythms that set the pace' of a locality and the intervals and cycles between events.

Second, the assessment of local or institutional context must address the *sense of their position* that actors have within the social space relative to others (Jenkins, 1992, 2000 edn). This sense is a product of the volume and composition of different types of resources or 'capital' possessed by an agent or group and which is reproduced through the structure of the social space. Bourdieu (1991) suggests that membership of certain groups provides access to certain kinds of capital which are linked to different types of power, and which in turn define one's position within a given field: there is thus a struggle between different fields for power, and struggles within each field for positions of influence. Political power is derived from the capacity to exploit the linkage of positions (*homology*) between these different fields to create 'objectified representations of the social world' (Bourdieu, 1991, p. 236). These representations (expressed perhaps in strategies, policies or other political utterances) also serve to reproduce and structure the social space.

Third, Bourdieu (1991) states that since practice is not random we must seek to understand the *practical sense* of agents, which involves the capacity for 'the exploitation of pause, interval and indecision' (Jenkins, 1992, p. 71). Bourdieu states that the practical sense is derived from the *habitus*, which guides agency in specific contexts. It is essentially about *strategizing* because life is not – and cannot be – governed by rules. Imagine, states Bourdieu, if we had rules for everything. Bourdieu's depiction of the social space as a site of struggle over access to resources suggests that depicting governance space as an arena of shared and tacit rules may not be a full or accurate account of the preferencing behaviour of

local government leadership. One might expect to find some evidence therefore of conflict over access to the resources of leadership.

1 The Context and Flow of LSPs

Insofar as local government reforms were intended to produce new forums for more efficient decision-making within councils themselves, various evaluation reports suggest this much has been relatively successful (Gains and John, 2005; Stoker et al., 2007). Noting that where the new constitutional arrangements have produced 'space for interpretation and creativity', Lowndes and Leach (2004, p. 561) add this occurs as much at the informal as the formal governance spaces, effectively 'neutering or subverting the intended changes in values or power relationships'. The structuring influences concerning executive decision-making appear to lean towards traditional ways, traditional places, traditional times of working, and to preference stability.

LSPs signify complex arenas in which competing priorities over resource allocation are negotiated, not just at the local level but between the local and national levels too, requiring trade-offs over inclusion and efficiency (Bailey, 2003; Munro et al., 2008). Russell (2008) reports that the goal of including wide numbers of partners brings problems in terms of aligning business planning cycles, reporting timetables and monitoring frameworks. Many of these and other barriers are products of 'longstanding organisational cultures and ways of working' and 'territorialism' (Russell, 2008, para. 5.10). Clegg and McNulty (2002) state:

Thus, mundane features of partnership – such as how and where meetings take place – become indicative of tensions within the partnership. (Clegg and McNulty, 2002, p. 588)

The draw into the LSP, states Purdue (2005, p. 265), is that 'partnership working sometimes provides the fragile new spaces of local governance in which these collaborative conversations can take place across organisational and sectoral boundaries'. Leach et al. (2005) report that for many community groups the fear of entering this governance space is that they will be marginalized within it, leading to a 'defensive' form of participation. Rai (2008) comments such barriers contribute to a 'prohibitive culture of governance' evident in the space and flow of participatory governance forms in terms of structures, settings, personal competence, and value conflicts.

2 Sense of Position within LSPs

Evidence indicates that there has been significant progress in the establishment or restructuring of partnerships in line with national guidance, but not towards any substantive shifts in power (DCLG, 2006a). Many LSPs have emerged out of earlier regeneration or similar partnerships, where the underlying culture has survived modernization. Local councils continue to be the dominant player in LSPs for cultural and historical factors, making it difficult to escape traditional interest

boundaries and relationships (Purdue, 2001). Clegg and McNulty (2004) support the view that membership of prior networks and contacts are generative of particular types of capital, especially in terms of skills and dispositions, which are valued and linked to success of partnerships.

Populating LSPs with more (and possibly ill-prepared) agents may not be sufficient to make governance space accessible. For example, Morris (2006, p. 2) reports that 'Community Empowerment Network (CEN) representatives have had too little influence on LSP boards'. Russell (2005) describes this lack of 'parity of partnership' roles between councils and CEN representatives in terms of 'junior status', indicating a number of reasons for this including the underlying culture of councils as well as the timing of developments. However, the stated commitment to community and voluntary sector involvement is not matched in practice, and is clearly more geared to voluntary sector representation than to community involvement. Russell (2005) concludes:

LSPs can provide different kinds of valuable support and action can be taken by VCS organisations themselves, but the indications are that insufficient resources are being made available yet in most areas for the amount of work that is needed and for a properly strategic and targeted approach. (Russell, 2005, p. 49)

In terms of inclusion into LSPs participation is normally assumed to mean the Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS), but can occasionally mean 'active community involvement', which Aspden and Birch (2005) state 'is often considered more meaningful' yet much less evident. That said, Mitchell and Skinner (2007) report that despite the need for strategic representation of the VCS in LSPs, there is little literature available that sets out the skills and competences needed, and none which specifically support working on LSPs. Acknowledging the development of other opportunities for community involvement Aspden and Birch (2005) comment:

Communities are more actively involved in structures for community revitalisation; capacity building initiatives are widespread; long term community trusts and the like are beginning to grow. The evidence is, however, that community empowerment is still fragile and that real control over resources has shifted only marginally if at all. (Aspden and Birch, 2005, para. 2.3.1)

Leach et al. (2005) add that there are few indications that the increase in opportunities for the 'wider unorganized public' to participate are being pursued. Sullivan (2008) also reports that the private sector is possibly the least successfully engaged body of potential stakeholders. One possible explanation is a view across councils of community empowerment as a 'naïve' and romantic idea with the potential to undermine community cohesion (Goss, 2005). Considering the extent of community participation in LSPs, Sullivan and Howard (2005) report that almost 80 per cent of LSPs have VCS umbrella group membership, compared to Community Networks, which have membership on only a third of LSPs. Russell (2005) states the emphasis on *community* engagement preferences advocacy over service-

delivery type VCS organizations, which itself raises important capacity issues about who is best positioned to speak for the community. Local authorities' preference in balancing inclusion and effectiveness is to engage those who can produce objective representations of their community through a single, clear voice, which makes decision-making easier (Gaventa, 2004).

3 Strategizing in LSPs

Bourdieu (1991) comments that competence is not simply about turning up: it is about being able to express a view and also 'those who listen must reckon that those who speak are worthy of attention' (Thompson, 1991, p. 9). Leach et al. (2005) note this effect in reporting that although stakeholder engagement in LSPs has increased, it is unclear whether there is any improvement in the quality of engagement. One explanation for this might be that the majority of LSPs are led by local councils. Goss (2005, p. 24) suggests that changes in governing positions are impeded by a 'riddle of uninvested leadership' in which the predominance of local councils is not adequately explained simply by a presumption of the leadership position; it is also a result of other partners taking a 'watching brief' approach. In the absence of adequate capacity from other sectors, local authorities will rush to fill in the gaps and, as the accountable body, for good reasons too. Some LSPs are chaired by other partners but ODPM (2006) adds that it is not who chairs the LSP that is significant anyway because there is no automatic connection between the roles of leader and follower in a partnership, adding:

In the end, our evidence is that the extent to which an LSP achieves a balance of power between partners appears to depend first and foremost on how willing the local authority is to lead, but to do so in an inclusive manner. (ODPM, 2006, para. 3.10)

LSPs are ambiguous spaces for all concerned. Councils themselves are often ambivalent towards LSPs, dismissing their necessity and raising concerns about the sincerity of local council commitments to create inclusive deliberative partnerships. Purdue (2005) states:

... the new reliance on a more participative model of democracy within local government is not, in general, matched by appropriate working methods in partnerships. (Purdue, 2005, p. 263)

Purdue notes there are no guarantees that local community leaders other than those already established in the role are able to participate in a leadership coalition. One source of tension is conflict over who fulfils, or who is presumed to fulfil, the role of community leader (Sullivan and Sweeting, 2005). While Blair (1998, p. 13) described local authorities' distinctive leadership role 'to weave and knit together the contribution of various local stakeholders', conflicts also arise over whether local authorities are best positioned to be community leaders:

In more participatory approaches, both the elected and the bureaucratic forms of representation and legitimacy are challenged, as communities and their leaders are invited

into (or demand) more direct forms of engagement. Conflicts emerge over who speaks for whom, and with what authority, and about the appropriate relationship between the 'governors' and the 'governed'. (Gaventa 2004, p. 9)

A further tension arises within local government, perhaps echoing an ideological ambivalence within central government, about what exactly is meant by *empowerment* and who is the focus of key reform goal of *active citizenship*. Andrews et al. (2008, p. 489) notes that although the policy language expresses the goal of 'empowered participatory democracy', community empowerment at the local level increasingly addresses citizens as customers in 'marketplace democracy' instead of understanding diverse stakeholder needs. Local strategies are replete with references to community participation, but what is described as 'community' rarely amounts to little other than what both Fung (2004) and Bourdieu (2005) describe as 'aggregated public opinion'.

Leadership: Constraints and Change

A clear synergy between the community leadership and place-shaping roles of local government is that they share similar 'apparatus of leadership' in terms of sustainable community strategies and outward facing collaborative arrangements, such as LSPs intended as deliberative governance spaces in which partners and communities participate to determine local priorities and service delivery. However there is also a distinctive difference between these roles: community leadership, at least in terms of the language of policy, is about the transformation of localities through the redistribution of community power. It is premised upon a narrative about empowerment that at least

... presents a semblance of an open space in which new actors are able to deliberate rules for moving ahead with the governance of their communities. (Skelcher et al., 2005, p. 592)

Skelcher et al. (2005) note that in practice these open spaces are constrained by a managerialist discourse that seeks to minimize the disrupting influence of more inclusive community governance arrangements. Wainwright (2001) agrees, stating:

... the community is present in partnerships primarily as a resource – a resource in terms of knowledge, social networks, commitment, energy, time. Government policy is not always clear as to whether it sees community participation as more than a resource; in particular does community participation ever involve the sharing of power, and hence some loss in power on the part of the local or national state, in order to increase the overall democratic power of local people? (Wainwright, 2001, p. 3)

Evidence from the meta-evaluation of the LGMA, along with other research into LSPs and constitutional reforms, indicates only partial success so far in the reconfiguration of governance space in favour of more equitable access. Further

research supports the view that the membership of LSPs is not only unreflective of local communities, but questions the commitment of local councils to make them otherwise (BTEG, 2006). Local councils have tended to use deliberative governance space to reproduce and legitimize existing forms of power (Cochrane, 2003).

Bourdieu's notion of the social space is helpful in highlighting that access to governance space is constrained not just by the pragmatics of managing local coalitions, but also by the very device nominally established to open it up. From his perspective the leadership position represents the concentration of symbolic and other forms of capital. As in the wider social space, the effect of concentrated capital is the reproduction of the structures that create it rather than their subversion. Bourdieu (1991) states:

... the objective relations of power tend to reproduce themselves in visions of the social world which contribute to the permanence of those relations, this is because the structuring principles of the world view are rooted in the objective resources of the social world and because the relations of power are also present in people's minds in the form of the categories of perception of those relations. (Bourdieu, 1991, p. 236)

The possession of capital is a probability statement about an agent's or group's capacity to read and therefore to be in a position to change the social space. Being 'well positioned' within the social space does not just mean that others are not so 'well positioned'. For those who lack symbolic capital, their position produces an 'adjustment between the individual's hopes, aspirations, goals and expectations, on the one hand, and the objective situation in which they find themselves by virtue of their place in the social order, on the other' (Jenkins, 1992, 2000 edn, p. 28). Those who lack adequate and appropriate capital have limited options to acquire the resources necessary to bring about change. The Audit Commission's model of community leadership suggests that community empowerment involves building capabilities for visioning and articulating a sense of direction and place in order to participate in governance spaces. Yet, the reality is that those who are 'well positioned' to envision and bring about change are those who are 'least inclined to do so' (Bourdieu, 1991, p. 239). This produces a simple question: is it possible to use a leadership model in order to redistribute community power? If not, is the redistribution of community power what is actually being aimed for? Rather than bringing about transformational change in the values and motives of leaders and followers, community leadership might be more appropriately described as a form of transactional leadership that focuses 'on the exchanges that occur between leaders and their followers' (Northouse, 1997, p. 131). The nature of these exchanges are determined by the institutions which instigate them, which Heifetz (2003) states in the case of public leadership are more likely to be mechanistic, rule-bound, and risk-averse.

While community empowerment remains a central part of the governance message, a central point made by Lyons (2007) is that the lack of public trust in local

government has been caused by the ‘enfeeblement’ of local authorities; strengthening them can only be achieved by entrusting them to deal with local problems locally. Local government must use its position ‘to set the agenda’ by understanding statutory requirements and ‘building engagement skills’ (Lyons, 2007). In a direct challenge to the community leadership discourse Lyons reiterates the need for strong leadership from local government through a self-empowering and locally-driven formula rather than through a centrally prescribed model. Local citizens should participate as *citizens* in shaping their localities. The compromise, in terms of Floyd Hunter’s paradox, is to empower local government and strengthen its strategic position over any idea of redistributed community power in any meaningful sense.

Conclusion

Bourdieu’s notion of the social space provides a provocative framework to reconsider the emerging evidence from the LGMA and other evaluations. It helps to raise questions about the plausibility of a leadership model to promote real community participation and bring about the meaningful redistribution of community power. Many state that it is still too early to pass judgement on the progress – or lack of it – with the reform of local government and the redistribution of community power (DCLG, 2006a; Sullivan and Sweeting, 2005). It is believed that redistributing community power to communities is a long-term, generational goal, as it requires fundamental change to the nature of deliberative governance space (Lyons, 2007). It means actively developing not just social capital but also the practical competence of communities so that they can participate within complex governance contexts as more level fields, and being prepared for the transformation of those fields which comes about as a result of their participation (Wainwright, 2001).

However, in terms of the impact that councils have had through their the community leadership roles, progress is largely limited to the development of a formal partnership model of deliberative community governance with little change to where or how local decisions are made in practice. There is at best an ambivalence about what community empowerment in this context means, and at worst a resistance to it. In terms of the flexibility and diversity that come with diffuse and complex systems of accountability, there remains a belief that people want clear and strong local leadership, linked to the notion of public value, in which local councils use their positions to lead their localities and build cohesion. In contrast, the Audit Commission’s model of community leadership represents a broad set of differing ideas about democratic governance, in the form of a loose narrative that does not appear, and possibly was never expected, to work in practice.

Does place-shaping signify a shift in the current imperatives of local government? In terms of concerns about economic, environmental and political security, places need certainty, stability and a unifying narrative that promotes consensus on local priorities. Whether this is indicative of a more fundamental shift away from

commitments to greater democratic governance is worth further inquiry, although there appears to be very little research into these issues at present. Bourdieu's political sociology is a helpful device with which to question some of the principles and assumptions underlying the notion of community leadership, including the use of a leadership narrative to empower communities to fully participate in deliberative governance. Perhaps the real paradox of community power is that it takes strong leadership to give power away, but this suggests a need for a more textured conceptualization of the leadership role of English local government in reforming and participating in local democratic governance.

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