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Place-based Leadership: a new avenue for planning research?

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ABSTRACT

Study an example of bold and imaginative planning and you will encounter leadership – probably inspirational leadership. Planning practitioners understand this well enough. In contrast planning theorists seem to regard leadership as an intellectual ‘no go’ zone. Many planning theory books pay no attention to leadership at all. By drawing on new comparative, international research on place-based leadership, this paper hopes to encourage planning scholars and practitioners to give more attention to the nature of leadership in urban planning. The author is preparing a book - *Leading the Inclusive City. Place-based innovation for a bounded planet* - for publication in 2014. This paper, which introduces themes that are examined at greater length in the book, discusses evolving debates about governance and leadership, sets out a new conceptual model for understanding place-based leadership and, in particular, highlights the role of civic leadership in promoting public service innovation. The paper closes with a discussion of possible implications for planning research.

Introduction

This paper explores two propositions. First, it will be suggested that effective planning depends on good leadership. Indeed, it will be argued, for purposes of intellectual challenge, that **all** examples of successful urban planning demonstrate leadership in action – that effective planning without leadership does not exist. Second, it will be claimed that planning theory says virtually nothing at all about leadership. This is troubling as a core quality in the nature of successful urban planning – leadership – is being neglected.

The paper offers a short introduction to leadership theories and outlines a conceptual framework that has been used in recent research in several countries to understand and improve ‘place-based leadership’. This notion of

place-based leadership provides but one way of injecting leadership theory into planning theory. Leadership theories provide many valuable insights on how to guide future action, and this paper does not claim to offer a comprehensive analysis. The aim is more modest. It is hoped that the notion of place-based leadership can provide an entry point for urban planning scholars into the literature relating to leadership and, in particular, the relationship between leadership and innovation – in particular, innovation that seeks to create an inclusive city.ⁱ

The central importance of leadership in urban planning

Our first proposition is that urban planning depends on good leadership. Evidence to support this claim can be drawn from two sources: the history of urban planning, and present practice in urban planning.

Sir Peter Hall, in his classic study of the intellectual history of urban planning and design in the 20th Century, identifies many examples of influential planners who have exercised remarkable civic leadership (Hall 1988). In *Cities of Tomorrow* Hall discusses the achievements of, amongst others, Patrick Abercrombie, Jane Addams, Daniel Burnham, Patrick Geddes, George-Eugene Haussman, Ebenezer Howard, Jane Jacobs, Robert Moses, Janice Perlman, and Clarence Perry. In important ways these individuals have made significant contributions to the theory and practice of urban planning. By exercising bold civic leadership they, and others like them, have influenced large numbers of planning professionals, urban designers and social reformers.

Few would deny that most, if not all, these figures influenced the trajectory of urban planning and design. How did they make an impact? Perhaps we can identify three dimensions: firstly, the imaginative, even visionary, quality of their thinking; second, their ability to communicate their ideas and to persuade others of their merits; and thirdly, because they applied their ideas in the real world. Like successful leaders in other fields, these high profile planners practiced what they preached. They reshaped attitudes and practices – they attracted followers, they exercised leadership.

Turning to a second source - the current practice of urban planning - we can identify numerous examples of cities where planners have exercised bold civic leadership. These examples demonstrate that successful city planning is driven by people with passion and commitment, people who are comfortable seeing themselves as civic leaders, people who deliver results on the ground. By way of illustration I identify here just four examples of inspiring civic leadership – ones that have had a significant impact on the quality of urban planning practice in the cities concerned.

- *Freiburg, Germany.* In November 2009 the British Academy of Urbanism gave the award of 'European City of the Year 2010' to Freiburg. In the following year, the Academy made Wulf Daseking, Director of Planning in the City, an Honorary Member of the Academy in recognition of his outstanding contributions to city planning and

urban design. At the same time the Academy launched *The Freiburg Charter for Sustainable Urbanism* to draw out guiding principles for urban planning and design (Academy of Urbanism 2011). The approach to civic leadership in Freiburg is discussed elsewhere (Hambleton 2011).

- *Malmö, Sweden.* In the three-year period 1992-94 the City of Malmö lost a third of its jobs. A decade or so later and Malmö is lauded as one of the most far sighted cities in Europe for sustainable development. In an astonishing turn around the city has reinvented itself as an eco-friendly, multi-cultural city. Malmö has an array of imaginative environmental initiatives delivering new ways of responding to climate change and provides an inspiring example of urban planning allied to innovations in urban governance. Like Wulf Daseking in Freiburg, Christer Larsson, Director of City Planning in Malmö, will be the first to say that many leaders have contributed to the achievements of the city and that leadership is multi-level (Hambleton 2008a; 2009a)
- *Melbourne, Australia.* In the early 1980s the city centre of Melbourne was a dump. Private interests, concerned only with urban development profits, were busy taking advantage of weak political leadership and poor planning policies to manufacture a boring 'could be anywhere' town centre. Leap forward 25 years and we find that the *The Economist* identifies the city as being the 'most liveable city in the world'. Indeed, Melbourne has now established itself as an international leader in how to create a people friendly public realm at the heart of a major metropolis. Local leaders, and Rob Adams, the Director of Design and Urban Environment for Melbourne deserves great credit, have transformed the city centre into a delightful, liveable and attractive district for residents, workers and visitors (Gehl Architects 2004; Hambleton 2008b)
- *Portland, Oregon.* It is possible to argue that the City of Portland is the best example of metropolitan urban planning in the USA. The City has a long established reputation as a pioneer in the field of sustainable urban development. Leaders in the metropolis have, and this is very unusual in the US context, developed an effective metropolitan approach to urban planning and governance (Ozawa 2004). The City has a robust spatial plan and there are numerous examples of imaginative urban development taking place in the city. For example, Portland State University (PSU) has worked with various stakeholders to develop an Educational Renewal Area (ERA) bringing together a range of local stakeholders. Many leaders have contributed to this recent initiative but it is interesting to note that Wim Wiewel, President of the University, is making an important contribution to the planning of the city. This illustrates how effective urban leadership involves actors outside city hall working alongside political leaders and community-based organisations.

It would not be difficult to list many more examples of present day urban planning practice where bold civic leadership is making all the difference to the process of shaping the urban future. The four presented here are just illustrations of the important role that leadership plays in good urban planning.ⁱⁱ

In summary, evidence drawn from the history of urban planning and from the present practice of some of the most innovative cities in the world suggests that successful urban planning is inextricably linked with good urban leadership. We can even suggest that good urban planning is improbable without good urban leadership. It follows that a detached observer might expect planning theory books to be brimming with insights on leadership in planning practice. However, as the next section explains, this particular observer will be disappointed.

The neglect of leadership in planning theory

Our second proposition is that, despite the central importance of leadership in successful urban planning practice, planning theory pays virtually no attention to it. Hall's book, *Cities of Tomorrow*, is a *tour de force* (Hall 1988). His analysis of the history of urban planning is both imaginative and meticulous, and it is full of useful insights relating to planning theory. Yet, and this is somewhat surprising, this volume does not refer to theories of leadership at all - even though it is crammed with examples of bold civic leadership. It does not comment on the implications of leadership theories for either planning practice or planning theory. In fairness, Hall's neglect of leadership theory is consistent with the approach adopted by other planning theorists. It would seem that leadership – theories of leadership and scholarship relating to leadership – is an intellectual 'no-go' zone for planning theorists.

Consider for a moment the contents of a dozen or so planning theory books, published in the last forty years: Almendinger and Tewdwr-Jones (2002); Faludi (1973a; 1973b); Forester (1989); Hall (1988); Healey et al (1982); Healey (1997); Healey (2010); Hillier (2007); Marris (1987); Rydin (2011); and Taylor (1998). This is not a comprehensive list of planning theory books. But perhaps it will be accepted that these books have all been seen, at one time or another, as valuable contributions to planning theory. Unless I am mistaken, none of these books discusses the role of civic leadership in the shaping of cities and city regions.

The word 'leadership' does not appear in the index of any of these books. Scant, if any, attention is given to theories of leadership and to the roles of various kinds of leaders in shaping cities. This is puzzling. My aim here is not to attempt to undermine the value of these books. They are all respected works. But why is there no discussion of the role of planning and planners in civic or place-based leadership?

Fainstein (2005) provides, perhaps, one possible clue to understanding the absence of a discussion of leadership themes in planning theory. She draws a distinction between 'planning theory' and 'urban theory'. She notes that

much of planning theory discusses what planners do with little reference either to the socio-spatial constraints under which they work or the purposes they wish to achieve. She suggests that: '... a narrow definition of planning theory results in theoretical weakness arising from the isolation of process from context or outcome' (Fainstein 2005 p121). Stated simply, she argues that planning theory has tended to focus on processes of decision-making. She contrasts this approach with the different approach encountered in 'urban theory'. Here scholars are concerned with the substance of public policy as it affects the quality of life in the city. By engaging actively with scholars in the fields of urban sociology, urban political science and environmental sustainability those concerned to advance 'urban theory' have highlighted the distributional impacts of planning policies.

Fainstein makes a plea for future developments in planning theory to bridge process and substance and, in her view, a focus on the creation of the 'just city' will repay dividends (Fainstein 2010). An example of this approach is provided by the notion of 'equity planning'. In an influential American book, *Making Equity Planning Work*, Krumholz and Forester (1990) provide a fascinating account of urban leadership in Cleveland, Ohio. Interestingly, the sub-title of this volume is 'Leadership in the public sector'. It is one of the few planning books I have been able to find that discusses leadership. We can suggest, then, that those concerned with 'urban theory' pay at least some attention to leadership themes and theories – and, in any event, urban political scientists have made significant contributions to our understanding of urban leadership (Judd 2000; Stone 1995).

The distinction between 'planning theory' and 'urban theory' might be seen as providing a reasonable explanation of why the 'planning theory' books I mentioned do not discuss leadership. It could be claimed that these books focus on the 'process' of planning, and that these authors do not pay attention to 'leadership' as this is a topic more than adequately covered by their colleagues working in the field of 'urban theory'. This is not a convincing argument. First, even the 'urban theorists' have given scant attention to leadership themes. The literature on leadership within the field of 'urban theory' is not that well developed. Second, and this is the point I wish to emphasise, any analysis of the 'process' of planning that neglects to consider 'leadership' is a weak analysis in its own terms. The world of planning practice shows us that leaders shape planning processes to achieve public purpose. To discuss 'planning theory' without discussing leadership diminishes the usefulness and relevance of planning theory. In the next section we step away from 'planning theory' debates and adopt a different perspective – one that is familiar to students of government, public management and urban politics.

Evolving debates about governance and leadership

The shift from local government to local governance is a familiar theme in modern debates relating to the governance of place (Goss 2001; Denters and Rose 2005; Haus et al 2005; Heinelt et al 2006; Davies and Imbroscio 2009). In broad terms local governance refers to the processes and structures of a

variety of public, private, and community and voluntary sector bodies at the local level (Hambleton and Gross 2007). It acknowledges the diffusion of responsibility for collective provision and recognises the contribution of different levels and sectors. As Peters argues:

'Governing has never been easy, but it has become all the more complicated... The process of governing now involves more actors, more policy areas that impinge upon one another, and most importantly involves a wider range of goals. With the multiplicity of targets being pursued by public action, designing programmes and processes becomes all the more difficult' (Peters 2011, p11).

The UK Coalition Government, elected in May 2010, advocates the development of a 'Big Society' (HM Government 2010a; HM Government 2010b).ⁱⁱⁱ The central idea is to encourage communities to help themselves, rather than rely on a continuing expansion of state-run services (Norman 2010; Tuddenham 2010). The emerging national policy is, then, clearly aligned with a 'governance' approach. Ministers argue that the state can only do so much. Indeed, they go further and argue that, because of the structural deficit in the national accounts, the state must do less. Some observers detect an anti-state philosophy in the approach the government has adopted thus far. Certainly the scale of the cuts in public spending is unprecedented in recent times.

The implications of the shift from government to governance for local political leadership are significant. Firstly, we can note that, just as approaches to governing have evolved, so too have approaches to leadership in general and local leadership in particular. Changes in society and culture are constantly reshaping the meaning and nature of leadership, and theories of leadership are, not surprisingly, evolving and developing (Burns 1978; Grint 1997; Keohane 2010). Explanations of the evolution of leadership theories are contested. At risk of oversimplifying, we can highlight four major, elements or approaches:

- Personal qualities of leaders
- Leadership and institutional design
- The nature of the leadership task
- The context for leadership

The 'Great Man' theory of leadership of the 19th century placed the emphasis on the characteristics of the individual leader – 'heroic' figures, with the right personality traits, were the focus of attention. This way of thinking was challenged, in the early 20th century, by the notion of 'scientific management'. This approach – exemplified by the Taylorism and Fordism of production line management in large factories – stressed the important role of leaders in designing procedures and practices in order to establish control over the workforce. In 'scientific management' roles and relationships, as well as tasks, are carefully defined and the monitoring of performance is central. Morgan (1986) suggests that the 'scientific' approach saw the organisation as an instrument of domination. This approach was, however, challenged by a

third strategy. Human relations theories gave more attention to the motives and feelings of workers, albeit often with the continuing aim of exploiting them. A fourth theme – one that cross cuts the other three – is the recognition that leaders need to tune in to the context both within and outside their organisation:

‘The size and culture of an organisation, the expectations of followers, the purposes the organisation is intended to pursue, and its history and traditions are all relevant in considering what kind of leadership is most likely to succeed. Behaviour by a leader that seems perfectly appropriate in some contexts may appear quite out of place in another’ (Keohane 2010 p10)

These four themes are all find expression in modern leadership theory and practice. Thus, some leadership writers focus on the development of the leadership skills of individuals by drawing lessons from inspirational leaders (Adair 2002). Until relatively recently, this biographical approach dominated discussion of urban leadership within political science (Stone 1995). The high profile planners identified by Hall (1988) in his history of urban planning could be said to fit within this mould. Some writers have highlighted the role of leadership in shaping strategy, and driving organisational performance through the development of, for example, ‘joined up’ government, and the imposition of measurable performance targets on public servants (Mulgan 2009). An updated version of the third theme, of human relations, is now deservedly receiving much more attention as both scholars and practitioners have come to recognise the importance of the emotional dimension of leadership (Goleman et al 2002; Heifetz and Linsky 2002; Haslam et al 2011).

As part of this there has been growing interest in the important distinction, made by Burns (1978), between ‘transactional leadership’ and ‘transformational leadership’. In the former leaders engage in a process of exchange with their followers – for example, a pay rise for outstanding work. Burns argues that the latter is both more complex and more potent – the transforming leader tunes into the feelings and emotions of followers, and seeks to stimulate enthusiasm and commitment through a process that is more like bonding than bartering. The fourth theme of developing context sensitive approaches to leadership, including developing the role of leaders in both responding to and reshaping organisational cultures, is now mainstream thinking in modern leadership programmes in both the private and the public sectors (Sashkin and Sashkin 2003).

All these four themes have influenced debates about local leadership in the UK and in other countries. It may be that they feature in planning education courses, but maybe not.

Local leadership debates in the UK

The UK government interest in ‘community leadership’ can be traced to a government report produced almost twenty years ago. Revealingly, this report focussed on the ‘internal’ – not the external – management of local

authorities (HM Government 1993). There was an implicit belief in this report that the institutional design of local government could help or hinder effective community leadership and it set out various ways of strengthening the political executive. Prime Minister Tony Blair, in a remarkable intervention, built on this earlier work and wrote a pamphlet urging local authorities to develop a highly visible, outgoing approach to community leadership (Blair 1998). Again, the underlying theory was that institutional redesign could bolster improved approaches to local leadership.

The Labour Government was quick to pass legislation creating not just a new directly elected mayor and strategic authority for London, but also opportunities for all English councils to develop new leadership models (Hambleton 1998; Hambleton and Sweeting 2004). The London reforms have undoubtedly strengthened the political leadership of the capital. Few voices are now raised arguing that the strategic model for governing London by means of a Directly Elected Mayor (DEM) and an assembly should be discarded, even though many in local government opposed the idea at the time.^{iv}

Research on the impact of the Local Government Act 2000 suggests that the institutional design of councils does, indeed, influence the way they operate and that that thoughtful redesign can have a positive impact on public service performance (Gains et al 2009). Sullivan (2007) notes, however, that 'community leadership' is an elastic term that contains multiple meanings – she rightly seeks to sharpen the debate about what this term actually means. Other scholars have added to this critique and argued that relatively little attention has been given to the challenges of managing the tensions that now arise in the new governance spaces created by the various moves to 'partnership' working (Howard and Miller 2008). Research by Purdue (2007) supports this view – he examined the role of community leaders in neighbourhood governance and shows how neglect of capacity building often leads to burnout for the individuals involved.

Three important points relating to planning theory emerge from the discussion in this and the previous section. First, as emphasised by numerous scholars, the debate about local leadership is first and foremost a **political** debate (Leach and Wilson 2000; Leach et al 2005; Leach 2006). The managerial literature on leadership can offer prompts and suggestions to discussion of the politics of place, but much of it is of limited value because it does not engage with politics. While the leadership powers of senior councillors in English local authorities have been strengthened by the legislative changes introduced since 2000, research on the changing roles of councillors in England suggests that many are finding it difficult to adapt to the new political structures (Copus 2008). Planning theorists do not seem to have contributed in any meaningful way to this debate about the restructuring of local power, even though one of the key powers of Directly Elected Mayors is strategic spatial planning.

Second, the shift from government to governance places a premium on facilitative leadership skills. American experience is relevant in this context as

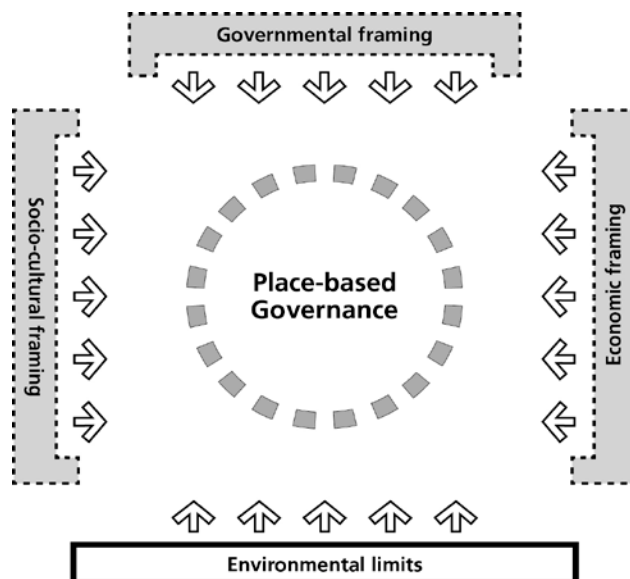
'governance' models have been in use for a longer period of time in the US than in the UK. Various US urban scholars have shown that traditional notions of 'strong' top-down leadership are unsuited to situations in which power is dispersed (Svara 1994 and 2009; Stone 1995). Recent research on collaborative leadership in UK local governance supports this argument. For example, Williams (2012 pp 100-109) outlines helpful ideas on the leader as boundary spanner. Planners often operate as boundary spanners, and the shift from government to governance could provide opportunities for planners to develop their potential as facilitative leaders. Some urban planning courses give time and attention to the development of boundary spanning skills of the planning students they teach, but few give much attention to the leadership implications (in my experience).

Lastly, it seems clear that much of the UK local government literature on leadership has concentrated on the internal operations of the local government system – on the roles of political parties, councillors and officers. A relatively small amount of research has been carried out on the local leadership contribution of locality leaders operating outside the local state, and this would seem to be an area that would repay further study.

Framing the power of place

Civic, or place-based leaders, do not operate in a vacuum. On the contrary, various powerful forces shape the context within which civic leaders, and I include planners here, operate. These forces do not disable local leadership. Rather they place limits on what urban planners may be able to accomplish in particular places and at particular moments in time.^v **Figure 1** provides a simplified picture of the forces that shape the world of place-based governance in any given locality.

Figure 1: Framing the political space for place-based governance



Let's run through this figure. At the bottom of the diagram, are the non-negotiable environmental limits. Ignoring the fact that cities are part of the natural ecosystem is irresponsible, and failure to pay attention to environmental limits will store up unmanageable problems for future generations. This side of the square is drawn with a solid line because, unlike the other sides of the square, these environmental limits are non-negotiable. On the left hand side of the diagram are socio-cultural forces – these comprise a mix of people (as actors) and cultural values (that people may hold). Here we find the rich variety of voices found in any city - including the claims of activists, businesses, artists, entrepreneurs, trade unionists, religious organisations, community-based groups, citizens who vote, citizens who don't vote, children, newly arrived immigrants, anarchists and so on. The people of the city will have different views about the kind of city they wish to live in, and they will have differential capacity to make these views known. Some, maybe many, will claim a right to the city (Lefebvre 1996). We can assume that, in democratic societies at least, elected leaders who pay little or no attention to these political pressures should not expect to stay in office for too long. Expression of citizen voice, to use Hirschman's term (1970), will see them dismissed at the ballot box.

On the right hand side of the diagram are the horizontal economic forces that arise from the need for localities to compete, to some degree at least, in the wider marketplace - for inward investment and to attract talented people. Various studies have shown that, contrary to neo-liberal dogma, it is possible for civic leaders to bargain with business (Savitch and Kantor 2002). Recognising the power of economic forces, including the growth in global competition between localities, does not require civic leaders to become mere servants of private capital. On the top of **Figure 1** we find the legal and policy framework imposed by higher levels of government. In some countries this governmental framing will include legal obligations imposed by supra-national organisations. For example, local authorities in countries that are members of the European Union (EU) are required to comply with EU laws and regulations, and to take note of EU policy guidance. Individual nation states determine the legal status, fiscal power and functions of local authorities within their boundaries. These relationships are subject to negotiation and renegotiation over time.

It is clear that **Figure 1** simplifies a much more complex reality. This is what conceptual frameworks do. In reality the four sets of forces framing local action do not necessarily carry equal weight, and the situation in any given city is, to some extent, fluid and changing. The space available for local agency shifts over time, and a key task of local leaders is to be alert to the opportunities for advancing the power of their place within the context of the framing forces prevailing on their area at the time. The figure indicates that place-based governance, shown at the centre, is porous. Successful civic leaders are constantly learning from the environment in which they find themselves in order to discover new insights, co-create new solutions and

advance their political objectives. Note that the four forces are not joined up at the corners to create a rigid prison within which civic leadership has to be exercised. On the contrary the boundaries of the overall arena are, themselves, malleable. Depending on the culture and context, imaginative civic leaders may be able to disrupt the pre-existing governmental frame and bring about an expansion in place-based power.

Place-based leadership and innovation zones

This section provides a brief presentation of a conceptual framework developed to enhance understanding of place-based leadership and, in particular, the role of leadership in promoting public service innovation. It draws on recent research carried out at the Centre for Sustainable Planning and Environments.^{vi} Civic leadership is 'place-based', meaning that those exercising decision-making power have a concern for the communities living in a particular 'place'. Some of the most powerful decision-makers in modern society are 'place-less' leaders in the sense that they are not concerned with the geographical impact of their decisions. Following Stiglitz I take the view that an unfettered market, especially in the context of globalisation, can destroy communities (Stiglitz 2006). There is now a substantial body of literature on 'social capital' and the role that it plays in fostering a caring society (Putnam 2000; Gilchrist 2004). There are different kinds of social capital and sometimes this capital can be used to exclude groups – the creation of social capital will not necessarily reduce socio-economic inequalities. However, with the right kind of civic leadership – of which more in a moment – it may be possible to encourage the bridging of social ties between different social groups.

As discussed earlier, there is a large body of literature on leadership - on leadership theories, leadership styles and alternative perspectives. In previous work I have defined leadership as 'shaping emotions and behaviour to achieve common goals' (Hambleton 2007 p174). This implies a wide range of activities aimed at generating both new insights and new ways of working together – it prizes respect for the feelings and attitudes of others as well as a strong commitment to collaboration.

Our approach to the study of place-based leadership is informed by this perspective and, in particular, we believe that the feelings people have for 'their' place have been seriously neglected in both the leadership literature and the public service innovation literature. Following Hoggett (2009 p175) we take the view that approaches to leadership need to develop a form of 'passionate reason'. How we feel is not a distraction from reason – on the contrary: 'Not only are our feelings essential to our capacity for thought but they are themselves a route to reason' (Hoggett 2009 p177).

Civic leaders are found in the public, private, and community/voluntary sectors and they operate at many geographical levels – from the street block to an entire sub region and beyond. We believe it is helpful to distinguish three realms of place-based leadership reflecting different sources of legitimacy:

- **Political leadership** – referring to the work of those people elected to leadership positions by the citizenry. These are, by definition, political leaders. Thus, directly elected mayors, all elected local councillors, and Members of Parliament are political leaders. Having said that we should acknowledge that different politicians carry different roles and responsibilities and will view their political roles in different ways.
- **Managerial/professional leadership** – referring to the work of public servants appointed by local authorities, central government and third sector organisations to plan and manage public services, and promote community wellbeing. These officers bring professional and managerial expertise to the tasks of local governance.
- **Community and business leadership** – referring to the work of the many civic-minded people who give their time and energy to local leadership activities in a wide variety of ways. These may be community activists, business leaders, trade union leaders, social entrepreneurs, voluntary sector leaders, religious leaders, higher education leaders and so on. The potential contribution to civic leadership of an independent and engaged voluntary and community sector is important here, and also engaged and locally embedded businesses.

These roles are all important in cultivating and encouraging public service innovation and, crucially, they overlap. We describe the areas of overlap between these different realms of leadership as **innovation zones** – areas providing many opportunities for innovation – see **Figure 2**. This is because **different perspectives are brought together** within these zones and this can enable active questioning of established approaches. Heterogeneity is the key to fostering innovation. We are suggesting that civic leadership has a critical role in creating the conditions for different people to come together – people who might not normally meet – to have a creative dialogue, and then to follow up their ideas. We present the circles in **Figure 2** as dotted lines as we seek to emphasise the connectivity, or potential connectivity, across the realms of civic leadership.

Figure 2: Realms of civic leadership



It can be claimed that the areas of overlap that we have identified in **Figure 2** are ‘conflict zones’, not ‘innovation zones’. It is certainly the case that these zones often provide settings for power struggles between competing interests and values. And it is important to acknowledge that, within these settings, power is unequally distributed. It is possible that formalized partnership settings can operate as innovation zones, but in our experience this is often not the case. Our research on public service innovation suggests that it is the more informal, open-ended, personal interactions that matter in a creative process (Hambleton and Howard 2012). This creativity can be cultivated if leaders step out of their own ‘realm’ of authority and engage with the perspectives and realities of others. This means going into what one public service leader described to us as one’s ‘ZOUND’ – or Zone of Uncomfortable Debate. Here, different approaches, values and priorities collide, and leaders need to be prepared to work in this ‘zone’ and to support others to do so.^{vii}

Wise civic leadership is critical in ensuring that settings of this kind – sometimes referred to as the ‘soft spaces’ of planning (Illsley et al 2010) – are orchestrated in a way that promotes a culture of listening that can, in turn, lead to innovation (Kahane 2004). Inventive place-based leaders can reconfigure conflict zones into innovation zones and, indeed, this is one of the main challenges that they face.

In sum, leadership capacity in modern society is dispersed. Recent work in the UK by NESTA supports the findings of our own research. Facilitative leadership skills are becoming increasingly important:

‘In more open, emergent systems, with many players operating in more fluid environments, and where the task is to create solutions rather than repeat tasks, then successful leadership will be more like leading a community of volunteers, who cannot be instructed. Leadership is likely to be far more interactive and distributed rather than concentrated and instructional’ (Leadbeater 2013, p50).

Our systems of local governance need to respect and reflect that diversity if decisions taken in the public interest are going to enjoy legitimacy. Further, more decentralized approaches - both across localities and within each realm of civic leadership - can empower informal leaders to be part of the dialogue (Howard and Lever 2011).

Figure 2 represents a drastic simplification of a more complex reality. It is not intended to show how the dynamics of local power struggles actually unfold. The relative power of the three realms varies by locality and this would imply different sized circles, whereas we have kept them all the same size. Moreover, the realms shift in influence over time. The interactions across the realms are also complex and, of course, there are many different interests operating within each realm. Nevertheless I believe that the notion of three different realms – with leadership stemming from different sources of legitimacy within each realm – provides a helpful way of framing discussion about civic leadership.^{viii}

Leadership: a new avenue for planning research?

This paper has suggested that leadership and planning theory are ‘ships in the night’. It is possible to argue that the ship of ‘leadership theory’ could learn from those on board the ‘planning theory’ ship. But, since this paper is for a planning research conference, this is not my focus. Rather I have tried to set out a case for those on the ‘planning theory and practice’ ship to hail their colleagues on the ‘leadership theory and practice’ ship, even invite them on board. My suggestion is that such a move could generate valuable insights on how to improve planning theory and practice.

In this closing section I offer five pointers for discussion – ideas for consideration and hints at possible directions for future research.

i) Scholarship on the nature of planning – making links to leadership theories?

Forester suggests that: ‘Planning is the guidance of future action’ (Forester 1989 p3). If this definition is accepted it suggests that planning is very closely allied with leadership, and this makes the absence of leadership theory in planning theory all the more mystifying. Perhaps scholars interested in examining the core purposes of planning could consider more actively the core purposes of leadership, and consider how alternative theories of leadership can illuminate the development of new theories of planning. This could be approached in a number of ways – as a philosophical enterprise, as a way of generating hypotheses or as a way of examining planning practice. Fainstein (2005) suggests there is merit in conjoining insights drawn from ‘planning theory’ and ‘urban theory’. My suggestion is that it would be desirable to add a third leg to this stool – ‘leadership theory’.

ii) Why has planning theory neglected leadership theories?

Perhaps it is worth considering why there is such a mismatch between planning practice and planning theory. Practitioners, and I draw here on my

experience of working with urban leaders and city planners in many cities in several continents, are fully aware of the importance of leadership in the planning and management of their cities. Yet, planning theorists disregard leadership theories. Is this because planning theorists have never heard of leadership theories? Or, have planning theorists examined the literature on leadership and concluded it is irrelevant? Or could it be that, because few planning theorists have practical experience of leading and managing planning departments and projects, they are simply unaware of the importance of leadership? These are open questions for planning scholars to consider.

iii) Place-based leadership versus place-less power?

The paper has set out a conceptual framework for understanding place-based leadership. It is a very simple framework, and I have stressed readily that the 'realms of leadership' set out in **Figure 2** contextualised within an understanding of the forces framing the space for political action – see **Figure 1**. The framework does not pretend to provide a way of analysing the detailed dynamics of the power system of a given city – other theories can assist with this. But an attraction of the model is that it connects to the lived experience of urban leaders and practitioners. The distinctive realms of leadership help practitioners 'make sense' of local leadership activities and assist in clarifying roles and responsibilities. Many are also attracted to the way that the model enables a contrast to be drawn between 'place-based' leaders (who care about the communities living in a particular place) and 'place-less' leaders (who care not a jot about the impact of their decisions on specific localities).

iv) Place-based leadership and the promotion of public innovation

The world is changing rapidly and this puts a premium on developing the innovative capacity of localities and the institutions of governance. The model of place-based leadership presented in this paper represents a contribution to 'innovation theory'. Much of the literature on innovation is managerial or technological. My suggestion in this paper is that successful public innovation is more likely to stem from changing political dynamics and that place-based leadership can play an influential role in creating spaces for innovation and experiment. Perhaps there is an implication here for planning theory.

This is not a cry for yet more 'enterprise zones' in which anything goes. Rather it is a plea for new kinds of civic leadership bringing together place-based activists to invent new possibilities. In our recent research report on public sector innovation and local leadership Jo Howard and I suggest that successful place-based leadership involves the 'orchestration of social discovery' (Hambleton and Howard 2012). Perhaps new thinking on the relationship between planning theory, local leadership and public innovation is called for.

One possibility to consider is the idea of sharing Innovation Stories. An Innovation Story is a short, factual account of an example of bold, place-based leadership. In the forthcoming book on *Leading the Inclusive City* the

author presents a dozen or so Innovation Stories using the following structured format:

- Aims and objectives
- Outline of the Innovation Story
- Leadership lessons
- Further sources

This is a simplification of the more elaborate structure set out in the recent study of *Public Sector Innovation and Local Leadership in the UK and the Netherlands* (Hambleton and Howard 2012). A key feature of the Innovation Story approach is the attempt to identify clear leadership lessons from each story. The idea here is not to prove that one approach or another is the 'right' way to lead the process of innovation. Rather the aim is to share lessons that planners and activists in other cities and localities can reflect on and, in their own way, consider whether these stories throw light on how to intervene in relation to the political dynamics of their own, place-specific situation.

v) A rocket boost for engaged scholarship?

A final pointer concerns the trajectory of research in universities. In many countries, higher education performance management regimes are skewing research away from policy relevance and away from active engagement with the challenges faced by local communities. Despite the recent increase in interest in assessing 'research impact' in some countries, the thrust of university promotion procedures and research council funding priorities is to promote esoteric research. Learned journal articles are highly prized within these performance regimes, and it is certainly important to strengthen the quality of peer reviewed scholarship in the field of urban planning and urban studies. But it is essential that universities reconsider the nature of modern scholarship to bring it into line with the expectations and requirements of modern society.

Ernest Boyer has provided a valuable start to this task by mapping out a holistic vision of scholarship (Boyer 1990). A growing number of universities are following this model – particularly public funded universities in the USA – but there is much more to do on this front and this could be of immense benefit to planning theory. Urban planning programmes in the US have done much to advance the cause of engaged scholarship, and Lorlene Hoyt provides a useful collection of essays on how to encourage urban planning students to make a real impact on their locality (Hoyt 2013). The notion of place-based leadership can embrace the role of students and faculty contributing to the governance of their city. This can, in turn, help to generate new ways of building approaches to planning theory that engage with the lived experience of urban residents.

In conclusion, the central aim of this paper has been to suggest that planning theory could be strengthened if planning scholars (defined broadly) were to give more attention to the role of leadership in shaping the urban future. I hope that the argument is persuasive.

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ⁱ A book providing a more extended analysis is in preparation: Hambleton R. (2014) *Leading the Inclusive City. Place-based innovation for a bounded planet*. Bristol: The Policy Press

ⁱⁱ Place-based leadership in these four cities will feature in the forthcoming book, along with Innovation Stories drawn from other cities where bold civic leadership has made a significant impact

ⁱⁱⁱ This section draws directly on Hambleton and Howard (2013)

^{iv} Debate about whether or not Directly Elected Mayors (DEMs) can improve local leadership is, once again, on the public policy agenda in the UK. The Localism Act 2011 provided the twelve largest cities in England, outside London, with the opportunity to introduce DEMs. Three English provincial cities have decided to introduce DEMs in the period since 2011: Leicester, Liverpool, and Bristol. Arguments in favour of this reform have been set out by the Institute for Government (Swinney and Blatchford 2011), and research on the prospects for Mayoral governance in Bristol has appeared recently (Hambleton et al 2013).

^v This topic of the relationship between local agency and external forces shaping the context for local agency are discussed at some length in the book. Here I provide a very concise summary.

^{vi} This framework was first developed in work Hambleton carried out for the Royal Commission on Auckland Governance (Hambleton 2009) and further developed in a scoping report for the Local Authority Research Council Initiative (LARCI) (Hambleton et al 2009). More details are available in Hambleton and Howard (2012).

^{vii} I am grateful to Katherine Rossiter, Managing Director of the Society of Local Authority Chief Executives and Senior Managers (SOLACE), for this insight, provided at our Anglo-Dutch Workshop on Place-based Leadership (9 November 2011). SOLACE would like to acknowledge the source of this concept as The Cranfield School of Management. For further information and to read Dr Catherine Bailey's discussion of the 'ZOUND', go to: <http://www.som.cranfield.ac.uk/som/dinamic-content/media/knowledgeinterchange/topics/20110404/Article.pdf>

^{viii} As an aside it is worth mentioning that it is possible to elaborate this model. For example, in work for the book on *Leading the Inclusive City* the author is showing how the community and business realm of civic leadership can be divided into two overlapping realms.