Place-based leadership and radical public innovation: Lessons from mayoral governance experimentation in Bristol, UK

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Abstract

This paper explores two related questions: 1) Does the institutional design of the governance arrangements of a city make a difference to the performance of place-based leadership? And 2) Does the leadership style of the individual exercising mayoral leadership in a given city make a difference to the way the city is governed? The paper, which is based on a five-year longitudinal study of place-based leadership in Bristol (known as the *Bristol Civic Leadership Project*), draws on surveys of citizens and civic leaders, on interviews and on participant observation. An introduction outlines the two central questions addressed by the paper. The next section explains the mayoral model of place-based leadership. It outlines the pros and cons of this model of urban governance and then describes how, in a referendum held in May 2012, the citizens of Bristol decided to introduce a directly elected mayor model of governance into their city. This is followed by a section providing data on citizen and civic leader 'before' and 'after' perceptions of the strengths and weaknesses of the directly elected mayor model. The results are striking and reveal important differences between different socio-economic groups in the city and between realms of leadership within the city. The following section turns to consider styles of mayoral leadership. The first two directly elected mayors in the history of Bristol - Mayor George Ferguson (2012-2016) and Mayor Marvin Rees (elected in May 2016) – have very different styles of leadership and these are compared. A final section discusses important themes relating to place-based leadership that flow from the analysis.

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Introduction

In cities across the world place-based leaders are breaking new ground in relation to public innovation. The reasons why civic leaders are coming up with game-changing strategies are diverse. They include: fiscal cutbacks by central governments in many countries, drastic in some cases; rising public expectations relating to what the state should be doing to tackle social and economic inequality; increasing anxiety about the impacts of climate change; recognition of the major shifts now taking place in urban and regional economies; and growing recognition of the need to create imaginative approaches that tackle the causes rather than the symptoms of current urban ills. A consequence is that, and this is an international trend, urban experimentation is on the rise. Despite this fact studies examining how successful urban experimentation actually works – in particular, examining how place-based leadership can stimulate successful public innovation - remain relatively thin on the ground. This paper aims to enhance understanding of the relationships between place and leadership by exploring the interplay between bold place-based leadership and progressive public innovation.

More specifically this contribution aims to throw new light on two questions that recur in the literature on public leadership and public management: 1) Does institutional design make a difference to leadership performance and effectiveness? and 2) Does the leadership style of a senior leader make a difference to the performance of a given institution or organisation? We aim to throw new light on these questions by focussing our attention on local, or place-based, leadership.

In relation to the first question, there appears to be a fairly widespread belief, certainly within the world of urban political science and, more broadly, within the world of public policy relating to local governance, that the institutional design of local governments does, indeed, matter. For example, scholarly studies indicate that institutional design can either bolster or stymie the ability of elected politicians to exercise effective civic leadership (Berg and Rao 2005; Leach 2006; Swianiewicz 2007). Across the world it is clear that many reformers take the view that steps to redesign local governance arrangements should be undertaken in order to give area-based leadership capacity a boost. Thus, many countries have now opted for directly elected executive mayors in the belief that introducing identifiable, visible mayors will strengthen local leadership (Hambleton 2013; Sweeting 2017). Notwithstanding the international enthusiasm for introducing directly elected executive mayors there appear to be very few longitudinal 'before' and 'after' studies examining the actual impact of such changes on perceptions of leadership performance.

In relation to the second question, there is an extensive literature on the strengths and weaknesses of alternative leadership styles. One of the early contributions to this literature distinguished three styles of leadership: authoritarian; democratic; and laissez-faire (Lewin et al 1939). While recognised, at the time, as a significant step forward this approach was criticised for being rather simplistic, and for failing to explore which style would be most effective in which situations and why. In the years since then the literature on leadership styles has burgeoned. There are now many business books exploring the relationships between diverse leadership styles and the way they relate to tasks and/or context (Cooper 2011; Pandit 2015). Leadership style also features in the literature relating to urban politics and city leadership and, in this context, it is important to highlight the significance of Clarence Stone's book, *Regime Politics,* which provides a detailed analysis of the exercise of power in Atlanta from 1946-1988 (Stone 1989). In this influential study Stone provides

numerous insights on urban politics and here we wish to highlight a key one relating to urban leadership:

> 'The power struggle concerns, not control and resistance, but gaining and fusing the capacity to act – **power to**, not **power over**' (Stone 1989, 229, author emphasis).

Stone understood well enough that leadership goes to the heart of politics, that is, to the capacity of citizens to act on their shared concerns. We will return to Stone's ideas later.

The paper is divided into four parts. The first section describes the directly elected mayor model of urban governance, outlines the pros and cons of this leadership model and then describes the decision of Bristol voters, in a 2012 referendum, to introduce a directly elected mayor model of governance into their city. A second section provides an analysis of the impacts of introducing the mayoral model and provides data on citizen and civic leader 'before' and 'after' perceptions of the strengths and weaknesses of the directly elected mayor form of governance. A third section turns to consider styles of mayoral leadership. It compares the two very different leadership styles of the first two directly elected mayors in the history of Bristol - Mayor George Ferguson (2012-2016) and Mayor Marvin Rees (elected in May 2016). A final section draws out lessons relating to the nature of place-based leadership in changing times and suggests, *inter alia*, that place should be given more prominence in both leadership and public management studies.

1) The mayoral model of city leadership

In many countries, such as Canada, Japan, New Zealand and the USA, the directly elected mayor model of local governance is long established. In recent years other countries have adopted the model, usually as part of a reform strategy for local, urban and/or metropolitan government. For example, directly elected mayors have been introduced into the following countries during the last thirty years: Germany (all Lander that did not already have directly elected mayors opted for mayors in the 1990s), Italy, Hungary, Poland, Slovakia and England (Hambleton and Sweeting 2014). Supporters of the model of electing city leaders directly by popular vote claim that it has both democratic process and functional efficiency advantages. Directly elected mayors are portrayed as being more visible, more accountable, more legitimate and more powerful than other kinds of city leader (Gash and Sims 2012). Put simply those advocating directly elected mayors believe that the model delivers better place-based leadership than other models.

The merits of the directly elected mayor model are, however, disputed (Copus 2006; Orr 2004). Opponents of the model fear that mayoral contests are likely to become personality driven. Instead of focusing on different policy options and alternative manifestos, mayoral election debates can, they argue, descend into a mere clash of personalities (Latham 2017). There is also evidence to show that the concentration of power in the hands of one individual can have drawbacks. It can overload the individual decision maker, who may be tempted to share power with unelected officers or advisers, rather than other elected actors, and it can also create 'bottlenecks' in decision making, slowing down the progress of policy initiatives. Critics also point out that, because mayors are elected for a fixed term of office, they may act in a manner that is indifferent to, or even opposed to, public opinion.

It is important to stress that there are many different models of mayoral governance in operation around the world (Hambleton 2015). There are even variations within

particular countries. For example, in a study of city leadership in the USA, Svara highlights the wide variety of city charters in place across the country, and draws a helpful distinction between 'executive mayors' and 'facilitative mayors' (Svara 1990). We will return to this distinction later. Moreover, in a more recent study, co-authored with Watson, Svara shows how established city charters in US cities regularly come up for review, with the result that the formal powers of directly elected mayors, and other officials, can, and do, change over time (Svara and Watson 2010). It seems clear, and not just from the US experience, that the arguments for and against directly elected mayors turn on value judgements relating to nature of leadership, accountability and democracy. In turn, these value judgements will be informed by the experience, or non-experience, of directly elected mayoral leadership in particular localities in particular countries and at different points of time.

Sweeting (2017, 4-5) argues that it can clarify understanding of the pros and cons of the leadership dynamics of the mayoral model if attention is focussed on the **one** common feature of all directly elected models of governance – that of direct election – and to consider the consequences of that feature for local governance arrangements. He identifies three consequences. First, and most obviously, people living in the municipality directly elect the mayor. There may, because different countries use different voting systems, be different ways of deciding the winning candidate, but in all models the mayor is chosen directly by the voters. Second, the result produces a clearly identifiable, individual political leader. Third, the direct election process creates a secure term of office until the next election, or at least until the activation of a recall procedure that would enable their removal from office. Many of the arguments around the directly elected mayor model of place-based leadership can be linked to these features, and these are summarised in **Table 1**.

Table 1: Advantages and disadvantages of directly elected mayors

Feature of system	Advantages	Disadvantages
Direct election of political leader by citizens	• Direct link between leaders and electors • Increased public interest in elections • Increased visibility for leader • Underpins leadership of place • Draws in candidates from outside established parties	• Focus on personality • Media driven, populist politics • Potential election of unsuitable candidates • Draws attention away from more fundamental matters
Creates individual, identifiable leader	• Concentrates power and authority • Facilitates construction of 'vision' • Focus for accountability	• Overloads individual actor • Little space for different or opposing voices • Accountability to other actors blunted
Secure term of office	• Long term outlook • Clear process for replacement	• Indifference to electorate between elections • Can be difficult or impossible to remove mayor

We now turn to consider, albeit briefly, the way policy and legislation relating to directly elected mayors has unfolded in the UK. This can be summarised in three steps. First, in 1997 Tony Blair, newly elected Labour Party Prime Minister, wrote a pamphlet urging local authorities to develop a highly visible, outgoing approach to community leadership (Blair 1998). Legislation to introduce directly elected mayors soon followed. The Greater London Authority Act 1999 created the first directly elected mayor in UK history (Sweeting 2002). In addition, the Local Government Act 2000 required English local authorities to move from the established committee-based structure of decision-making and to choose one of three alternative models: indirectly elected council leader and cabinet; directly elected mayor and cabinet; and directly elected mayor and council manager. The vast majority opted for the leader and cabinet model, including Bristol City Council. In essence, the directly elected mayor model did not prove attractive to English local authorities in the 2000s.

Second, the Conservative/Liberal Democratic Coalition Government, elected in 2010, decided to give the directly elected mayor agenda a boost and passed the Localism Act 2011 requiring, *inter alia,* the largest cities in England to hold referenda to decide whether or not to introduce a directly elected mayor model of governance. In the event ten referenda were held in May 2012 and nine cities, including Birmingham, Leeds, Manchester and Newcastle*,* rejected the idea. Bristol was the only city to vote 'yes'.

Third, the Conservative Government, elected in 2015, passed the Cities and Local Government Devolution Act 2016 introducing so-called 'metro-mayors' for six city regions in England. These new directly elected metro-mayors, and this legislation includes the West of England area where Bristol is located, are supposed to exercise civic leadership for the metropolitan areas they represent, but they legislative underpinning is feeble – they lack independent tax-raising power and are required to comply with central government directives (Hambleton 2017).

The fact that, in 2012, Bristol citizens chose a distinctive way forward for urban governance in the city attracted national media interest, and we have explored the reasons why citizens opted for such a bold change elsewhere (Sweeting and Hambleton 2017). In essence the referendum result reflected, in part, growing frustration with the frequent changes in city leadership and a widespread perception that Bristol was 'not punching its weight' and, in part, the fact that a lively group of civic activists and small business leaders organised a very effective 'Vote Yes' campaign. In the next section we examine what impact the mayoral model has had on the governance, and particularly the leadership, of the city.

2) The initial impacts of mayoral governance on Bristol

The referendum result in Bristol brought about a change in the model of leadership at Bristol City Council, that in broad terms, and using the typology of Mouritzen and Svara (2002), could be described as changing from the collective form, with a cabinet comprised of elected members led by the leader of the council, to the strong mayor form, with a directly elected mayor in overall charge of council functions. In this section we outline the research we have carried out on governance change in Bristol in the Bristol Civic Leadership Project (www.bristolcivicleadership.net) and report the initial impacts of mayoral governance under two broad and, to an extent, overlapping headings: impacts on changing perceptions of city governance; and impacts on processes of city governance.

The Bristol Civic Leadership Project

The Bristol Civic Leadership Project was set up in 2012, and aims to evaluate the difference that mayoral governance makes to the way the city is governed, and to engage with questions about how to make the system work better. To that end, we have carried out empirical research, both before and after the introduction of the mayoral system, as follows[1]:

- Surveys of Bristol residents, via the *Bristol Quality of Life in your Neighbourhood* surveys, in 2012 (response rate 18%) and 2014 (response rate 14%).

- Surveys of civic leaders September 2012 (response rate 59%) and December 2014 (response rate 49%). This is due to be repeated in 2018.

- Workshops, interviews, and focus groups with councillors, business representatives, and public and third sector officials, in 2012 and 2015.

- Surveys of Bristol residents, via the *Bristol Citizens' Panel*, in September 2012 (response rate 35%) and January 2014 (response rate 48%). This is due to be repeated in 2018. We were able to analyse the results of the Bristol Citizens' Panel Survey according to the ward in which the respondents resided, and were able to categorise results according to whether respondents lived in 'better off Bristol', 'middle income Bristol', or 'less well off Bristol'.

Thus, we have data from before the introduction of the mayoral system in 2012, and after the introduction of the mayoral system in 2014, when George Ferguson was mayor. We intend to carry out further empirical research in 2018, to yield data from the mayoral system in operation under Marvin Rees. Also, since the election of Rees in 2016, one of the researchers (Hambleton) has been closely, but informally, involved with policy development at City Hall. We therefore also use this experience to inform the discussion below, in the sense of participant observer.

For the civic leaders' survey, we wanted to analyse the opinions of a broad and diverse cross-section of those involved in Bristol's governance including but also beyond the council. We adopted a framework to capture those opinions, called the 'realms of civic leadership' to emphasise that, despite the adoption of the mayoral model, leadership is dispersed across a variety of sectors in modern governance - see **Figure 1**.

Figure 1: The realms of civic leadership

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[1] Full details of these research methods can be found in Hambleton and Sweeting (2015), available for download at www.bristolcivicleadership.net
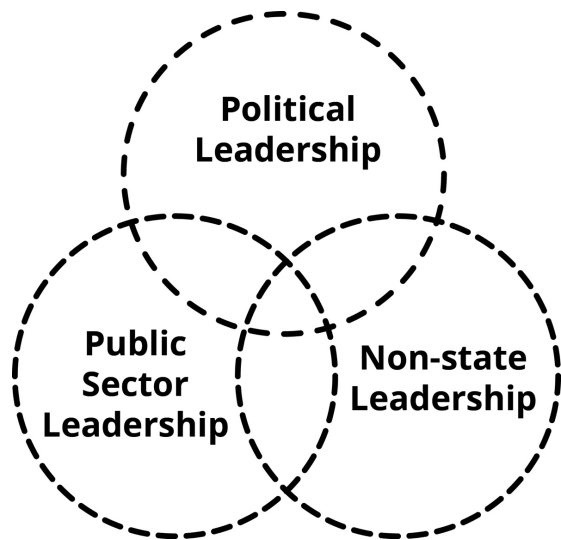
Source: Authors

The logic of this framework is that it is helpful when studying governance networks, rather than seeing leaders in a homogenous, undifferentiated way, to distinguish between three broad kinds of leader: political leaders; public sector leaders; and non-state leaders.

The *political leadership* realm contains people elected by the citizenry. Their involvement is based on being part of the electoral chain of command that links the state and civil society, and their role is, essentially, a representative one (Copus 2015). The *public sector leadership* realm contains public servants working for local authorities, central government departments, and other public sector organisations to plan and manage public services and promote community wellbeing. Their involvement is based on professional expertise and state sector resources, and their primary role relates to service provision. The *non-state leaders* realm comprises community activists, business leaders, social entrepreneurs, trade union leaders, voluntary sector leaders, religious leaders so on. It is the most diverse of the three realms. Participants here may be involved in governance in a range of ways – representing, advocating, providing services, or simply by taking part in matters relating to the governance of place. Such a classification is broad brush, and simplifies a more complex reality; the three realms will vary by place and time, overlap, and may be further divided, and individuals can occupy more than one realm. What the classification does do, however, is provide a helpful way of framing the analysis of civic leadership within the context of a multi-actor system of governance, one that requires contributions from leaders with diverse backgrounds and sources of legitimacy. Leaders from these three different realms are likely to think differently about reform of the local governance system because they have different experiences and hold different positions. Our analysis of governance change in Bristol illuminates the way that the introduction of mayoral governance is interpreted differently in different sectors.

*Impacts on perceptions of city governance*

In relation to changing perceptions of city governance it is clear that the move to a mayoral model of governance helped to accelerate change in the way that Bristol is viewed externally. The city doesn't lack 'self-confidence'. It is often cited as the only large UK city outside London with an above average GDP (see e.g. GVA, 2014: 4),

and can lay claim to being the UK's 'smartest city' (Woods et al, 2017). Nevertheless, for many years the city council has been viewed as inward looking, lethargic, and under-performing, especially by central government. For example, the 2002 Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA) report found the council's performance 'weak' (Audit Commission: 2002), and in 2007 it scored two out of a possible four stars (Audit Commission: 2007). The introduction of the mayoral model has gone some way towards changing central government perceptions of the city council. After the introduction of mayoral governance, one Whitehall civil servant commented on the preparedness of the council to be 'innovative' and 'radical', and regarded it as something of a 'national leader' (interview, 2015). Bristol is one of the Rockefeller 100 'Resilient Cities', and was European Green Capital in 2015. It would be wrong to suggest that this positive lift in external perceptions of Bristol is solely a result of the mayoral leadership; a longer-term trajectory is in play. But it is clear that the first two mayors of Bristol have both boosted the national and international profile of the city.

The mayoral model allows for the incumbent to take advantage of the visibility that it offers in order to better publicise and promote the city, something that was recognised by respondents in two of the realms of the civic leaders survey. Overall, 31% of respondents were agreed before the introduction of the mayoral model that *the leadership of the council is effective in representing the council in national and international arenas*, compared to 61% after. The differences in responses between respondents to this question bring us to our second point – that the introduction of the mayoral model changed perceptions of governance within the city on the part of those who are involved in it, but unevenly. For many responses, those in the political realm were considerably less likely to view the change to mayoral governance as positive, unlike those in the other two realms. Our research shows that many councillors felt disempowered by the introduction of the mayoral model, with responses reflecting that perception, whereas many of those outside that realm reported positive change. While there was little change 'before' and 'after' in response to a question about the effectiveness of the leadership of the council in relation to national and international representation in the political realm (51% before, compared to 45% after), responses from those in the public sector and non state leaders realms showed dramatic increases, from 23% before to 76% after in the former, and from 17% before to 61% after respectively.

Similar patterns are apparent in responses to other questions. For example, **Figure 2** shows the responses of different groups of civic leaders in response to a question about whether they agreed that the leadership of the council has a vision for the city, before and after the introduction of the mayoral model. It shows that while councillors were less likely to agree that the leadership offered a vision for the city after the introduction of the mayoral model, those in the other realms were much more likely to agree.

Figure 2: Citizens' Panel survey 2012 and 2014 'The leadership of the council has a vision for the city', per cent agree, by realm of leadership
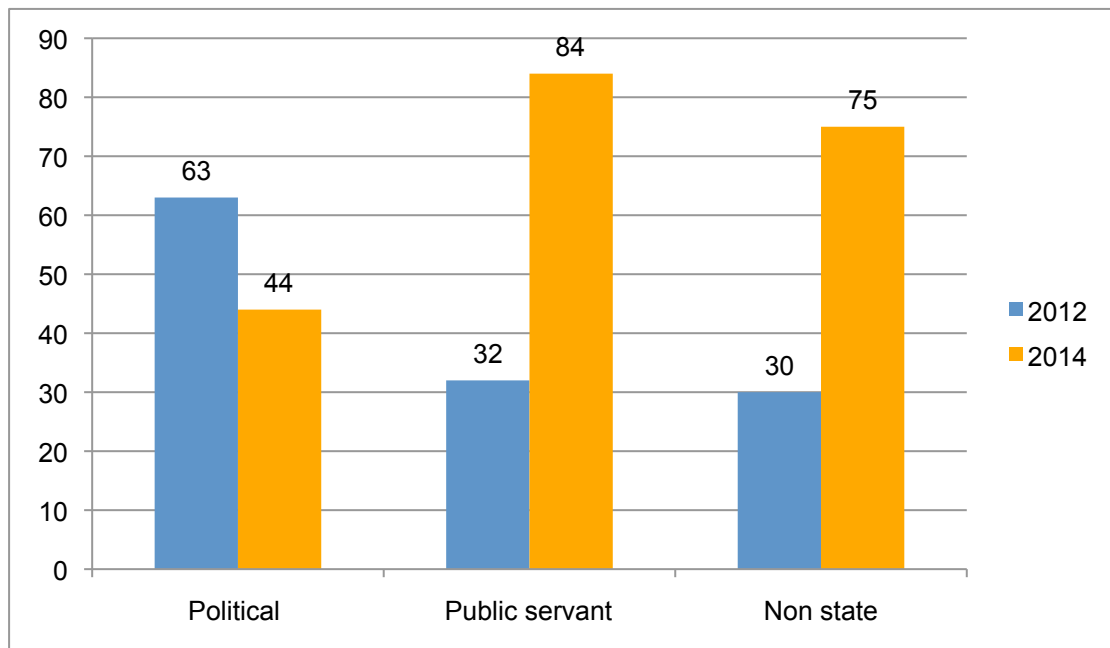
The citizens of Bristol also changed their perceptions of governance with the introduction of the mayoral system. Probably the single most important empirical finding of the first stage of the evaluation research was the leap in perceptions of the visibility of city leadership on the part of Bristolians. Under one quarter of respondents agreed the city had visible leadership under the previous leader and cabinet model; over two thirds did after – from 24% in 2012, to 68% in 2014 (Sweeting and Hambleton 2017). Such positive results were not, however, repeated for all variables. There was, for example, little or negative change around issues of representation, timeliness, and trust.

Further, the introduction of the mayoral system altered perceptions around the effectiveness of mayoral governance according to the socio-economic geography of the city. Prior to the introduction of the mayoral system, there was widespread optimism about the change of governance. **Figure 3** shows that in 2012, more than 60% of respondents in each cross-section of Bristol's residents agreed that a directly elected mayor would improve the leadership of the city. By 2014, while support for this statement was largely the same in 'better off' Bristol, it was less so in 'middle income' Bristol, and had dropped from 62% to 38% in 'less well off' Bristol. These differences suggest that, in its' initial phase at least, mayoral governance was not doing enough to address the concerns of 'less well off' residents.

Figure 3: Citizens' Panel survey, 2012 and 2014. A directly elected mayor will improve/has improved the leadership of the city, percent agree, by ward socio-economic category

A directly elected mayor will/has improve/d the leadership of the city

	2012			2014		
Better off Bristol	67%			66%		
Middle income Bristol		61%			55%	
Less well off Bristol			62%			38%
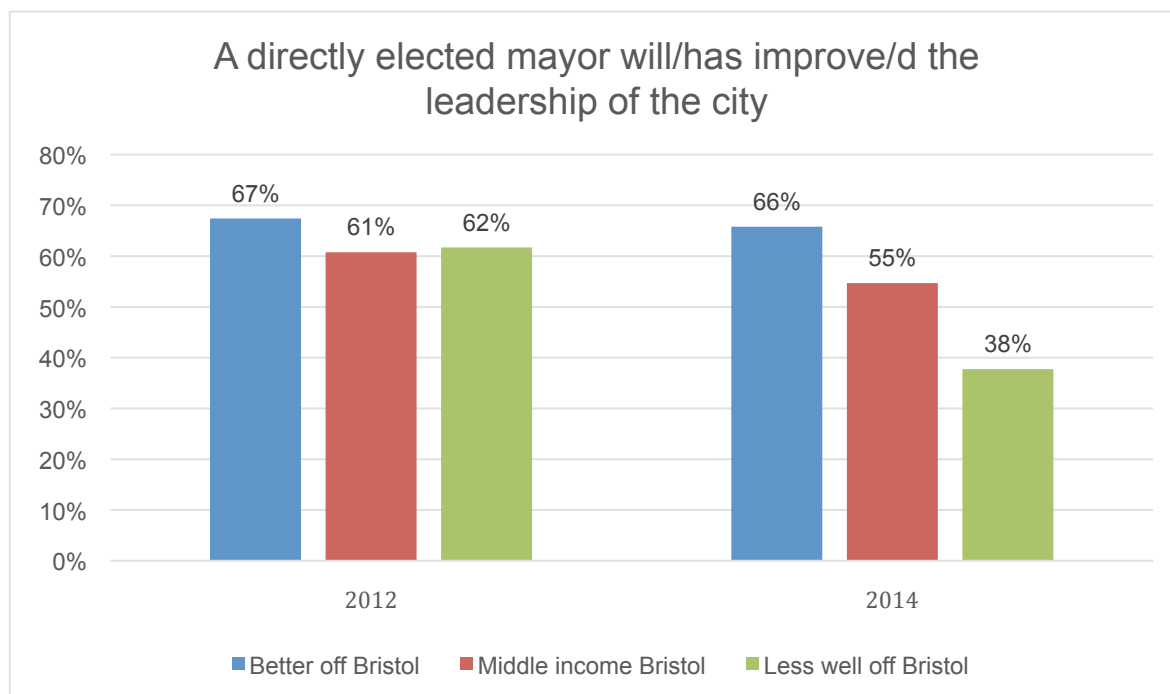
Impacts on processes of governance

For processes of governance, our research highlights how the more centralised and individualised leadership introduced in 2012 has led to changes in the ways that politics 'happens' in the city, and these changes have in some senses depoliticised its governance. While it doesn't necessarily follow that the introduction of a mayoral model will centralise, it is a predictable outcome that appears to have occurred in the first years of the mayoral model in Bristol. This aspect is indeed part of the rationale for mayoral systems – as discussed above, mayors provide a focus and a figurehead upon which legitimacy and authority is bestowed. Despite the ability in legislation to give executive councillors decision-making powers, Mayor Ferguson's cabinet was *advisory*, an arrangement that has been continued by his successor. It is hardly surprising that many councillors reported a loss of influence in decision-making after the mayoral system was introduced (Oliver, 2017).

While mayor Ferguson urged councillors to take a more active role in their neighbourhoods, such a role has, on the whole, been difficult to establish. Bristol has long struggled to create an effective system of neighbourhood representation (Hoggett and Kimberlee 2001), and what funding neighbourhood governance arrangements had were have been hard hit by central government's austerity policies. Moreover, Ferguson's status as an independent deprived him, the city bureaucracy, and the broader governance system of the party links that would normally be in place. Such links can be expected to provide a check on executive power, and also serve to disperse, formally and informally, decision-making and authority around the governance system. The centralisation that is a consequence of the model was thus exacerbated by the way in which Ferguson approached the mayoral role, and by his independence from party. We will return to consider Mayor Ferguson's leadership style shortly.

The visibility of the mayor and centralisation of the system that comes with mayoral governance was underpinned and enhanced by a constitutional change to the way that politics 'happens' in the city. At the same time as the mayoral system was

introduced, the way of electing councillors in the city also changed. The old system entailed electing one third of councillors each year, without elections in the fourth year. Hence in most years there were elections of some sort in the city, providing a platform for issues of public concern to be discussed, debated and reported on, and with the possibility of change in the balance of power in the council, with potentially a change of leader. The new system entails not only the election of the mayor for a four-year term, but also the election of all councillors, *at the same time as the mayor*. So the frequency of elections in the city has been cut from three in every four years, to once every four years. Additionally, experience from the 2016 election shows that the visibility that the mayoral candidates tend to enjoy overshadows councillor elections, with, for example billboards of the faces of mayoral candidates appearing around the city. There were also hustings for mayoral candidates, and in between elections, the mayor's Annual State of the City address takes place, a practice that enhances the visibility of the mayor. Ferguson often made a virtue of his independent status, accusing councillors or cabinet members who opposed him of 'playing politics'.

In summary, our research identifies two opposing forces operating on and influencing the political process of the city. The first is the politicising force, evident in the creation of a powerful politician at the centre of governance, endowed with institutional and political resources, and with the personal legitimacy and visibility that the mayoral model offers. The opposing force, that of depoliticisation (Flinders and Wood 2014), occurs in both obvious and subtle ways. The more obvious way is the weakened role of councillors, and the reduction in frequency of elections in the city, reducing opportunities for democratic debate and contestation. Less obvious is the way in which, in a context where the formal political process becomes domintated by mayoral priorities, other issues outside them become much more difficult to get onto the public policy agenda. We conclude that the introduction of mayoral governance has entailed considerable change in the city – it has clearly 'made a difference' in the terms of the evaluation study on which this paper is based. There are differences both in perceptions of governance, and in the processes of governance.

3) Evaluating mayoral leadership styles

In this section we turn to consider the impact of mayoral leadership style on the governance of the city. The study of leadership is a multi-disciplinary exercise attracting contributions from the fields of management studies, organisation theory, psychology, history and political science. Because our action/research is focussed on place-based leadership and the role of leadership in promoting public innovation we are particularly interested in concepts and frameworks that throw light on the interplay between leadership styles, local power structures and the possibilities for urban innovation. In fact, urban political science offers numerous typologies of leadership styles. For example, Yates provides an early and influential categorisation based on his study of city leaders in the USA. His framework distinguishes four leadership styles: 1) crusader, 2) entrepreneur, 3) boss, and 4) broker (Yates 1977).

John and Cole (1999) provide a helpful typology and we draw on their framework in the presentation below. This framework – see **Figure 4** – comprises two dimensions. Earlier we drew attention to the important distinction made by Stone in his analysis of urban politics in Atlanta (Stone 1989). He provides many insights on the first key dimension of leadership style, namely the way power is conceived and exercised by a leader. He distinguishes between leaders who focus on generating the 'power to' achieve outcomes from those who focus their efforts on trying to exercise 'power over' others. In simple terms he contrasts the desire and ability to

act authoritatively, at times to command and control others, from the desire and ability to release untapped sources of energy by empowering others. This is the vertical dimension in **Figure 4**.

In relation to the second dimension the framework draws a distinction between those leaders who have a clear political agenda and a strong interest in bringing about change, and those that have a tendency to respond to other actors and external events. Leaders who are change oriented can be considered to be directive. Other leaders may believe that the status quo is desirable and/or that only modest change is necessary. This is the horizontal dimension in **Figure 4**.

It goes without saying that conceptual frameworks of this kind simplify a much more complex reality. It is also the case that individual leaders may move their position on these two dimensions depending on the issue at hand and/or changes in the immediate context. Nevertheless we believe that the model is helpful in revealing **tendencies** in city leadership behaviour. We take the view that the framework provides a useful starting point for understanding the predominant leadership style of a given directly elected mayor or other local political leader.

Figure 4: Typology of urban governance leadership styles
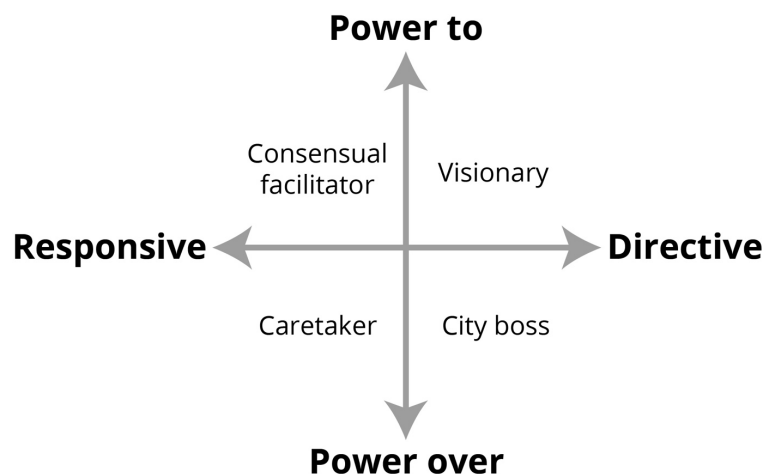
Source: John and Cole (1999) p. 102

Figure 4 suggests that urban leaders can be grouped into four categories reflecting their location on the two dimensions of leadership style. On the left of the diagram we find leaders who tend to operate in a 'responsive' way. The **caretaker** is, essentially, a weak political leader who is not that interested in changing things very much. Such leaders may be effective as party leaders or, even as city managers, but they are likely to find it hard to cope with rapid policy change and they tend to have low recognition of the need for public innovation. The other type of responsive leader is the **consensual facilitator**. Such leaders are, like the caretaker leaders, relatively easygoing but they are far more adaptable. They are likely to be good at partnership working and are able to generate capacity in others by persuasion and relationship building, rather than by the authority of office.

On the other side of the diagram we find leaders who tend to be 'directive' in their leadership style. The **city boss** could well have a clear vision of what they want to see happen, but they are unlikely to be very good at listening to other voices. They may lack the understanding, or patience, to participate in active networking and innovative policy making that modern city politics now requires. The **visionary** combines elements of directive leadership with capacity generation. The visionary has a pretty clear idea of what they want to achieve but knows that they need to work creatively with others to co-create new possibilities. They tend to adopt an inclusive approach to decision-making but exercise political will, rather than formal authority, to generate support for a shared vision.

Introducing the first two directly elected mayors of Bristol

The first two directly elected mayors of Bristol have very different backgrounds. Here we provide short personal profiles of George Ferguson, who was Mayor of Bristol from 2012-2016, and Marvin Rees, who was elected as Mayor of Bristol for 2016-2020. Elected in November 2012 George Ferguson was Bristol's first directly elected mayor and his unexpected victory attracted the attention of the national media. This was mainly because he was a successful Independent politician, that is, he ran for office without the backing of any political party. This, in itself, is very unusual in British city politics; normally city leaders require the backing of a political organisation to have any chance of being elected. The fact that Ferguson defeated all the party political candidates was newsworthy.

Born in 1947 George Ferguson had a successful career as an architect before deciding to enter the mayoral contest. He co-founded a firm of architects – Ferguson Mann Architects - in Bristol in 1979, and the practice established a good reputation for carrying out successful urban regeneration projects in the city and elsewhere. These projects included saving an old tobacco factory in South Bristol from demolition and transforming it into a successful mixed-use project, one that now includes the Tobacco Factory Theatre, bar/café and creative industry workspaces. Ferguson, a respected architect and urban designer, served as President of the Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA) in 2004. Early on in his career Ferguson served as a Liberal Party Councillor on Bristol City Council (1973-79) and he also stood unsuccessfully as a Liberal Party candidate for parliament in the 1980s. He ceased party political activity in 1987. In summary, when Ferguson decided to run for Mayor of Bristol in 2012 he was 65 years old, had extensive experience of leading urban regeneration projects, a relatively high profile as an architect and a reputation in Bristol for taking action to save historic buildings and structures.

In the November 2012 mayoral election Marvin Rees, the Labour Party candidate for mayor, was runner-up to George Ferguson. On that occasion Rees polled 31,259 votes, including second preference votes, some 6,000 votes fewer than Ferguson. However, in May 2016, Rees and the Labour Party enjoyed a landslide victory. Rees polled 68,750 votes, including second preference votes, over 29,000 votes more than Ferguson. Interestingly, Ferguson polled 39,577 votes in 2016 compared with 37,353 in 2012. Despite improving on his 2012 performance he was no match for Rees who, in 2016, more than doubled the number of votes he attracted in 2012.

Born in 1972 Marvin Rees is mixed-race and has a working class background. Father of three, he is the son of an English mother and a Jamaican father. In his early life he went through tough times, at one point spending time in a Women's Refuge with his mother. He was brought up in Bristol by his mother, spending time in Laurence Weston and Easton - two of the most deprived wards in the city. He is

rooted in the community and social networks of St Paul's, and has a long history of civic activism, notably in relation to youth work. He has a Master's degree in Political Theory and Government, and also a Master's in Global Economic Development from Eastern University in the USA. Rees has been a freelance journalist and radio presenter on BBC Radio Bristol and Ujima Radio. He has held various positions in Bristol including working in public health. For a period he worked as a programme manager for the NHS in which he focused on delivering race equality in mental health. Rees has never been a councillor but, in the period before he was elected as the Labour Party candidate for Mayor in 2012, he had built a strong reputation as an articulate spokesperson for the less well off in the city. When elected in 2016 he was 45 years old and became the first ever mayor of black African-Caribbean descent to lead any European city.

Before turning to consider the leadership styles of Bristol's first two mayors it is important to refer to the national policies for local government pursued by both the UK Coalition Government (2010-15) and the Conservative Government (since 2015). This is because these policies have placed major constraints on the exercise of place-based leadership by both Mayor Ferguson and Mayor Rees. In essence the UK central state has chosen to decimate central government financial support to local government, an approached described as 'super-austerity' by some scholars (Lowndes and Gardner 2016). In the Bristol case the cut in central government financial support is from £201 million a year in 2010/2011 to £45 million a year in 2019/2020 – that's a 78% cut (Hambleton 2017). Mayor Ferguson was, then, faced with very nasty budget challenges from the very beginning of his term of office. Shortly after being elected in November 2012 he discovered that central government was requiring him to make £35 million in spending reductions within six weeks (Hambleton 2015 pp133-134). Central government has continued to attack local government in recent years and Mayor Rees was forced to implement significant reductions in public service during his first two years of office – for example, closing a number of public libraries.

The leadership style of Mayor Ferguson (2012-2016)

Ferguson, a confident individual, well known in the Bristol area for always wearing red trousers, quickly established a mayoral reputation for taking decisions with little or no consultation. For example, on his first day in office Ferguson implemented two policies with immediate effect. He revoked Sunday car parking charges in the city and announced that the 'Council House', the municipal headquarters, was to be renamed 'City Hall'. His renaming of the administrative seat was intended to signal that the council building should be seen as a public place, a resource for the city, not the 'house for the council'.

As discussed earlier, in the section describing the initial impacts of the mayoral model on Bristol, Ferguson can be credited with lifting the visibility of political leadership in Bristol and also setting out a bold vision for Bristol. Highlighted in his first Mayoral Annual Lecture, in November 2013, his document, '*A vision for Bristol*' set out a strategy described by the *Bristol Post,* the local newspaper, as a vision for a 'bold, energised, green city'. In 2015 Bristol was to become European Green Capital, although the foundations for that success, as Ferguson often explained, were constructed well before he was elected. Under Ferguson significant decisions were often taken relatively swiftly, particularly in relation to policies for the urban environment. For example, 20 mph speed limits were introduced across virtually the whole city, fairly extensive resident parking zones were also introduced and Bristol Energy, an alternative energy provider developed by the city council, was launched.

While often decisive, Ferguson's leadership style can be criticised for being too centralised and, at times, needlessly top-down. For example, he attempted to introduce 18 resident parking zones within his first year of office covering a large swathe of the city. In these areas all car parking is restricted and local residents have to pay to obtain parking passes for their vehicles. The environmental objective, mainly to erase spaces for motorists commuting into the city and to shift behaviour, was sound. However, a key problem with this particular initiative was that the public consultation processes were wholly inadequate, and it was not surprising that the proposals were met with widespread public anger and resistance. In his first Mayoral Annual Lecture Ferguson, himself, admitted that he could be impatient, and announced that he was paring the car parking scheme back to cover just 13 zones. It can be argued that it was the way the initiative was imposed in a needlessly rushed and autocratic way that put people's backs up.

Mayor Ferguson did not make good use of the seventy councillors elected to Bristol City Council on a ward basis. At times he appeared to see them as an obstacle to be bypassed. Our research on leadership in Bristol found that 'the role of councillors in exercising leadership had been unnecessarily restricted' (Hambleton and Sweeting 2015, 25). Moreover, this sentiment was not limited solely to councillors. One voluntary sector respondent, lamenting the concentration of power in the position of the mayor, stated 'Councillors are less visible, it's a mayor and officer council now'.

If we now return to consider the typology of leadership styles presented in **Figure 4** we can see that Mayor Ferguson's dominant leadership style was clearly on the directive side of the framework. While he had a vision for the city it was largely his vision. His leadership approach was, in essence, characterised by a continuing effort to impose this vision on the city. It follows that his dominant leadership style can be placed firmly in the **city boss** quadrant.

The leadership style of Mayor Rees (2016-18)

Mayor Rees, while just as confident as Mayor Ferguson, has adopted a very different style of leadership. A few days after being elected Rees, at his Swearing-In Ceremony on 9 May 2016 in the M-Shed, a museum documenting the history of the people of Bristol, demonstrated his strong commitment to developing a collective, not an individualised, approach to city leadership. Note that this ceremony was not held in City Hall. Rather this important civic event was located in a public building in the centre of the city that is visited by large numbers of Bristol residents. The symbolism was clear – City Hall is only part of the governance of the city.

Most unusually for a Swearing-In Ceremony the Mayor was not the only speaker on the platform offering ideas on the future of the city. After the formal Swearing-In procedure Rees introduced Miles Chambers, later to become the first Bristol Poet Laureate, who read a passionate poem about the history of the city. Rees then invited three other civic leaders in Bristol to offer their contributions: a senior health services manager; the Vice-Chancellor of one of the two local universities; and the Bristol Area Commander of Avon and Somerset Police. Rees did not know in advance what these civic leaders were going to say. From the get-go, then, Rees was signalling his interest in sharing power and valuing the leadership contributions of other agencies and actors. In his own speech Rees emphasised that the City Office model of city leadership, a notion he had spelt out in his campaign for mayor, was intended to improve partnership working and would emphasise the co-creation of new ideas and ways of working.

It is possible to summarise the main features of Rees's City Office way of working by referring briefly to five elements in the approach. First, inclusive City Gatherings of civic leaders, drawn from the realms of place-based leadership shown in **Figure 1**, have been held on a regular basis since the City Office Founders Meeting held in July 2016. City Gatherings, which take place every few months in different locations, create highly interactive 'city conversations', with participants working together in cross-sectoral teams, to examine the major challenges facing the city and to explore ideas on how to tackle them. Typically City Gatherings attract between 70 and 180 participants.

Second, Rees has created an innovation zone in City Hall just outside the Mayor's Office. People, from any of the realms of leadership in the city, who are working on activities relating to the City Office agenda, are invited to work in this space on Tuesdays and Wednesdays. In addition, the City Office organises regular presentations and workshops on Tuesday mornings.

A third element in the model is to create and deliver specific City Office collaborative projects on pressing issues. A good example is provided by the Street Homelessness Challenge project. In late 2016 Rees asked local leaders to work together to create 100 extra beds for homeless people in the first 100 days of 2017. A project group, chaired by the City Office Director, was set up to develop ways of achieving this ambitious target. City Office partners launched a 'spectrum of activity' to tackle homelessness (Morris 2017). This approach brought in actors not normally involved in addressing this challenge, for example, local businesses.

Fourth, the One City Plan, now in preparation, is designed to deliver the main strategic aim of the Bristol City Office: it is orchestrating the creation of a 'big picture' strategy for the future development of the city, one that looks forward to 2050, and one that agencies are expected to commit to.

The fifth element in the City Office approach is the development of place-based leadership talent. The City Gatherings, mentioned earlier, identified the importance of developing and delivering new kinds of civic leadership programmes, ones that target under-represented groups in the city. The idea is for the City Office to orchestrate a step-change in the provision of place-based leadership programmes – ranging from city leadership courses for young people (under 18s) through to advanced place-based leadership workshops for senior leaders from the realms of leadership shown in **Figure 1**.

We now return again to consider the typology of leadership styles presented in **Figure 4**. It is clear that Mayor Rees's dominant leadership style can be located in the top part of the diagram. He emphasises the benefits of 'power to' behaviour as against a 'power over' approach. Clearly he has a vision for the city, one articulated in his first Mayoral Annual Lecture given in October 2016, emphasising the need to create *'A city for all'*. In his first two years as mayor his leadership style places him in the **consensual facilitator** quadrant of **Figure 4**, arguably with some overlap into the **visionary** quadrant. Interestingly this suggests that Rees's style of leadership is, in many ways, almost exactly the opposite of Ferguson's. However, some caution is needed in making an assessment of the impact of Rees's style of leadership. He has only been in office since May 2016 and it is too early to say whether or not his consensual style of leadership will be seen as effective in shaping the emotions and behaviour of other civic leaders in a progressive direction. Relationship building takes time and critics of Mayor Rees already claim that too much energy is being spent on consultation at the expense of taking bold action. We plan further research in 2018 to discover how well his consensual style of leadership has worked, as

viewed by citizens and actors drawn from the different realms of leadership shown in **Figure 1**.

4) Emerging lessons for public leadership theory and practice

In this final section we return to address the two questions introduced at the beginning of this paper: 1) Does the institutional design of the governance arrangements of a city make a difference to the performance of place-based leadership? And 2) Does the leadership style of the individual exercising mayoral leadership in a given city make a difference to the way the city is governed? The quick answers, as derived from our research on governance change in Bristol, are 'Yes' and 'Yes'. Our longitudinal study of place-based leadership and public innovation in Bristol shows that redesigning the institution of local government has had a major impact on the way leadership in the city is exercised, on some indicators a startling impact. Our research also reveals a marked shift in the leadership styles adopted by the first two mayors of Bristol, although further work is needed to arrive at a detailed comparative assessment of the impacts of these two leadership styles.

In some ways it is rather difficult to separate out our two questions. This is because there is, inevitably, a continuing interplay, in urban politics at least, between institutional design and leadership style. Indeed, reforms of executive arrangements in local government are often intended to generate a change in leadership style. Thus, advocates of the mayoral model of governance claim that it can underpin a more potent exercise of place-based leadership. For example, the UK government argued that 'elected mayors can provide democratically accountable strong leadership.' (DCLG 2011, 6). Our initial analysis of governance innovation in Bristol shows that the change from a leader and cabinet model to a directly elected mayor model did, indeed, contribute to a change in the style of place-based leadership. Moreover, the analysis of leadership styles presented above demonstrates that different styles of leadership are possible under the directly elected mayoral model. Ferguson's city boss style of leadership contrasts with the more consensual and inclusive approach of his successor Rees. It follows that there is a more complicated relationship between institutional design and leadership style than reformers have tended to recognise.   Nevertheless it is helpful, for purposes of analysis, to separate out these two elements, and we now consider each in turn.

Place-based leadership and institutional design

In the UK context, and perhaps elsewhere too, the debate about the strengths and weaknesses of the directly elected mayor model of governance is needlessly polarised. Stakeholders on both sides of the argument tend to be far too ready to take up a position either 'in favour' of directly elected mayors or 'against' directly elected mayors. Two insights stem from the analysis presented in this paper. First, comparative international research on urban governance shows that there are many different models of mayoral governance (Sweeting 2017). It follows that it is misguided to adopt a view that is either 'for' or 'against' directly elected mayors. Rather, it is vital to first consider the detailed institutional design of the particular mayoral model of governance in question. To emphasise this point we can note, for example, that the directly elected mayor of New York City has massive legal and financial powers, whereas the directly elected mayor of the West of England Combined Authority (WECA), one of the UK metro-mayors elected in May 2017, has truly trivial legal and fiscal power. Earlier we referred to Svara's distinction between 'executive mayors' and 'facilitative mayors' (Svara 1990). His approach provides a helpful way of considering the executive power of the mayor vis a vis other stakeholders, and other scholars have built on this work (Frederickson et al 2004;

Hambleton 2015, 181-188). Future research on mayoral leadership can, we hope, provide new insights on the strengths and weaknesses of **different** forms of mayoral governance.

Second, even when the institutional design is held constant, the impact of a given mayoral model can vary significantly depending on the leadership style adopted by the individual elected as mayor. Our study of mayoral governance in Bristol shows that the first two mayors of Bristol have adopted entirely different styles of urban leadership even though their powers, determined by the UK Localism Act 2011, are identical. It follows that it is not possible to read off the way that leadership will be exercised in a city by referring only to the institutional design of local government in said city. Our research suggests that more research on the interplay between the institutional design of local governance and the way place-based leadership is exercised would be well worthwhile.

When it comes to directly elected mayors we suggest that it would be helpful for future research to focus attention on the impact of **direct election** on the practice of leadership. **Table 1** identifies three features that flow from the direct election process: 1) direct election itself, 2) creation of an individual, identifiable leader, and 3) a secure term of office. As shown in the table each feature has advantages and disadvantages and future leadership studies could examine this balance sheet of pros and cons in more detail.

Evaluating mayoral styles of place-based leadership

The analysis presented in this paper draws on a typology of urban governance leadership styles – see **Figure 4** (John and Cole 1999). We have found this typology useful in our study of mayoral leadership in Bristol. However, it is possible that the framework could be improved. For example, it is not necessarily the case that a given leader can be positioned that easily within any one of the quadrants. Certainly it is important to refer to leadership tendencies rather than fixed styles, no leader sits in one quadrant of the framework all the time. Moreover, we know that effective leaders adapt their leadership style to the tasks and challenges before them (Bungay 2011; Keohane 2010). A city mayor can, then, be expected to operate both 'power to' and 'power over' approaches to leadership on any given day of the week. Likewise a mayor may choose to be 'directive' and 'responsive' at different points of time within the same meeting. There is a challenge here for scholars interested to advance understanding of the role of leadership style in place-based leadership. Perhaps new frameworks are needed to capture the dynamic variation in leadership style over time.

Evaluating place-based leadership: wider challenges

In closing we would like to draw attention to three important issues that, we believe, should receive more attention in future research on place-based leadership. First, while it is clear from the evidence presented in this paper that place-based leadership can make a difference the governance of a particular place, it is important to draw attention in all studies to the national context within which place-based leadership is exercised. For example, the legal constraints imposed on local leaders in particular countries, or states within federal countries, by higher levels of government vary enormously. In some countries, for example, Germany and Sweden, local governments enjoy constitutional protection from interference by higher levels of government. These protections create a significant amount of local political space within which locally accountable, civic leaders can pursue bold strategies for public innovation. This freedom to do things differently, enables local

political leaders to bring together leaders from the different realms of place-based leadership shown in **Figure 1** to co-create new solutions to pressing public policy challenges. Unfortunately in some countries, and the UK provides a striking example, locally elected authorities enjoy no constitutional protection and have little or no independent fiscal power. It follows that directly elected city mayors in a highly centralised state, like the UK, have very little room for manoeuvre. Future studies of place-based leadership need to take full account of the impact of higher levels of government on place-based leadership. Put bluntly, if locally elected leaders have very little power it probably does not matter that much what the local institutional design is like, or whether or not the senior elected local leaders have good or indifferent leadership skills. In future research on place-based leadership relationships between local leaders and higher levels of power within the state need to be explained and the implications explored.

Second, our research on place-based leadership in Bristol suggests that different kinds of leader have different views on the impact of the mayoral model of governance. **Figure 1** distinguishes three different realms of place-based leadership in any given locality, and our survey research suggests that leaders from these different three realms of leadership can disagree over what constitutes leadership success. Much research in leadership studies aims to arrive at a single view of the performance of a given leadership model or leadership style. To adopt such an approach to evaluation fails to recognise that different stakeholders, in a given urban or social system, may legitimately have different perceptions of the success or otherwise of particular leadership actions. One way to address this challenge is to adopt a pluralistic approach to evaluation (Hall 2004). This approach, originally developed in health care evaluation studies, recognises that different actors in a given process will have different perceptions of what constitutes success. For example, the views of health care professionals may differ from patients. Perhaps pluralistic evaluation concepts can play a role in future studies of the performance of place-based leadership.

Our last topic concerns the fact that different socio-economic groups in a city can be expected to have different views about the success or otherwise of particular leadership efforts. This is, of course, not surprising. In urban politics it is inevitable that leaders take actions that have distributional consequences for different groups of residents within the city they govern. In our study of governance change in Bristol we gathered the views of three socio-economic groups: 'better off' Bristol; 'middle income' Bristol; and 'less well off' Bristol – see, for example, **Figure 3**. We found that, in 2014, 'less well off' residents tended to take a dim view of the leadership of the city; this contrasted with the views of 'better off' and 'middle income' residents. This finding encourages us to suggest that scholars interested in place-based leadership should be invited to pay more attention to the distributional impacts of particular leadership efforts and to the perceptions of different socio-economic groups.

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