# Place-based Leadership in a Global Era

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**Robin Hambleton**[1]

Centre for Sustainable Planning and Environments
University of the West of England, Bristol

## Abstract

*This article examines the major challenges now facing local governments across the world and advocates the development of a new focus on place-based leadership for local government scholarship and practice. The challenges facing local authorities are many, but they can be summarised in two words: globalisation and urbanisation. In response to these we have witnessed, in many countries, a shift from 'local government' to 'local governance'. This shift is discussed, and it is suggested that new models of partnership working could, if handled in the wrong way, undermine local democracy. To combat this danger it is essential to give civic leadership far more attention – in the worlds of both academe and practice. A new way of conceptualising place-based leadership – one that identifies three 'realms of civic leadership' – is put forward. This model emphasises the role of civic leadership in shaping emotions and supporting public service innovation. To illustrate the argument an example of highly respected place-based leadership is presented. Freiburg, Germany is recognised as a very successful eco-city and the leadership model is used to help explain why. The article concludes with some reflections and pointers for research and policy. It is suggested that new forms of 'engaged scholarship' – approaches that bring together academics and practitioners to co-produce new knowledge about place-based leadership in an international, comparative perspective – should be encouraged.*

[1] Robin Hambleton is Professor of City Leadership at the University of the West of England, Bristol and Director of Urban Answers, a company he founded in 2007: <www.urbananswers.co.uk>.

**Keywords**

Place-based Leadership, Local Governance, Public Service Innovation, Engaged Scholarship

## 1. Introduction

Local governments across the world now face remarkable challenges, mainly because the world is changing very rapidly. The global economic recession, shifts in our understanding of the causes of climate change, growing ethno-religious friction in many multicultural cities, and startling advances in personal communication technologies are just four developments that pose massive challenges for local leaders and managers.

Sceptics will say that every generation believes it is living through tumultuous change. Localities – both urban and rural – have always faced tough challenges. What's new? There are two overarching reasons why the current dynamics of change lay down unprecedented challenges for local governments: globalisation and urbanisation.

This article provides a very brief description of these challenges and then sets out a discussion of how local governments in different countries are responding. The shift from 'local government' to 'local governance' appears to be taking place in many countries. While this can have advantages, it also has drawbacks and, depending on how it is handled, it could actually undermine local democracy. It will be suggested that civic leadership – and, more specifically, 'place-based' leadership – can play a vital part in strengthening the orchestrating role of local government in this rapidly changing environment. The trouble is that civic leadership is being given insufficient attention in both academic and policy debates relating to the future of local government. This article aims to make a contribution to filling this gap. A conceptual framework, designed to advance understanding of place-based leadership, is presented. This distinguishes three realms of civic leadership in any given locality – political, managerial/professional and community.

The model emphasises the critical role that leaders from all three realms can play in creating innovation zones – or new spaces of interaction – in which new ideas can be generated and tried out. A short summary of the outstanding achievements of the leaders

of Freiburg, Germany, is then presented to illustrate the argument. Here is a city that is very comfortable with the idea of innovation – of setting remarkably high standards and then delivering on them. This illustration is followed by a final section offering some reflections. This develops some pointers for policy and practice and some pointers for academe. It will be suggested that one way forward is for academics and practitioners to work closely together in the co-production of new knowledge relating to civic leadership and public service innovation.

A caveat is due at the outset. Cities and localities are geographically and culturally specific – they exist in different economic, political, socio-cultural and legal contexts. It follows that we should guard against generalising too freely about how to lead and manage local governments across the world. Having said that, it is hoped that the discussion that follows identifies ideas that can be used to stimulate fresh thinking on the nature of place-based leadership and how to improve and develop it.

## 2. Globalisation and Urbanisation

The background discussion paper for the 2009 Commonwealth Local Government conference on *Improving Local Government: the Commonwealth Vision* held in Freeport, Grand Bahama, provides a helpful overview of the challenges now facing local governments across the world (Amis 2009). This discussion paper reviews the changing international context for local government and highlights: the Millenium Development Goals (MDGs); the global economic crisis; and energy efficiency and climate change challenges. Thirty years ago local governments did not, on the whole, need to concern themselves too much with international developments. Now they do.

Earlier it was suggested that the two words 'globalisation' and 'urbanisation' sum up the overarching reasons why local governments across the world face new challenges.[2] The economic, political, social, environmental and cultural changes implied by the term 'globalisation' are truly startling. Hutton and Giddens bring together a collection of essays on the contours of contemporary capitalism that give weight to this view: 'It is the interaction of extraordinary technological innovation combined with the world-wide reach driven by global capitalism that give today's change its particular complexion. It

[2] This discussion draws on Chapter 1 of my co-edited book on *Governing Cities in a Global Era* (Hambleton and Gross 2007).

has now a speed, inevitability and force that it has not had before' (Hutton and Giddens 2000 pvii).

Globalisation is **not**, of course, just an economic phenomenon – it has social, political, environmental and cultural dimensions. Globalisation enhances mobility and connectivity among people and can, as a result, enhance the local quality of life. However, the economic dimension of globalisation is particularly important. Some authors argue that cities cannot do much other than compete for inward investment.[3] Tiebout (1956) pointed to this over fifty years ago, when he suggested that people and industry choose their locations based upon a simple cost-benefit ratio of goods and services available. Peterson (1981) later suggested that, due to local resource deficits and the need to maintain their competitive position, cities had become dependent on higher levels of government and private investment for survival. Thus, in his view, local policy is heavily constrained – in effect local leaders can do little in the face of wider economic forces. Urban dependency, on this analysis, increases as the world becomes increasingly global. Labour and capital are mobile, people follow jobs and industry opts to move to more distant locations, where the cost of land and labour are lower.

Others argue, however, that urban dependency theories overstate the power of international and national actors and understate the power and influence of local leaders and activists. For example, Savitch and Kantor, in their cross-national comparative research on urban development, point out that city leaders can, in fact, bargain with business and that: 'Cities with strong popular control systems exercise greater influence over capital investment and influence the course of economic development decisions' (Savitch and Kantor 2002, p45). Other urban scholars support this view and some even suggest that cities now have elevated in importance in the global world (Denters and Rose 2005).

Reference was made earlier to the fact that we now live in a predominantly urban world. In fact, the world is urbanising at a remarkable rate. Figure 1 shows how the overall population of the world is set to climb from 6.5 billion in 2005 to around 8.2 billion in 2030. By then almost five billion people (or 60% of the world population) will live in urban areas. This is a staggering increase of 1.8 billion in the world urban population in a

[3] I use the word 'cities' at various points in this article but the argument applies equally to smaller towns and localities in general.

comparatively short space of time. In 1950 there were 86 cities in the world with a population of more than one million; today there are 400, and by 2015 the UN predicts that there will be over 550.

This urban population growth is spectacular. From a city planning and a local government point of view it is just as important to record that this growth is mainly happening in areas that have **not** seen much in the way of urbanisation in the past. As Davis (2006) points out most of this surging urban expansion will occur in the developing countries. He notes, correctly, that the scale and velocity of Third World urbanisation dwarfs even that of Victorian Europe.

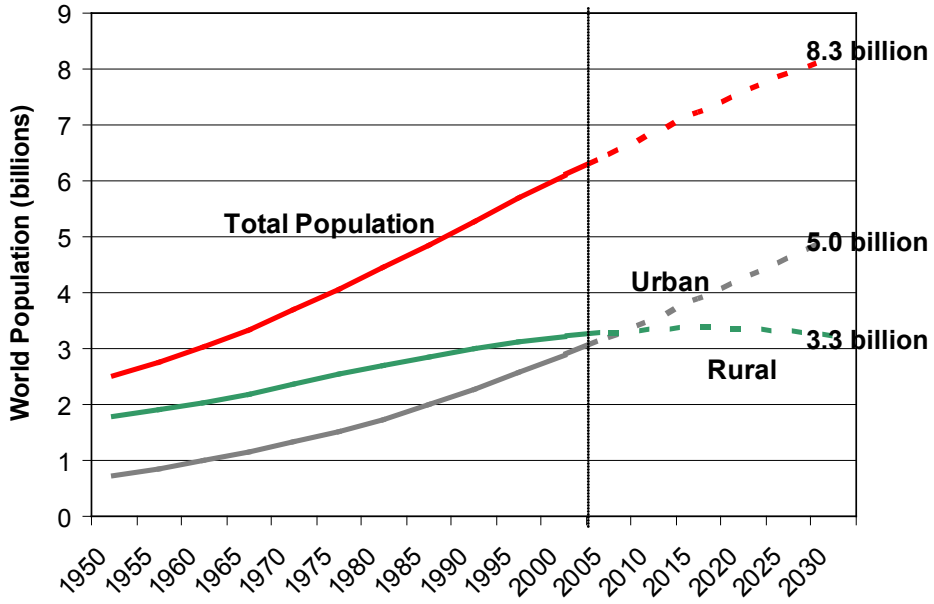


**Figure 1. World Population Growth**

*Source:* United Nations World Urbanisation Prospects, <http://esa.un.org/unup/>.

## 3. From Local Government to Local Governance

In this section we explore the movement from 'government' to 'governance' – a shift that appears to be taking place in many countries. The argument runs that the forces of globalisation and, to some extent urbanisation, described in the previous section have forced change on local governments. It can be argued that the established systems of local 'government' were pressured into introducing 'governance' models in order to cope with radical change. The phrase 'local governance' is now very familiar in both public policy and academic debates about cities and city regions, but this has not always been the case.

Back in the 1970s and 1980s analysts would be more likely to talk of 'local government' and/or 'urban management'. Indeed, 'urban management' is still a phrase that is widely used in the literature relating to developing countries, and it is even described as 'a relatively new topic' in one recent, and important, contribution to the field (Dijk 2006, pxix). The literature on 'urban management' usually gives insufficient attention to the political processes that shape local affairs and this is a limitation. This is why urban scholarship, in western democracies at least, has been giving increasing attention to the politics of urban planning and city development.

A number of scholars have contributed to the urban government/urban governance debate. Stone (1989), in his classic study of governing coalitions in Atlanta, influenced a generation of urban scholars, and DiGaetano and Klemanski (1993) made an important early international contribution to the field of urban governance, with their comparative study of power in selected cities in the US and the UK. Over the last decade or so the international literature examining the shift from urban government to urban governance has grown significantly (Denters and Rose 2005; Davies and Imbroscio 2009; Hambleton and Gross 2007; McCarney and Stren 2003).

But what do these terms mean? For the purpose of this discussion *government* refers to the formal institutions of the state. Government makes decisions within specific administrative and legal frameworks and uses public resources in a financially accountable way. Most important, government decisions are backed up by the legitimate hierarchical power of the state. *Governance*, on the other hand, involves government *plus* the looser processes of influencing and negotiating with a range of public and private sector agencies to achieve desired outcomes. A governance perspective encourages collaboration between the public, private and non-profit sectors to achieve mutual goals. Whilst the hierarchical power of the state does not vanish, the emphasis in governance is on steering, influencing and coordinating the actions of others.

Moving to the local level, *local government* refers to democratically elected authorities. *Local governance* is broader – it refers to the processes and structures of a variety of public, private, and community and voluntary sector bodies at the local level. It acknowledges the diffusion of responsibility for collective provision and recognises the contribution of different levels and sectors. This argument suggests that approaches to

leadership and public service management that may have served societies well in the past will need to be updated to meet the needs of changing times.

Elsewhere, I have argued that to contrast two 'schools' – the pro 'government' school and the pro 'governance' school – runs the risk of presenting a caricature of a more complex political debate (Hambleton, 2007). However, for the purposes of our discussion here, this juxtaposition will suffice. A key theme in these debates concerns the degree to which elected city governments are able to exercise democratic control over what happens to their localities and the people living in them. As mentioned earlier some scholars argue that locally elected politicians can do little to shape the fortunes of their city – for example, Peterson (1981) argues that cities must serve powerful economic interests if they are to prosper. Others take the view that 'place-based' power can be significant (Savitch and Kantor, 2002; Heinelt *et al*., 2006).

The move to 'governance' approaches is important for our discussion of civic leadership as it raises questions about the effectiveness of local democracy. Several studies – in, for example, the UK and the USA – have shown that the new kinds of partnership created to advance collaboration between different stakeholders in the city lack transparency. Worse than that, it would seem that local 'public/private partnerships' and 'special authorities' are becoming increasingly undemocratic and authoritarian (Davies, 2007; Judd and Smith, 2007). We can, then, raise a concern about the degree to which elected local authorities are able to have a decisive impact on the life chances of their residents. Certainly we need to recognise that powerful global economic forces limit the power of the local state and partly explain the continuing existence of major inequalities in cities.

## 4. Conceptualising Place-Based Leadership

We now turn to the theme of civic leadership, which is used here to refer to all leadership activity that serves a public purpose in a given locality. Civic leadership is 'place-based' leadership – 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 (Ranney 2003). Following Stiglitz, who draws on Putnam, 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.

Civic leadership is inspirational and collaborative. 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.[4] If we apply this definition to place-based leadership it implies an approach that is very different from leading the 'organisation' or 'leading the local council'. It invites leaders to move outside their organisation (be it a local authority, a business, a social enterprise, a university or whatever) to engage with the concerns facing the place. We can surmise that most of the people 'concerned with' a place actually live there. However, some individuals may be committed to a place and the people living in it without actually living there. For example, the chief executive of a local authority may live in a neighbouring area. The central point is that it is concern for the people living in a particular place that drives leaders to act.

The literature on leadership – on political leadership, on managerial leadership and on local government leadership – has given scant attention to how people feel. Some scholars and writers have started to address this issue. For example, Goleman *et al*. (2002) draws on earlier work on emotional intelligence to develop a 'leadership repertoire' that displays some awareness of emotions. Hoggett (2009), in his wide-ranging study of human feelings and identities in political life, makes a remarkably insightful contribution by introducing different theories of collective emotion. The point to emphasise here, however, is that these contributions are surprisingly few and far between. More worrying, there appears to be little evidence that these ideas have impacted debates about local leadership, still less the actual practice of leadership and management in local government.

[4] This definition resonates with recent contributions to the literature on leadership, including Sashkin and Sashkin (2003); Heifetz, Grashow and Linksy (2009); and Keohane (2010).

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. Three kinds of civic leadership, reflecting their different sources of legitimacy, can be distinguished:

- **Political leadership** – referring to the work of those people elected to leadership positions by the citizenry. These are, by definition, political leaders. Thus, all elected local councillors are political leaders, although we should acknowledge that different councillors carry different roles and responsibilities and will view their political role in different ways. We should also note that many councillors see themselves as 'community leaders' and this is no bad thing. However, the key point I wish to highlight here is that their legitimacy stems from the ballot box. Because they are elected local politicians have a right to exercise political power. This distinguishes them from other local leaders.

- **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 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, voluntary sector leaders, figures in religious organisations, higher education leaders and so on. Particularly important here is the potential contribution to civic leadership of an independent and engaged voluntary and community sector.

It is essential to point out immediately that Figure 2 represents a drastic simplification of a more complex reality. There is no suggestion here that, because the circles are an equal size, the three realms of place-based leadership are equally powerful. On the contrary, the relative power of leaders operating in the different realms varies enormously by locality. The way the realms are configured in a particular place will be shaped by a range of external pressures as well as by local factors. The model is presented only as a conceptual framework to aid thinking about the nature of place-based leadership.

In addition to distinguishing different sources of legitimacy, the model suggests that leaders from all three realms can play a critical role in promoting public service innovation. More than that the model is designed to highlight the significance of the areas of overlap between the different realms of leadership. These areas of overlap can be described 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. If mishandled processes of dialogue in these spaces can become 'conflict zones' with little listening taking place. This is where civic leadership can play a vital role – in shifting the focus to learning and innovation and away from dispute and fear (Kahane 2004). 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. This, in turn, requires emotional sensitivity and an awareness of the importance of various sources of community identity.

**Figure 2. Realms of civic leadership**


Innovation does, of course, take place within each of the realms of leadership shown in the diagram. The suggestion being made here is that the areas of overlap tend to be neglected, despite the fact that they can provide exciting opportunities for the development of new approaches to social discovery that, in turn, lead to public service innovation.

This framework is elaborated elsewhere (Hambleton 2009; Hambleton *et al*. 2009). For our purposes an important point to stress is that inspirational, civic leadership can emanate from any of the three realms of leadership. Elected politicians can exercise a path-breaking role but so, too, can community leaders operating outside the state. It is also the case that appointed officers – for example, an inspiring city manager or service director, a neighbourhood manager or area police officer – may set the tone of local leadership. The role of managers and professionals in local civic leadership is, in fact, often undervalued. Officers can and do work closely with political figures and community stakeholders to bring about transformative change. In particular, street-level workers can play a key role in promoting dialogue over time that stimulates creative solutions to local problems. In the US context Nalbandian (1991) has emphasised the importance of professional managers identifying, understanding and working with the values of their local communities. And in more recent work he has shown how professionals can play a crucial role in promoting community involvement and, what he describes as, 'civic discovery' (Nalbandian 2007).

There is an important dimension to the local leadership debate that we should not ignore – the powers of local authorities and the institutional design of local government. The powers granted by higher levels of government to local authorities in various countries vary dramatically. Clearly this shapes the capacity of local authorities to lead their place. In addition, the detailed design of local democratic institutions can vary significantly between countries. In relation to the civic leadership debate we can note that an increasing number of countries believe that it is important to strengthen the local political executive – either by introducing a strong directly elected mayor or by creating a senior executive group of councillors (Borraz and John 2004; Magnier 2006; Swianiewicz 2007). Directly elected mayors have, for example, been introduced across local government in Germany and Italy, and the model has also been introduced into English local government (Hambleton and Sweeting 2004; Copus 2008). Former UK Prime Minister Tony Blair was enthusiastic about this approach (Blair 1998) and, in 2000, the Labour Government created the Greater London Authority (with a directly elected mayor). This was a major breakthrough in urban leadership. The model underpins bold outgoing leadership by the Mayor. Opposed by just about all involved in UK local government at the time, there are now few, if any, local government voices calling for the abolition of the directly elected mayor for London. In the Localism Bill, presented to Parliament in December 2010, the present UK Coalition Government proposes

introducing directly elected mayors in twelve major cities in England (subject to local referenda). The institutional design debate about local leadership can be expected to continue in England.

The debate about institutional design is, in fact, very much alive and well across Commonwealth countries. For example, in New Zealand the Royal Commission on Auckland Governance recently carried out a thorough study of alternative approaches to metropolitan governance (Royal Commission on Auckland Governance 2009). In this case the Commission recommended the introduction of a directly elected mayor for a large, newly created unitary authority. The Government, while rejecting important aspects of the Commission's recommendations, decided to introduce a directly mayor and moved swiftly to pass new legislation. Mayor Len Brown took up his duties as Mayor of Auckland in November 2010, and is now the directly elected leader of the largest local authority in Australasia (Cheyne and Hambleton 2011). For our purposes, the important point to note about the institutional design of local government is that it can either support outgoing civic leadership or hinder it. There is not space here to elaborate the pros and cons of alternative institutional designs. In any event, one of the arguments of this paper is that local government can gain much by paying more attention to leadership processes rather than focussing too much attention on structures and organisational charts.

Let us now provide a brief recap on the argument developed so far. Today local governments exist in a rapidly globalising world, a world that is also rapidly urbanising. Buffeted by external economic and other forces, that appear to be outside their control, local governments strive to create a positive and predictable future for their residents. As a result of these various pressures many local authorities have decided that the 'state cannot go it alone' and they have developed models of working designed to enhance partnership working with other stakeholders in the locality. This shift from government to governance has many advantages as important players can be brought into the process of leading the city – local enthusiasts, ethno-religious organisations, local businesses, economic players, the voluntary sector, social enterprises, universities and so on. A risk, however, is that local democratic accountability vanishes as new, secretive 'partnership organisations' take over local decision-making. Various studies of these partnership arrangements have suggested that they often lack transparency and are vulnerable to take over by vested interests (Davies 2007; Judd and Smith 2007).

In the face of these challenges it is imperative that local government, and all those who care about local democracy, develop much stronger models of place-based leadership that can withstand place-less power. It has been suggested that a new approach to civic leadership – one based on strengthening the connections between the three realms of civic leadership shown in Figure 2 – is needed. In the UK context there is some recognition of the merits of adopting a place-based approach. The Total Place initiative, introduced in 2009, attempts to assess the totality of public spending in an area and strives to uncover waste and duplication so that resources can be deployed more effectively (HM Treasury 2010). And the follow up policy of Community Budget pilots adopts a similar approach. It is too early to say whether these efforts to adopt a total approach to a locality will bear fruit.

In the next section an effort is made to illustrate what strong, place-based leadership might look like in practice by providing a short case study of the achievements of civic leaders in Freiburg, Germany. This is not intended to be a detailed case study, rather the aim is to outline the contours of an approach to studying place-based leadership that might prompt further scholarship in this vein.

## 5. Going Green – A Radical Approach to Local Leadership

Imagine a city with a population of 220,000 where car ownership is going down, and the citizens are proud of it. From having no bike paths in 1970 the city now has a network of over 300 miles of bike lanes. The railway station has its own 'bike station' with 1,000 supervised spaces, together with repair and bike hire services, a cycle shop, a café and a travel agency. Some neighbourhoods have been designed to achieve zero-energy or 'energy plus' development. In these areas you will find solar powered houses contributing to the electricity supply – not taking from it. Freiburg, Germany's southernmost city, can now claim to be a world leader when it comes to responding to climate change.[5] Urban designers in the UK have been so impressed with the achievements of the city that they published *The Freiburg Charter for Sustainable Urbanism* in an effort to identify guiding principles for good planning and design from the city (Academy of Urbanism 2011).

[5] For more information visit: <www.freiburg.de/greencity>.

***A summary of the Freiburg success story***

The origins of the community activism that underpins current innovations in Freiburg can be traced to the late 1970s. A successful local and regional campaign against a proposal to locate a nuclear power station in nearby Wyhl provided the original impetus. Those involved recall that the campaign was both creative and inclusive – it united farmers and conservative businessmen, students and activists, old and young – in a new kind of political movement, a 'green' movement. A colourful coalition of anti-nuclear activists was born and, from small beginnings, success spurred further success. As early as 1986, the year of the Chernobyl disaster, the council declared the city a nuclear power free zone.

In 1992 Freiburg was chosen as Germany's 'Environmental Capital' for its pioneering achievements, such as the installation of an early-warning system for smog and ozone pollution, pesticide bans, recycling measures and its high quality public transport. Freiburg is now one of the greenest cities in Germany – no city of comparable size has more forests, vineyards and open space. It has a high quality public transport system and it is very easy to move around the city either by tram or bicycle.

The Green Party has strong roots here and the city council, which has 48 members, currently has twelve Green Party councillors. In 2002 Freiburg became the first sizable city in Germany to elect a member of the Green Party – Dieter Salomon – as mayor. The population at large has a strong commitment to environmentalism, one that has stood the test of time. Many young people are now choosing to move to Freiburg not just because it has a well-respected university, but also because of the strong, green values it stands for.

The largest solar research institute in Europe – the Fraunhofer Institute for Solar Energy Systems (ISE) – is based here and solar technology has created over 1,000 new jobs in the last ten years. The city council organises 'Solar Tours' to enable visitors to learn from the practical experience of some of the 500 solar projects that are now up and running in the city. Environmental policy, solar engineering, sustainability and climate protection are key features of public policy and the city council is deeply committed to further innovation to advance the green agenda for the city.

A key strength of the 'Freiburg approach' is that the city is not complacent. Visitors from across the world now flock to the city to learn about the achievements of the city – in public transport, solar energy, green jobs, urban design, and the creation of communal forests and green spaces. But the city is keen to redouble its climate protection efforts. Deputy Mayor, Gerda Stuchlik, who leads on environmental and educational matters, has recently promoted plans to reduce $CO_2$ emissions to 40% of 1990 levels by 2030. There are many examples of high quality, green urban developments in the city. For example, Rieselfeld, is a new district in the west of the city which has been constructed in the period since 1994 to very high urban design standards. In the next section we provide a short profile of just one green neighbourhood – Vauban.

***Vauban – a child-friendly, green suburb***

The Vauban district, an area of about 40 hectares, on the south side of the city, is a newly created, family-friendly neighbourhood full of green spaces and attractively designed homes. It contains 5,200 people and around 600 jobs. Many local people work in stores, markets and gastronomy. There are teachers and public service professionals, architects and designers. Around one hundred work in a local electrical installation company and there is a balance of social groups.

By bringing together urban planners and residents in a highly constructive process of public participation, the neighbourhood has achieved outstanding environmental standards. The land was divided into relatively small plots, and preferences were given to private builders, households, social housing providers and co-operatives. Major house builders were banned. The outcome is a child-friendly, green suburb with an abundance of small-scale creativity. Sensitive, people friendly design is central and building controls are demanding.

Highlights:

- Tram service available in the development from an early stage giving frequent, fast and reliable service to the city centre and the city as a whole
- First class bike network encouraging cycling for longer and shorter trips
- Safe environments outside the homes with children free to roam
- Extensive green spaces for recreation and social interaction
- No parking in the car restricted residential streets, except for unloading and/or dropping off frail or elderly people

- Multi-storey car parking in two garages on the fringes of the neighbourhood provides space for cars for those that want them – but at a price
- Creative design of streetscapes, public spaces and community facilities.

***How local government works in Freiburg***

Freiburg is located within the state of Baden-Wuerttemberg and the local authority of Freiburg has two political institutions:

- The City Council (Gemeinderat). This has 48 members who are elected for a term of five years. The law requires that the number of councillors, reflects the population size of the city. The city population is 220,000 and this results in 48 councillors. They are elected 'at large' – they do not represent districts or wards within the city – and they are expected to serve the whole city. Candidates must be 18 years old and there is no upper age limit. The City Council, which meets around twenty times each year, is the main policy making body of the city – covering planning, the budget, city laws and taxes.

- The Mayor. This person is elected by the citizens for a fixed term of eight years. The Mayor chairs the City Council and is the 49$^{th}$ member (and can vote). The Mayor is also the most senior representative of the city and is the Chief Executive Officer of the city administration. In cities like Freiburg one or more Deputy Mayors support the Mayor. There are four in Freiburg and they cover: budget and public housing; environmental politics, schools and youth; social and cultural affairs; and planning and development. Deputy Mayors are elected by the City Council for a term of eight years but they are professionals, chosen for their professional skills. They are not members of the City Council, but attend all Council meetings and have the right to speak on matters relating to their department.

Local authorities in Germany are stronger than local authorities in many countries in the sense that the position of municipalities is guaranteed – they are given the right to local self-government. In addition, they have the authority 'to deal with all local matters affecting the municipality'.

### *Civic leadership in Freiburg*

We now turn to consider how the leadership model outlined in Figure 2 can help us understand the process of innovation in Freiburg. The evidence suggests that leaders from all three realms of civic leadership have helped create an innovative approach to local governance.

The role of **politicians** has been critical in promoting and implementing green policies. The elected politicians set the direction and tone of local policy. Mayor Dieter Salomon says:

> 'Freiburg is geared towards the principle of sustainable development and this principle guides all our political decisions. The most notable changes can be found in our energy and public transport policies. We promote the use of renewable energies – solar power, wind power, water power and biomass – and we have managed to significantly increase the percentage of renewable energies, mainly with solar energy. We also promote the concept of a 'city of short distances'. To achieve this we put great emphasis on having a high quality public transport service and an extensive network of bicycle lanes'.[6]

Eckart Friebis, a Green councillor elected in 1989, adds:

> 'The role of politicians was particularly important at the beginning of our work. This is because the administration did not really know what sustainability meant and did not really want to try out new ways. Before we had a majority on the City Council we could not force the administration to change, but at least we could enrich council and public discussions with our new ecological ideas. Later, when we [the Green Party] gained power, we were able to push these ideas more strongly and they are now embedded in the thinking of the administration'.[7]

**Professional and managerial leaders** have also played a key part. For example, Wulf Daseking, the long-serving Director of Planning in Freiburg, has provided strong, professional leadership to the planning and design work of the city. His efforts have been recognised internationally. For example, 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 an Honorary Member of the Academy in recognition of his outstanding contributions to city planning and urban design and reference has already been made to *The Freiburg Charter for Sustainable Urbanism* (Academy of Urbanism 2011).

[6] Personal communication.
[7] Personal communication.

In various speeches Mr Daseking has encouraged professionals to 'stay put' in a given place for a reasonable length of time because this can enable professionals to have more impact. He says:

> 'It takes years to bring ideas to fruition. You must follow ideas through to the stage of implementation. We have too many young people who just run after a career – whatever that is – and change jobs like changing shirts. No, a planner must work to make changes on the ground. This can be difficult as planning time horizons are long - and can be in conflict with political time horizons that tend to be short. Professionals have an important role in civic leadership - alongside other leaders – partly because they are able to take the longer view'.[8]

Finally, **community leaders** are critical. The roots of current approaches can be traced to the community activism of the 1970s. Without the drive and energy of community-based activists it is difficult to see how significant change could have been brought about. Mayor Salomon stresses the importance of working with a wide range of community actors in order to advance green objectives:

> 'To achieve our objectives we need the awareness of our citizens to make contributions of their own, for example, by investing in the thermal insulation of their homes in order to save energy. Many stakeholders are involved in realising the goals of sustainable development – our citizens, our businesses, environmentalist groups and institutions and, of course, the administration itself'.[9]

There are, of course, conflicting views within Freiburg about the direction of public policy. Some citizens believe that the Mayor and the City Council are pushing the green agenda too hard, while there are radical groups that believe that not enough is being done. Axel Mayer, Director of the Freiburg branch of Friends of the Earth – is positive about the achievements of the people of Freiburg, but he makes the point that the 'ecological footprint' of Freiburg is still not satisfactory:

> 'Many goods and resources consumed in Freiburg are produced and won in countries far away from the Green City. These goods don't actually pollute our Green City, but they do damage the environment of those countries producing them. An objective evaluation should not omit this pollution when calculating Freiburg's ecological balance'.[10]

#### *Summary of key lessons from Freiburg*

It is important to acknowledge that the story of Freiburg's achievements outlined here is impressionistic. The analysis does not stem from a major research project. Rather the aim has been to begin to apply the place-based leadership model to a particular city and consider how it might be developed. Three lessons emerge for policy from the Freiburg story. First, it illustrates the value of strong, local political leadership. Indeed, it provides

[8] Personal interview.
[9] Personal communication.
[10] Personal communication.

an inspiring example of localism in action. Local leaders, unconstrained by centrally imposed performance indicators, have developed a forward looking strategy and delivered on it. Second, it is also clear that the officers and professionals appointed by the city to push at the boundaries of good practice have played a crucial role. Third, there is a clear lesson relating to the importance of working with local communities and civil society in general. The community activism in the neighbourhoods within Freiburg is lifting. The commitment to green values and collective purpose is highly developed and this external pressure has ensured year-on-year improvements in environmental performance.[11]

It should be noted that the German Federal Government has a national policy of providing substantial subsidies to promote renewable energy. But this observation does not weaken the argument set out here suggesting that civic leadership in Freiburg has been very successful. This is because most other cities in Germany, cities that enjoy the same Federal Government subsidies, are unable to match the high performance that Freiburg has achieved.

## 6. Reflections and Pointers

In this final section I offer some reflections and pointers for the world of policy and practice and for the world of academe.

### *Pointers for local government policy and practice*

Three main pointers for policy and practice emerge from this analysis. First, it is clear that civic leadership matters. As part of this, it is evident that elected politicians can exercise a critical role in setting the tone and this is true for both local and national politicians. President Obama provides an inspiring example of this kind of leadership. When campaigning for the US Presidency Senator Obama gave a remarkable speech on race relations in Philadelphia on 18 March 2008. It is widely remembered for the way in which he saw 'both sides of the race debate' (Wolffe 2009, p178). But it also provides a critique of place-less leadership. In his speech he set out the choice that continues to present itself to all civic leaders:

> For we have a choice in this country. We can accept a politics that breeds division, and conflict, and cynicism... Or, at this moment, in this election, we can... talk about the shuttered mills that once provided a decent life for men and women of every race, and the homes for sale that once belonged to Americans

[11] Further information on the Freiburg experience is available in report for the UK Local Government Improvement and Development (LGID) agency (Hambleton 2011).

> from every religion, every region, every walk of life. This time we want to talk about the fact that the real problem is not that someone who doesn't look like you might take your job; it's that the corporation you work for will ship it overseas for nothing more than profit. (Obama 2008)

Obama captured the mood of the nation and went on to win a spectacular victory in the Presidential election later that year.

In this article it has been suggested that, given the growth of 'place-less' power in our rapidly globalising world, it is becoming increasingly important to strengthen **place-based leadership**. This is because 'place-less' leadership disregards the concerns of communities living in particular localities, and it rides roughshod over the rights of local people. A conceptual model for thinking about civic leadership in a given locality has been put forward – see Figure 2 – and this outlines three realms of civic leadership. This model suggests that inspirational, civic leadership can emanate from any of the three realms - elected politicians, paid public servants or from civil society.

But are there limits to place-based leadership? The answer is 'yes'. It is important to recognise that the argument should not be taken to the extreme. Untrammelled 'place-based' power can work against good race relations and the creation of a just city. For example, if neighbourhoods are granted massive authority to rule their areas we can be sure that the rich and selfish will be quick to ensure that people who differ from themselves are excluded. Indeed, as documented by Davis (1992), Minton (2009) and others, the growth of privatised, 'gated communities' is a worrying international urban trend. The creation of gated communities with high walls and security guards could be described as an example of 'place-based' leadership. In this case the residents of the fortified enclaves strive to secure the success of their 'place' in what they consider to be an increasingly hostile urban environment. This is **not** what I am advocating when I argue for a strengthening of 'place-based' leadership. Rather, following Frederickson (2005), I am suggesting that politicians, professionals and community activists should be guided by 'instincts of appropriateness' and what is understood to be right and fair.

Second, the institutional design of local governance arrangements matters. Structures, constitutions and decision-making processes are not the whole story when it comes to defining 'good governance', but it is misguided to believe that they are irrelevant. Institutional design can either hinder or promote effective and accountable civic leadership, public involvement and effective place shaping. Thus, governance

arrangements can foster inclusion of excluded voices or do the opposite. A warning note has been sounded about the shift from government to governance. Privatised forms of urban governance, sometimes advanced in the name of 'public/private partnership working', can erode the corrigibility of decision making. A risk with these models is that, 'behind closed doors' local leaders become servants of 'place-less' leaders to the disadvantage of their communities.

Third, it seems clear that public service innovation – defining it, understanding it, developing practical ideas on how to promote it – is a very important topic now, not just for local government and governance, but also for all those concerned with public services as a whole. There is light weight thinking in this area and more than a little lofty rhetoric. Scholars can play an important role in advancing thinking about public service innovation and helping public service leaders move beyond performance management regimes that seem to be increasingly outdated. The emergence of major, new challenges for governments – notably climate change and the economic recession – give added weight to this argument.

The civic leadership model advanced in this chapter advocates a **political**, as opposed to a managerial, approach to public service innovation.[12] It has been suggested that the overlaps between the different realms of civic leadership can provide 'innovation zones' in which new ideas can be explored and tried out. It goes without saying that it is imperative that the creation and design of these new spaces for interaction need to be shaped by local people, and this is particularly true in the multicultural city. This will require risk taking by both political and managerial public service leaders.

***Pointers for academe and training providers***

I offer three pointers for the world of academe and training/educational development – two relating to what universities and training providers might do, and one relating to the need to stimulate a new wave of action research on local leadership.

First, in relation to education we can at least raise the question of whether leadership is being given sufficient attention in the undergraduate and postgraduate courses being pursued by those who might hope to play a part in shaping the quality of life in the place

[12] Many writers and consultants advocate a managerial approach to public service innovation (Tidd et al 2005). These approaches can play a role in improving service responsiveness, but radical change requires political, rather than managerial, thinking because significant shifts in power are necessary.

where they live. Are we doing enough to educate future locality leaders? It would seem, for example, that many of the courses providing pathways into local government careers are dominated by professional institutes who perhaps have a vested interest in perpetuating a highly specialised approach to knowledge and understanding. Are these courses neglecting the cross-cutting skills and competencies future civic leaders will need?

At a more advanced level the argument set out in this article has significant implications for leadership development programmes at local, regional and national levels. For much of the time countries are investing in a 'silo' approach to public leadership analysis and development. Civic leadership development, if it is supported at all, tends to be handled separately within each of the three realms civic leadership set out in Figure 2. And there is further segmentation within each of the realms. Thus, there are many leadership courses for specific professional groupings of officers, development courses for councillors, courses for community organisers and so on. A consequence is that breakthrough educational practice - linking leaders in the different realms of leadership together in a shared process of social discovery - is sorely under developed in universities and elsewhere.[13]

A second 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 (Hambleton 2006; Goddard 2009; Hambleton 2010). 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 local government 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 marvellous 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

[13] It is encouraging to note the emergence of new leadership development programmes that relate to 'place', for example, programmes recently developed in England (Local Government Association 2011). However, even these pioneering place-based leadership programmes neglect leaders from outside the state. This would seem to be a weakness when the community sector has so much to offer to local leadership (Community Sector Coalition 2009).

– but there is much more to do on this front and this could be of immense benefit to the field of local government studies.

Third, and this brings the place-based leadership agenda back into sharp focus, how can we stimulate a major expansion in place-based action research on local leadership? One strategy is to develop an expanding set of collaborative place-based research projects – studies and projects that bring together universities and local authorities and other agencies in particular places. The place-based leadership conceptual framework set out in this article could provide a starting point for some of these collaborations.

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