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Handbook on Local and Regional Governance

Chapter 16 by Robin Hambleton

Political leadership: when place makes a difference

Introduction

Societies across the world now face at least four major challenges at once: 1) Recovering from the COVID-19 health calamity; 2) A sharp economic downturn arising from the pandemic; 3) The global climate and ecological emergencies; and 4) Disturbing increases in social, economic and racial inequality. Various writers have claimed that complex challenges of this kind require not just improvements in international, national and multi-level governance, but also a significant expansion in the power and influence of place-based leaders. For example, Barber (2013) claims that city mayors, singly or jointly, are more capable of responding to transnational challenges than nation states because they are not mired in ideological infighting and sovereign rivalries.

This chapter considers the importance of place in the modern world and explores the major power struggle that is now underway between place-less power and place-based power. By place-less power, I mean the exercise of power by decision makers who are unconcerned about the impacts of their decisions on communities living in particular places. The forces of globalisation, which have, over the last thirty years or so, resulted in a remarkable growth in the number of multinational companies operating on a global basis, have provided the engine for this rapid expansion in place-less policy making, and the consequences for social, economic and environmental justice have been dire (Mason 2015; Monbiot 2016; Jackson 2021).

Fortunately, many political leaders elected to serve in the institutions of local and regional governance – meaning elected local councillors, directly elected mayors, city region assembly members and other locally elected officials – are alert to this troubling challenge. In many countries, we find local politicians working very hard to advance the cause of place-based power against the impositions of place-less decision makers. This chapter aims to throw new light on this growing tension between seemingly unaccountable, distant decision makers and local citizens demanding their democratic right to influence the decisions affecting the quality of life in the area where they live and work.

The presentation unfolds in the following way. First, we ask the question why does place matter? A second section, one that discusses the rise of place-less power, shows how the power of place, meaning the ability of citizens living in particular localities to influence events affecting their area, is under

threat. The various factors that explain this reshaping of the global power system are outlined. A third section considers whether the COVID-19 calamity is spurring a rethink of societal priorities in a way that could lead to a strengthening of the power of place in the future. The suffering caused by the pandemic has certainly led to an upsurge in community-based problem solving. It is important to recognise that many of the most effective responses to the COVID-19 pandemic have drawn strength from the power of place.

In the fourth section a conceptual framework, derived from study of innovative cities and city regions in several countries, is outlined. Inspirational examples of civic leadership in three European cities – Bristol, UK; Copenhagen, Denmark; and Freiburg, Germany – are then presented to illustrate how collaborative leadership can make a difference to the local quality of life. A penultimate section considers whether place has a downside, and a final section identifies emerging lessons for scholarship and for policy and practice.

1) Why place matters

There are many reasons why place should play a much more prominent role in public policy making. Some of the reasons stem from recognising the flaws in remote, centralised decision-making, while others arise from the demonstrable advantages of adopting a place-based approach.[i] In relation to the downsides of centralised decision-making it is well documented that higher levels of government, meaning those exercising decision-making power above the level of the city region, city or locality, tend be more disabled by departmentalism than more local levels of governance. For example, James C. Scott, in his insightful book, *Seeing like a state,* shows how national governments, with their functional, single-purpose departments, have difficulty comprehending what needs to be done precisely because their briefing systems and ways of seeing are distorted - not surprisingly, this leads to disastrous errors in decision-making (Scott 1998). Turning to the advantages of place-based decision-making Magnusson (2011) builds on Scott's analysis and explains that to 'see like a city' has many advantages over 'seeing like a state'. He argues that, in particular, it involves thinking and acting as inhabitants, not governors. Taking account of Magnusson's analysis we can identify four inter-related reasons why place matters.

First, place has meaning for people. To claim that place is significant in modern life could seem to be an odd, even out-of-touch, way of viewing the modern world. Some may feel that, because the internet and mobile phone technologies have transformed our abilities to communicate across space – not to mention the way globalization has altered economic and social relations across the entire planet – talking about the importance of place is to swim against the tide. Those who hold this view are misguided. The COVID-19 pandemic has reminded us that much of life remains, and will always remain, stubbornly place-dependent. Place forms an important part of our identity as human beings and it contributes to our sense of belonging (Tuan 1977; Castello 2010; Bell and de-Shalit 2011; McClay and McAllister 2014). To argue for recognizing the significance of place for our psychological wellbeing

is not to contest the value of personal connections made digitally across space.

Second, place provides the spatial basis for the exercise of democracy. In an important sense elected local authorities provide the democratic building blocks that underpin nation states and, ultimately, international democratic institutions. The longstanding and fundamental arguments for local government are relevant to this discussion of the relationships between place and local democracy (Gyford 1991). There are several dimensions to these relationships but three stand out and, whilst they overlap, they are distinctive. First, local governments contribute to political pluralism and support political education as they act as schools in which democratic habits can be acquired and practiced. Local political engagement can enhance the overall quality of both representative and participatory democracy in a country. In relation to leadership development these local settings can provide a good way of drawing people from diverse backgrounds into local civic life. Second, and closely related, local governments can facilitate the growth of self-organising capacity in local communities (Gilchrist and Taylor 2016). As mentioned earlier, the COVID-19 pandemic has stimulated a remarkable upsurge in place-based community action and local governments have played a vital role in encouraging and supporting these developments. Third, local governments can improve the responsiveness of service providers to the diverse needs and requirements of different communities, an argument that gathers additional weight in complex multicultural communities. Jane Wills, in her study of localism in the UK, explains how the rise of localism was '… generating new potential for collective organisation, self-government and new forms of political authority that could then contribute to the wider good of the whole' (Wills 2016 p.207).

A third argument for valuing place relates to effectiveness. Places are different and policies and practices need to be designed to respond to these differences (Dreier et al 2014). Local leaders understand these differences better than those working in distant central government departments. More than that, as we shall see when we discuss examples of innovative place-based leadership later in the chapter, enlightened civic leadership is, at root, collaborative. It stems from the direct experience of local actors listening to each other, sharing knowledge and understandings, and co-creating new solutions. There is a two-fold advantage here. Strong local government can lead to the co-creation of solutions suited to local communities. In addition, having a diversity of geographical power centres in a country adds to the innovative capacity of that country's governance. With the rise of international policy exchange between and among localities and cities in different countries, the dispersal of power adds to the innovative capacity of the world as a whole (Campbell 2012).

Fourth, contrary to theories about the so-called 'death of distance' (Cairncross 1997), place matters enormously to all manner of businesses providing goods and services. Research on why companies, and organisations in general, value face-to-face encounters and meetings shows that:

> ‘In the end, it’s still about the human touch: making time and making contact… In this context Information and Communications Technology (ICT) is the great enabler – we can “reach out” across cities and continents as never before – but it is *not* the great substitute – face-to-face is still integral to maintaining relationships, confidence and commitment’ (Reades and Crookston 2021 p. 217, ***author’s emphasis***)

Reades and Crookston set out a compelling argument that ‘being there’ really matters. Some elected local authorities understand this process well enough and have adopted an approach to local economic development that is designed to strengthen place-based relationships, and keep wealth local, through a process of community-wealth building (Guinan and O’Neill 2019). In the UK Preston City Council provides a good example. In this case the approach involves harnessing the purchasing power of public institutions and local businesses to transfer wealth and power back to local communities (Brown and Jones 2021).

2) The rise of place-less power

Arguably the most important reason why place should be given more attention in public policy making stems from the need to combat place-less power. To understand the rise of place-less power it is important to step back and consider the way global capitalism has evolved over the last fifty years or so. David Ranney, in his perspicacious analysis of industrial restructuring in Chicago, explains how the power and influence of trade unions and local communities started to be weakened in the 1970s (Ranney 2003). While his action/research was conducted in one city, his insights illuminate developments that have taken place in many industrialised countries. Ranney shows that the manufacturing-based economy that developed in the USA, with jobs that paid reasonably good wages, arose from social and political struggles by workers and activists.

In the 1980s this relative stability in socio-economic relations was, however, undermined by the arrival of, what former US President George H. Bush called, a ‘new world order’. In essence, this new order, which was driven by powerful elites that had no interest in the welfare of particular communities, required each individual and every firm to be globally competitive. This dramatic shift ushered into the USA, and many other countries, an era of increasing inequality – with a lowering of living standards for many people and, for some, an increase in abject poverty.

Over the years, with the growth of increasingly large multinational companies, influential place-less decision-makers have become increasingly effective in playing places off against each other. A consequence of this behaviour, which is underpinned by the global financial system, is that private sector decision-making has come to focus on maximising profit for companies, regardless of the social and environmental costs (Piketty 2014). Thus, in recent decades we have seen firms and businesses continually opting to move their activities to more distant locations where the cost of land and labour is lower. This narrow economic approach to decision-making

disregards the importance of social bonds and community wellbeing and is, of course, environmentally misguided (Chang 2011; Stiglitz 2019).

I present here an example of this process, one that is set out in more detail elsewhere (Hambleton 2015 pp. 89-91). Cadbury's, a famous UK chocolate manufacturer had a successful chocolate factory located in Keynsham, a small town near Bristol, UK. When, in 2010, the company was taken over by Kraft Foods, a large American company, the new owners decided to close the factory, which was profit-making, and move production to Poland in order to make, in theory, an even higher level of profit. Despite making a public promise to the workers at Keynsham that they would not move the production elsewhere, Kraft Foods (renamed Modelez International in 2012) closed the factory. This relocation resulted in the loss of 400 jobs in this small town and this decision, made by Kraft Foods executives located in Illinois, USA, had a devastating impact on people living there. Needless to say, the environmental costs of shipping the massive volumes of chocolate from Poland to the UK for years to come were not factored into Kraft Food's decision to withdraw from the UK.

This is a classic example of what Michael Sandel calls 'market thinking'. In his acclaimed book, *What money can't buy*, Sandel explains how this expansion of 'market values', into spheres of life where they don't belong crowds out other more important values – for example, sympathy, generosity, thoughtfulness, and solidarity (Sandel 2012). He argues, rightly in my view, that there are moral limits to markets and that these have gone largely ignored.

Recent scholarship has identified how the so-called 'digital revolution' has added troubling, twists to this story about the rise of place-less power. Phil Allmendinger, in an extended critique of so-called 'smart cities' initiatives, argues that they threaten not just the future of cities but also the future of the planet (Allmendinger 2021). He fears that the enormously powerful global Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) companies – such as Google, Facebook and Twitter – are striving to change the very nature of the city and society:

> 'The impacts are all around for us to see, from the loss of affordable housing through Airbnb to the closure of shops and offices as retailing moves online, facilitated by out-of-town giant Amazon "fulfilment centres"' (Allmendinger 2021 p.10)

Allmendinger, following in the footsteps of Shoshana Zuboff (2019), explains how so-called 'smart cities' form part of a deliberate strategy, developed by the major high-tech companies, to collect precious personal data about the behaviour of citizens in order to extract private profit. In relation to 'smart cities' initiatives Zuboff is particularly concerned that Alphabet Inc, the parent company of Google, is now actively working to introduce 'for profit' models of data gathering in partnership with particular local governments. She explains how these 'Google city' initiatives are designed to use sophisticated surveillance systems to gather place-based information about people with the

result that: '… once-public assets and functions are reborn as the cornered raw materials earmarked for a new marketplace' (Zuboff 2019 p. 228).

The major ICT companies are also weakening local democracy by undermining the revenue streams of local newspapers and local media outlets. More than 500 US newspapers have closed since 2010 and, in the UK, the number is around 200 (Allmendinger 2021 p.69). This is worrying as citizens are deprived of the insights provided by independent local journalists analysing place-specific issues and concerns. The remaining local newspapers find themselves pressed to include clickbait and/or recycled news.

Danilo Yanich, in a detailed analysis of the impact of local television news on recent elections in the USA, shows how local television is a dominant source of local political information for American citizens (Yanich 2020). He explains how the political parties have realised this and that, particularly during national election campaigns, local stations have become hugely dependent on income from political advertising. A consequence is that investment by local stations in producing stories that critically examine the claims made in the various ads they carry has dwindled to virtually nothing. His disturbing conclusion is that political reality in the USA is now determined by those with the resources to buy it.

3) COVID-19 opens a new political window?

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a devastating impact on the world. At the time of writing over 285 million people have been infected and over 5.4 million people have died. Moreover, the virus has revealed startling social and economic inequalities in many societies. It has been brutal in hurting people in society who are already vulnerable – for example, the infirm, the elderly, the poor and people from black and ethnic minority backgrounds (Marmot et al 2020; Perry et al 2021; Stiglitz 2020). At the same time, while the pandemic has been merciless, the gravity of the current predicament has brought about a rethink and many people are asking fundamental questions. For example, after COVID-19, what kind of future do we want for ourselves, for our children, for our grandchildren and for subsequent generations? Is it wise to believe that continued exploitation of people and the planet provides the right lodestar for modern societies?

I have explored these questions in a recent book and suggest that the so-called Overton Window needs to be discarded and replaced by a new window of political possibilities (Hambleton 2020a). Named after Joseph P Overton, the late Vice-President of the Mackinac Center for Public Policy, based in Michigan, US, this window concept claims to describe what is politically possible, or reasonable, at any given time within the prevailing politics of the day. In his insightful book *The Establishment: And How They Get Away With It*, Owen Jones provides a revealing account of the role of right-wing think tanks in reshaping the political discourse about the role of the state in Britain and the USA, in the period since the 1970s (Jones 2014). He explains how these think tanks operated as 'outriders', extolling extremist, even dangerous,

ideas that right-leaning politicians could then draw on. He rightly gives attention to the so-called 'Overton Window'. The window analogy is rather helpful, as it suggests that those seeking bold change, in whatever direction, need to think beyond the development of new policies. Radical reformers need to work out how to move the location of the window in the direction they favour.

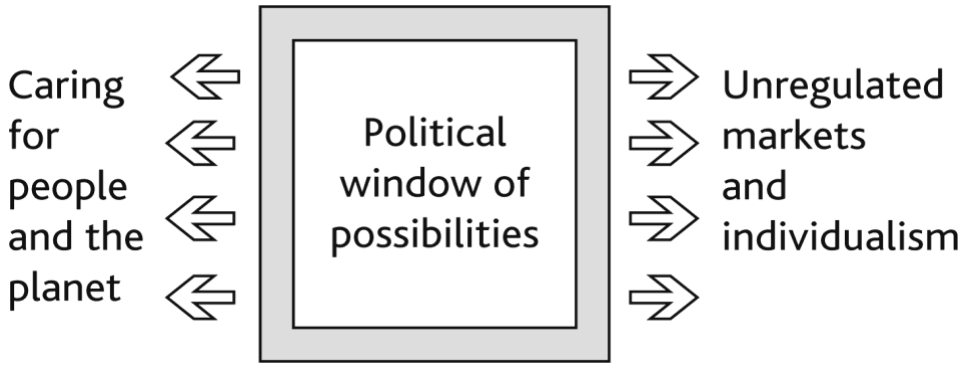
The chief problem with Overton's version of the window is that it misunderstands the nature of freedom in the modern world. In line with Overton's position, right-leaning politicians take the view that weak, or minimal, government is superior to strong government – at root they claim that 'less government' delivers 'more freedom'. The state does, indeed, limit individual freedoms, usually to bring about significant societal benefits. For example, anti-pollution laws limit the freedom of polluters to ruin the natural environment, and laws banning physical assault and murder limit the freedom of violent individuals to do harm to other people. City planning laws prevent individual landowners from executing developments that would have devastating impacts on neighbours and society at large. Even those on the right of the political spectrum recognise that not all individual freedoms are good for society.

However, the experience of living through the COVID-19 calamity teaches us that the very framing of this debate about 'freedom' is misconceived. Focusing attention only on individual freedom is a peculiarly narrow, even bizarre, way of conceptualising freedom. The COVID-19 pandemic demonstrates that we are all inter-dependent. In the period since January 2020 societies across the world have favoured remarkably strong intervention by the state to meet the COVID-19 challenge precisely because citizens value freedom – meaning freedom from sickness, freedom from suffering, and freedom from death. These radical shifts in public perception of what really matters in modern society suggest that we need a more capacious way of measuring and evaluating state intervention – one that goes well beyond the simplistic question 'Is this state limiting my individual freedom or not?'

The suggestion I wish to make here is that we can build a useful measure of governmental performance by focusing on the concept of caring for others and for the planet. In her book *Caring Democracy: Markets, Ecology and Justice*, Joan Tronto argues that care, not economics, should be the central concern of democratic life (Tronto 2013). She explains how societies now face a caring deficit, and the COVID-19 pandemic has shown her analysis to be prescient. By drawing on the well-established literature on eco-centrism (Eckersley 1992) we can add to caring for ourselves and for each other the critical importance of caring for the natural environment on which we all depend.

Figure 1 presents a new way of considering future political choices, one that steps beyond the outdated framing provided by the Overton window.

Figure 1: A new window of political possibilities



Source: Hambleton (2020a) p.67

This figure suggests that, in many societies, two contrasting visions of how to bring about societal progress now compete for ascendancy. On the one hand, those on the political right argue that the power of the state should be diminished, and that individuals and private companies should be given free rein to exploit opportunities as they think fit. On the other hand, the COVID-19 pandemic has revealed that resilient societies will need to move away from promoting self-interested behaviour and towards collaborative ways of making decisions, ways that value caring for people and the planet.

This is, of course, not a new debate. What is new is that the COVID-19 calamity has prompted many to rethink the role of the state in the modern world:

> 'If the old Washington consensus believed in small states, low taxes and balanced budgets, the new Washington consensus believes in activist governments, inclusive growth and a green new deal' (Elliott 2021).

There are signs, then, that the political window of opportunity is moving, in some countries at least, towards caring for people and the planet. This, in turn, can be expected to expand the political space available to public leaders, including local political leaders.

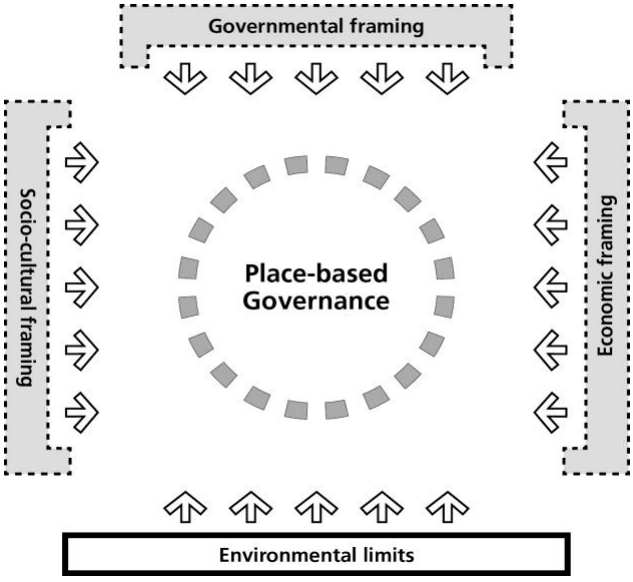
4) The New Civic Leadership conceptual framework

The COVID-19 pandemic is, of course, a global calamity. However, at the same time, it is not so much a single phenomenon as a multitude of specific outbreaks affecting different localities and communities in very different ways. While the steps taken by national governments to respond to the COVID-19 challenge have dominated the headlines, it is the case that thousands of cities and localities across the world have played, and are continuing to play, an enormously important role in responding to the crisis and in helping societies recover. As explained earlier local leadership has the major advantage of being able to tap local knowledge and understanding. Moreover, civic leaders, inside and outside the state, are uniquely well placed to support and

orchestrate local community-based efforts to meet the needs of diverse vulnerable groups and invent new ways of doing things.

When exploring how elected local governments and other place-based actors might respond to societal challenges, it is important to understand the potential constraints on local political action. It is naïve to believe that elected local leaders are free agents able to respond directly and compassionately to the views and priorities expressed by their citizens. On the contrary, various powerful forces shape the context within which civic leaders operate. These forces do not erase the possibilities for local leadership. Rather, they place limits on what local leaders may be able to accomplish in particular countries and localities at particular moments in time. **Figure 2** provides a simplified picture of the four sets of forces that shape the world of place-based governance in any given locality.

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



Source: Hambleton (2015) p.114

At the bottom of the diagram are, what I take to be, the non-negotiable environmental, or planetary, limits. The scientific evidence on climate change suggests that ignoring the fact that cities and local communities are part of the natural ecosystem is irresponsible, and failure to pay attention to environmental limits will store up unmanageable problems for future generations (Girardet 2008; Jackson 2009; Bulkeley 2013; Raworth 2018). The 26th UN Climate Change Conference of the Parties (COP26), held in Glasgow in early November 2021, reminded all of us of the urgency of taking bold action to tackle climate change.[ii] This side of the square is drawn with a solid line because, unlike the other sides of the square, these environmental limits are non-negotiable.

On the left-hand side of the diagram are socio-cultural forces - these comprise a mix of people (as actors) and cultural values (that people may hold). Here we find the rich variety of voices found in any city or locality. The people of a given city, or locality, will have different views about the kind of place they wish to live in, and they will have differential capacities to make these views known. Some, maybe many, will claim a right to the city (Lefebvre 1967; Brenner *et al* 2012). We can assume that, in democratic societies at least, elected leaders who pay little or no attention to these local political pressures should not expect to stay in office for too long. Expression of 'citizens voice', to use a phrase deployed by the famous economist Albert Hirschman, will see them dismissed at the ballot box (Hirschman 1970).

On the right-hand side of the diagram are the horizontal economic forces that arise from the need for localities to compete, to some degree at least, in the wider marketplace for inward investment and to attract talented people. Some writers argue that, owing to local resource deficits and the need to maintain a competitive position, cities have become dependent on higher levels of government and private investment for survival (Peterson 1981). On this analysis, localities become ever more dependent on external forces, effectively helpless victims in a global flow of events. However, various studies have shown that, contrary to neoliberal dogma, it is possible for civic leaders to bargain with business (Savitch and Kantor 2002).

At the top of the diagram, we find the legal and policy framework imposed by higher levels of government. In some countries, the framing grants substantial autonomy to elected local governments, in others the central state virtually tells local authorities what they can and cannot do.

The New Civic Leadership (NCL), a conceptual framework developed by the author, involves strong, place-based leadership acting to co-create new solutions to public problems by drawing on the complementary strengths of civil society, the market and the state (Hambleton 2015). In essence, it highlights the role of local leaders in facilitating public service innovation. As shown in **Figure 3**, it suggests that in any given locality, place-based governance is likely to comprise five overlapping realms of place-based leadership, with leaders in each realm drawing on different sources of legitimacy:

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

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

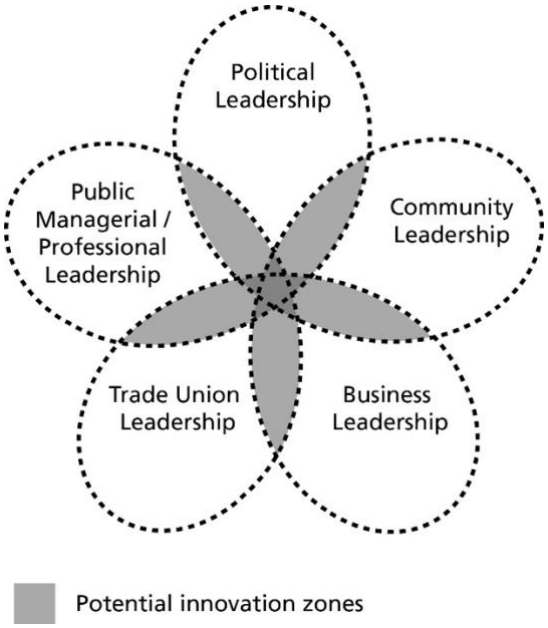
- *Community leadership* - referring to the many civic-minded people who give their time and energy to local leadership activities in a wide variety of ways;

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

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

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

Figure 3: The realms of place-based leadership



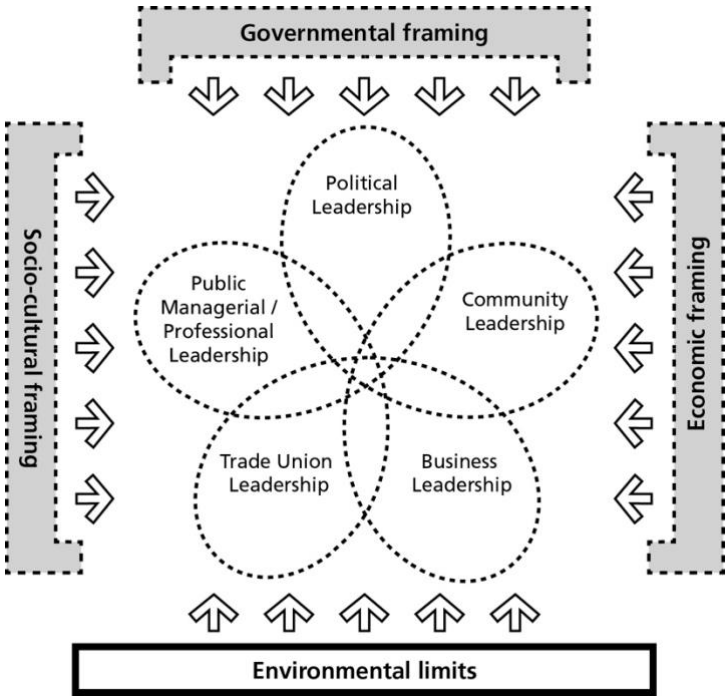
Source: Hambleton (2015) p.127

It is fair to say that the areas of overlap in **Figure 3** are often experienced as conflict zones within cities, rather than innovation zones. These spaces do, of course, provide settings for power struggles between competing interests and values. Moreover, power is unequally distributed within these settings. This is precisely why place-based leadership matters. The author's research on innovative urban governance in several countries suggests that civic leadership is critical in ensuring that the innovation zones are orchestrated in a way that promotes a culture of listening that can, in turn, lead to innovation (Hambleton 2015).

Civic leaders are, of course, not just 'those at the top'. All kinds of people can exercise civic leadership and they may be inside or outside the state. The author's definition of leadership is 'Shaping emotions and behaviour to

achieve common goals' (Hambleton, 2007 p.174). This definition recognises that how people feel matters a great deal and it stresses the importance of the co-creation of new possibilities. Having explained the five realms of place-based leadership it is now possible to advance the presentation by locating the five realms within the context of the wider power struggles discussed earlier in this chapter – see **Figure 4**.

Figure 4: Place-based leadership in context



Source: Hambleton (2015) p.128.

These ideas on New Civic Leadership resonate with recent scholarship on various aspects of place-based leadership. For example, Harrow and Guest (2021) have used New Civic Leadership concepts to offer a critique of the efforts being made by some UK universities to engage more effectively with their local communities. In essence, they argue that many of these university efforts do not go far enough in developing effective approaches to place-based co-leadership and collaboration. Other scholars have also expanded our understanding of place-based leadership by offering insights based on case studies (Bolden *et al* 2020; Roberts 2020; Sancino and Hudson 2020; Worrall and O'Leary 2020).

5) Collaborative place-based leadership in action

Many local and regional governments across the world are actively developing collaborative approaches to civic problem solving and the literature on place-based leadership is growing (Collinge et al 2010; Sotarauta

2016; Sotarauta and Beer 2021). In a contribution to this literature I provided profiles of seventeen innovation stories of bold civic leadership drawn from fourteen different countries (Hambleton 2015). Here, to illustrate the potential of inclusive place-based leadership, I present brief outlines of just three fine examples of democratic collaboration that draw strength from the power of place.[iii] These cities, which are chosen to show how public innovation can be promoted in countries with very different constitutions, have all attracted international recognition for their innovations in local leadership.

The Bristol One City Approach

Bristol, population 463,000, has a directly elected mayor model of governance (Hambleton et al 2021). Marvin Rees was first elected as Mayor of Bristol in 2016 and he has used the New Civic Leadership framework set out above to introduce and develop a One City Approach to the governance of the city.[iv] The aim is to tackle inequality and other pressing challenges by uniting public purpose in the city, and a variety of changes have been introduced to achieve this aim (Hambleton 2020b). City Gatherings, bringing together leaders from the five realms of leadership shown in **Figure 3**, have created and built important relationships that cut across the realms. The first City Gathering, held in July 2016, attracted seventy civic leaders. This was very successful in identifying issues for collaborative action and, over the years, more and more civic leaders have become involved. For example, over 400 civic leaders participated in the twelfth City Gathering held in March 2021.

A large number of collaborative initiatives have been carried as a direct result of decisions taken at City Gatherings. These range from the Feeding Bristol Healthy Holiday Programme of 2019, which delivered 65,000 meals to needy children in the school holidays, through to the Period Friendly Bristol Initiative of 2020, which is tackling period poverty by providing menstrual products to poor women and girls. A thirty-year Bristol One City Plan has been co-created setting out in detail how the city intends to become a fair, healthy and sustainable city. This collective plan, which is rolled forward each year, is aligned with the UN Sustainable Development Goals.[v]

Civic collaboration in Copenhagen

Denmark leads the world on climate change action, having reduced its CO2 emissions by more than half since peaking in 1996. Copenhagen is widely recognised as one of the most liveable cities in the world. For example, the city won the award of European Green Capital in 2014 and, in 2020, Health Europa designated Copenhagen as the healthiest capital city in Europe.[vi] The government of Copenhagen, a municipality with a population of 603,000, consists of a City Council, with 55 members elected for a term of four years, and seven standing committees.[vii] The city's electoral system uses a system of proportional representation and the most important committee is the Finance Committee. Chaired by the Lord Mayor, Frank Jensen, it comprises the six Deputy Mayors plus six members of the City Council.

This city has developed a highly participatory model of city governance and the practical success of this inclusive way of governing has delivered a biking revolution (Nielson et al 2013). A key feature in the governance of the city has been the use of ambitious place-based targets coupled with rigorous monitoring of performance (Gehl 2010). In relation to cycling, for example, in 1996 the City Council introduced a system of bi-annual indicators (known as the Bicycling Account). This process has provided the traffic department with rich data not just on bicycle use in the city, but also on Copenhageners perceptions of cycling conditions. Copenhagen now has more bicycles than cars and the city aims to become the world's first carbon-neutral capital by 2025. Promoting cycling forms an integral part of the strategy for responding to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Collaborative planning in Freiburg

Freiburg, Germany's southernmost city, has established itself as a world leader in relation to sustainable development. The city, population 230,000, has been successful in promoting a civic culture that combines a very strong commitment to green values and respect for nature, with a buoyant economy built around, among other things, renewable energy. The UK-based Academy of Urbanism was so impressed with the achievements of the city that it published *The Freiburg Charter for Sustainable Urbanism* to promote imaginative city planning and sound urban design across the world (Academy of Urbanism 2012).

Freiburg has a directly elected mayor, who serves for a fixed term of eight years, and a city council (*Gemeinderat*) with 48 members elected on an 'at large' basis for a term of five years. Over a long period politicians, planners, the local university, businesses, community groups and civil society in general have worked well together in Freiburg. The city has an integrated land use/transport strategy (Daseking 2014). All major trip generators have to be located close to a tram stop and the publicly owned tram system is superb. There are no out-of-town retail developments or business parks. From having no bike paths in 1970 the city now has over 300 miles of bike lanes. There is a high level of citizen participation and neighbourhoods are designed in a child-friendly way. The results are impressive (Hall 2014).

6) Does place have a downside?

In this chapter it has been argued that place has been neglected in public policy making and that strengthening the power of place in modern societies is, on the whole, a rather sensible aim. However, before identifying the key lessons to emerge from this relatively positive assessment of the potential of the power of place in modern societies, it is important to address the counter argument: Does place have a downside? The answer is yes, and three important points need to be made.

First, as De Blij (2009) shows with great clarity, some places have massive advantages and others are seriously disadvantaged. We are all born into natural and cultural environments that have a profound impact on our

individual and collective prospects. De Blij provides a global analysis, but his argument applies just as well to localities within a country and, moreover, to neighbourhoods within a city. Put simply children growing up in neighbourhoods characterised by extreme poverty have their chances of economic mobility undermined from the get go simply because of where they live (Smith et al 2007). It follows that devolution of power, if not accompanied by other policies designed to level up opportunities for disadvantaged areas, will inevitably exacerbate socio-economic inequality. It is essential, then, for higher levels of government, at national and international levels, to intervene to enable **all** places to prosper and flourish. This is, of course, why many countries have national arrangements for general revenue sharing designed to share revenues with local governments on the basis of need.

Second, and this is a development of the previous point, as Nightingale (2012) explains, powerful socio-economic and political forces have been operating for hundreds of years leading to a worldwide spread of urban residential segregation based on class and race. It follows that enlightened general revenue sharing by higher levels of government can, once it is recognised that spatial inequality is now very deeply entrenched, only go so far in levelling up the life chances of people living in different areas within a country. In addition to national policies to redistribute resources to needy areas, we need to develop a better understanding of the processes driving the deepening spatial segregation that is now taking place in many societies.

Bill Bishop's analysis of the spatial dynamics of US society, which he describes as the 'Big Sort', is helpful in this context (Bishop 2008). In essence, Bishop argues that, over time, suburbs, small towns and rural areas have increasingly voted Republican whilst, at the same time, cities have become increasingly enthusiastic about the progressive policies of the Democrats. He claims that this situation arises because people move to places that reflect their values. The election data from the US Presidential elections, of 2016 and 2020, show that his analysis was prescient. Moreover, his insights on the relationships between the political outlook of cities versus towns and rural areas are replicated in other countries.

This poses a major challenge for public policy but it is not insurmountable and this takes me to my third point. New research on neighbourhood change in US cities provides helpful insights on how, while the power of place is shifting in modern societies in unpredictable ways, there are many opportunities for co-creating tolerant, inclusive neighbourhoods (Mallach and Swanstrom 2023). This path-breaking analysis suggests that, while the exercise of place-less power threatens the possibilities for co-creating 'good' neighbourhoods, the misuse of power by distant decision-makers can be opposed by local actors. This research rejects the idea of attempting to go back to a so-called golden era of idyllic urban villages – for all their delights these lively ethnic neighbourhoods sometimes imposed a suffocating conformity. Rather the future for very local, or neighbourhood, development is one in which people not only 'get along' but 'get ahead'. This analysis extends the ideas set out by Mark Granovetter (1973) who, in a much-cited article, argued that 'weak ties' between different neighbourhoods need to be cultivated. To argue for place-

based efforts to tackle socio-economic inequality is, then, to argue not just for classic place-based community development designed to empower local actors, but also for local community leaders to make concrete connections to other actors outside their immediate neighbourhood.

7) Emerging themes for scholarship and practice

What insights emerge from the discussion of place and leadership presented in this chapter? The evidence presented here suggests that scholarship relating to public and administrative leadership has neglected the importance of place, and this oversight necessarily weakens the understanding that these disciplines can offer. This criticism is in line with the analysis provided by Brad Jackson (2019). He evaluates the recent literature on leadership and concludes that, while place may be mentioned by public leadership scholars, it rarely becomes the focal point of scholarship. He is convinced that place is too important a component of leadership to be sidelined in this manner, and he praises Guthey *et al* for making a strong case for a place-based approach to leadership research:

> 'A place-based approach requires scholars to think of organisations not only as strategic enterprises in a global economy, but as buildings and grounds peopled by humans with bodies who live in places and communities that have complex ecological, social and political histories. A shift towards place-based thinking may lead to scholarly research and management practices that deal more effectively – at local levels – with such thorny issues as social justice, global climate change, alternative energy and economic inequality to name but a few' (Guthey *et al* 2014, p.62)

While academics studying local and regional governance might be expected to nod their heads in approval of this sentiment I suggest that, even within the field of local government studies, we should encourage more scholarly analysis of the precise role that place plays in modern systems of urban and regional governance. Is Barber (2013) right to claim that city mayors and local political leaders are more capable of responding to modern societal challenges than nation states? Can more research, preferably action/research, be carried out with cities and localities that are breaking new ground in collaborative governance so that new insights relating to place-based leadership can be generated? Too much social scientific study of governance systems concentrates on critique – on demonstrating the flaws in given approaches and practices. Both scholarship and societal progress would be advanced if researchers paid more attention not to critique, but to why some places succeed in co-creating tolerant, multi-cultural, prosperous cities and city regions and why others don't. In my view scholars who decide to analyse successful, inclusive cities and localities will soon find that they are advancing our understanding of leadership, particularly place-based leadership.

In conclusion I offer remarks on four important themes that have emerged in this chapter. I hope that they can receive more attention in the worlds of

academe and policy and practice in the period ahead. First, can the experience of living through this awful COVID-19 pandemic provide a platform for the development of more enlightened approaches to governance at all levels in the future? In recent decades powerful forces, described as the 'new world order' in this chapter, have prioritised unregulated markets and individualism over other values relating to, for example, the natural environment, human rights and community wellbeing. COVID-19 has reminded us that wellbeing isn't individual but social. **Figure 1** suggests that the way communities have responded to the COVID-19 calamity is opening up a new window of possibilities, in effect, a shift in values towards caring for ourselves, for other people and for the planet. It is difficult to overstate how important this shift towards caring could be.

Second, it is important to strengthen the power of place in modern societies. While the analysis in this chapter has drawn attention to the potential downsides of place, in particular the way that disadvantaged areas can be trapped in a spiral of decline by forces over which they have no control, the thrust of the presentation has been to suggest that place has important benefits. The main reasons why the power of place needs to be enhanced have been set out. In particular, we need powerful places if we are to prevent the continued exploitation of people and the planet by place-less decision-makers, meaning decision-makers who do not care about the wellbeing of particular communities.

The good news is that some countries prize the importance of local democracy, and their constitutions protect localities not just from the intrusions of ruthless profit-seeking multinational companies, but also the interference of an over-bearing central state. Take Freiburg, one of the innovative cities highlighted in this chapter. In this small town in southern Germany the democratically elected mayor of the city, Martin Horn, and the City Council, have the authority to insist that future developments in the city deliver not only world-class environmental standards, but also that over 50% of new housing units must be genuinely affordable (Hambleton 2021a). Freiburg and other cities in Germany are breaking new ground in progressive policy making precisely because they have serious place-based power – they have the constitutional right to do things differently. Copenhagen, another example presented earlier, shows how an elected local authority can become world leading if locally elected leaders have substantial power to pursue radical policies.

Third, and this complements the previous point about the importance of devolving power, central governments also have a vital role to play in ensuring that all localities within their jurisdiction can prosper and flourish. In most countries some areas have major advantages while others have very few – it follows that it is not enough to devolve substantial power to the local level. In addition, national arrangements for general revenue sharing and strategic investment are needed to tackle regional and spatial inequalities and 'level up' the opportunities for localities that have lost out in the processes of industrial restructuring that have taken place in recent decades. In many countries there is growing concern about so-called 'left behind' areas,

meaning areas that now suffer high levels of poverty and deprivation. In the UK Conservative ministers, including Prime Minister Johnson, have indicated that they will deliver a raft of policies that will 'level up' society. This is a noble aim but, at the time of writing, clearly articulated UK policies designed to deliver on this 'levelling up' aim have yet to published, let alone implemented (Connolly et al 2021; Hambleton 2021b).

Fourth, how do we co-create new forms of place-based collaborative governance that bring all voices into local, democratic decision-making processes? This is, of course, a focus of much fine scholarship in the field of local government studies and other chapters in this volume attest to this. In this chapter I have suggested that it is essential to understand the power system within which local leaders have to act. All civic leaders, regardless of their individual abilities, operate within a broader power structure that constrains their capacity to take imaginative steps forward. Wise political leaders spend time understanding these constraints and consider ways of expanding the political space available to them. They recognise that, at times, in order to serve their city well, they must transcend the city and work to influence the national and international forces that hold back local democratic innovation (Frederickson 2005).

In this chapter I have outlined a way of thinking about the power of place and about the nature of place-based leadership, which I describe as New Civic Leadership. This model, summarised in diagrammatic form in **Figure 4**, suggests not just that elected political leaders can play a crucial convening role, bringing together the various realms of place-based leadership, but also that they can co-create innovation zones, or spaces, in the areas of overlap between these realms. Many localities across the world are developing new approaches to collaborative governance, and the evidence suggests that many of them are developing innovation zones that, in turn, enable local actors to co-create new solutions to the challenges now facing societies across the world.

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Endnotes

[i] These reasons are discussed in more detail in Hambleton (2015) pp. 79-107.

[ii] For more information on COP26 visit: https://ukcop26.org

[iii] I provide more detailed discussion of these three civic leadership efforts elsewhere: Bristol (Hambleton 2020b); Copenhagen (Hambleton 2015 pp. 247-250); Freiburg (Hambleton 2015 pp. 228-232).

[iv] Details of the Bristol One City Approach are available at: https://www.bristolonecity.com/

[v] Details of the Bristol One City Plan are available at: https://www.bristolonecity.com/about-the-one-city-plan/

[vi] Health Europa (2020) ‘Copenhagen crowned Europe’s healthiest capital city’, 21 January. More: https://www.healtheuropa.eu/copenhagen-crowned-europes-healthiest-city/96778/

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