



NOTTINGHAM
BUSINESS SCHOOL
Nottingham Trent University



Edge Hill University



RSA Report on Research Network:

Leading citizen driven governance: Collective regional and sub-regional leadership in the UK and beyond.

First event (of three) held at Bass Management Centre, Nottingham Business School NTU on 19th June 2008.

Organisers: Professors Joyce Liddle and John Diamond and Dr Pip Tucker

This first event (of three planned research workshops) was attended by over 30 academics, policy makers and practitioners who were invited to discuss some of the key issues and debates of multi-scalar governance, and the problems of collective leadership within emerging, and as yet virtual, and relatively informal decision-making arrangements. Organisers were particularly pleased to see a few PhD and early career researchers in attendance, and informal feedback confirmed that it had been a useful day, with some very positive comments from participants.

Professor Baback Yazdani, Dean of NBS welcomed all attendees and then Professors Liddle and Diamond explained that the purpose of the day's proceedings was to bring together academics, strategic and operational policy makers and practitioners from state, non-state and third sector agencies, especially those individuals intimately involved in leading, developing, managing, delivering and measuring the performance and impact of Local Area Agreements, or other local priorities and programmes. Professor Diamond pointed to the importance of locality, neighbourhood and regions, and how many

different stakeholders are now being brought to the decision-making tables as 'spaces' are opening up for hitherto excluded groups such as communities, charities, businesses and third sector in making decisions affecting their constituents and localities. He also pointed out the importance of these changes to policy development and interventions, and suggested that today we had the opportunity to consider some of these policy issues. What the organisers expected was for participants to have a dialogue and rich conversation on what these new spaces of decision making feel like for those involved in them, and also to reflect on their own practice, as well as drawing from national and international comparisons.

Aureliane Beauclair then introduced participants to the work of RSA International and confirmed the support for this event, and for which the organisers are grateful.

Key note speakers then gave their particular perspective on collective leadership, with Ioannis Oikonomopoulos, the former Deputy Mayor of Megara, a municipality in Greece, giving an international flavour to the proceedings. In his amusing and insightful talk, Mr Oikonomopoulos provided a cross cultural examination of the need for local and regional actors to work across boundaries, but also pointed out some of the inherent historical and political problems in doing so. Setting the Greek context into its historical roots, he explained some things that were unique to Greek political culture, and demonstrated how this might differ in other jurisdictions.

George Cowcher, CEO of Derbyshire and Nottinghamshire Chambers of Commerce then gave the 'voice' of the business community and showed how it fits into new regional governance structures. He emphasised the importance of 'place' in new governance arrangements and how significant the SNR was to his members. The sense of place and sense of 'combined purpose' was essential to driving local and regional transformation, and George highlighted how large companies such as Rolls Royce in Derby may be global players, but also have a sense of the locality in which they sit. Business leaders are concerned that SNR may contain too much on governance and accountability, but insufficient on skills, transport and infrastructure; all are issues of crucial importance to business leaders. He believes that the regional level is large enough to deliver positive outcomes, and an international business perspective must also be taken if resources are to be targeted efficiently. He would like regions to celebrate successes more and reduce their reliance on European Funding sources. He then went on to say that the EM economy is exciting with a geographic advantage over other UK regions, due to its size, availability of land; close proximity to London, the SE, and West Midlands and the NW; and its very good airport

The challenges facing the EM are:- skill levels which are lower than they should be; how to raise the aspirations of young people; how to improve transport connectivity; need to reduce crime levels; lack of entrepreneurs and low business start ups; improving productivity and reducing the burden of regulation on businesses. However, he ended on a positive note by saying that the EM has an excellent portfolio of businesses, aspirational Local Authorities and excellent universities. If all sectors can work together collectively more effectively, the region has greater potential for transformation.

Martin Gawith, CEO of Greater Nottingham Partnership then introduced the sub-regional level of governance and warned of the danger of people becoming disengaged for political processes because they lack belief in the existing systems of decision making. He emphasised how middle class people still dominate in articulating a 'voice' and how we need to empower local people to take decisions for themselves. Martin suggested that community leadership was alive and well but whilst we have 'police no-go areas' it was difficult to engage communities. He felt that recent changes such as patient -led health were a very positive move and initiatives such as these were presenting us with new ways of working together by involving local people more. He called for more genuine changes to local service delivery so that the public could verify that they are truly receiving the services they need, rather than simply accepting what they were given. Martin firmly believes that to change attitudes to involvement we need to change the structures of how we deliver public services and the forms of democracy we want to have. Only then will be able to fill those new spaces of decision making by agreeing the structures to facilitate engagement.

Sharon Squires, CEO of Derbyshire Community Partnership gave her perspective on local decision making by drawing on her experience of setting up the Partnership. She believes that the Local Authority has a duty and responsibility to shape 'places' and take on a community leadership role for its communities, but there is a danger in micro-management of issues where communities might take control themselves. She emphasised the need to have faith in democracy and a recognition of plural identities. She worries that the impact of managerialism might easily switch communities from taking on a leadership role for themselves and they need data and clearer understanding of issues before we can move towards customer led services and empowerment. Moreover, by devoting resources in traditional ways, there is a reduction in involvement with a concomitant failure to encourage appropriate leadership, vision and skills for a locality. Sharon advocated greater collective local leadership to engage local people, local politicians, local public sector agencies and businesses. She believes that if citizens are to be empowered in setting the vision for their own neighbourhoods then we

need appropriate governance, structures as well as building up the skills and expertise.

Sara Ayres of Bristol considered some of the problems of introducing SNR, and showed the importance of consensus and synergies in decisions affecting localities. She stressed the opportunities of new governance arrangements to enhance collective leadership approaches. She drew on current research in which she interviewed senior civil servants and regional actors who were central to the development and introduction of SNR, and highlighted many of the competing agendas at both Whitehall and GO levels of governance. The government's requirement for evidence based decision making prior to policy interventions provided a good opportunity for regional actors to work more collaboratively together to shape their localities, but the multi scalar nature of problems and nationally set targets may prove to be more problematic than politicians believe they will be.

Crispian Fuller of Warwick drew on research from the national evaluation of LAAs/LSPs to note how there was an 'implied' collective leadership in built to the development of LAAs and LSPs, and yet the reality is that there is 'heterogeneous collective leadership' and forms of leadership differed between localities. He also pointed out that LAAs are shaped around service delivery rather than involvement, engagement and democracy, which presents problems for collective leadership. Meta-governance arrangements might well be considered to be new forms of control rather than new forms of democratic engagement and he concluded by saying that LAAs and LSPs are contingency-laden, and very much dependent on other agency involvement, with the potential for only token engagement of community and business actors.

Sarah Longlands gave CLES perspective on SNR and demonstrated the need for Local Authorities to become empowered and take up the cudgels of collective leadership in their localities. She explained the Statutory Economic Assessments were an excellent vehicle to generate a sense of place and introduce new processes for both collective leadership and engagement and inclusion. The introduction of MAAs is also an example where actors can work across organisational boundaries to provide leadership on specific projects. The personal and the collective could merge in new governance arrangements and if local authorities and other actors could create the conditions for sharing of information and data at ward level or super output level, and work collaboratively with RDAs and other agencies, then a collective leadership approach could be achieved. In Sarah's view SNR and MAAs provide excellent opportunities to engage a range of actors in shaping places.

Nina Daubin, CEO of Nottinghamshire Community Foundation was passionate about the need for 'self-leadership' as a precursor to

collective leadership. Only if people can understand their own role in leadership and reflect on their approaches will they be able to become part of collective leadership forums. Without this self knowledge, decision making will continue to be top-down and not transformational. She illustrated that the SNR denied the emotional aspects and the narratives that people use to make sense of their places. For any transformation to be successful it must have a chronological trajectory and government interventions framed around how economic and social inclusion can be achieved through the people living in, and experiencing their locality. The language and lenses used by policy makers and public managers do not always lend themselves to inclusion, so those involved in policy interventions must reflect on why they wish to collaborate and acknowledge that it is OK to disagree or challenge received wisdom

The proceedings were brought to a conclusion as John Diamond drew out the key points of the day for the organisers to take forward to the next event planned in Liverpool during November 2008. This will be followed by a Spring event in Bristol, and culminate at RSA International Conference in Leuven, Belgium in April 2009.

The organisers are happy to report that this first event went very well, and achieved the objectives of stimulating a rich dialogue, some interesting conversations and vigorous debates from a variety of personal perspectives and on-going research projects. Actors from different scales of governance, international, national, regional, localities and neighbourhoods had the opportunity to explain their own involvement in decision making forums, as well as express their opinions on collective leadership. The workshops gave a wide diversity of actors the opportunity to reflect on their own practices and to consider both positives and negatives of involving and engaging wider stakeholders into new action spaces. It also revealed that there are many, diverse approaches to collaborative working and collective leadership that span both organisational and sectoral boundaries.

Professor Joyce Liddle, NBS, NTU
Professor John Diamond, Edge Hill
Dr Pip Tucker, Devon County Council

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