WELLINGTON: WHAT DO WE WANT? HOW DO WE GET THERE?
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Community Leadership And Local Governance Frameworks: What Do We Know?

Community Governance Internationally – Trends and Highlights

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This paper was delivered to a conference organised jointly by the Wellington Rotary Club and Victoria University of Wellington on the theme of 'Wellington: What do we want? How do we get there?' The purpose of the paper was to provide an overview of developments in community governance internationally.

1   Introduction

In this presentation I draw on many years of experience as a researcher and adviser working with local government, both in New Zealand and increasingly internationally, and with colleagues from a number of different jurisdictions. It is an experience which highlights the difference between the way in which New Zealand policy makers and politicians typically consider the role and function of local government, and the way understanding of local government has been evolving internationally.

This presentation will begin with a brief discussion of the meanings of governance and community governance as they are developing in international research and practice. It will then consider the following trends:

- Globalisation.
- Administrative versus functional boundaries.
- Changing demands for engagement.
- 'Wicked issues' - the local government role.
- Governance of local government activity.

It will conclude with some questions for the evolution of local government within the Wellington region.

2   Governance and community governance - what do we mean?

In recent years we have seen a great deal of work internationally on the meaning and nature of governance. Much of the emphasis has been on the way in which the relationship between the formal structures of government, and the communities for which those structures have government responsibility, has been evolving. The difference between formal and informal arrangements came to prominence in the work of Clarence Stone on what he termed 'urban regime theory' - the study of the actual practice of governance within American cities (Mossberger& Stoker 2001).

More recently, the work of Robin Hambleton on the nature of governance has focused on the distinction between government as such and governance as a broader concept. Hambleton has developed what is now a widely accepted definition drawing the distinction:

Governance involves government *plus* the looser processes of influencing and negotiating with a range ofpublic and private sector agencies to achieve desired outcomes. A governance perspectiveencourages collaboration between the public,

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private and non-profit sectors… Whilst thehierarchical power of the state does not vanish, the emphasis in governance is on steering,influencing and co-ordinating the actions of others (Hambleton 2011).

Recent work in Australia has considered the role of governance at a community level - how are decisions taken which affect the places in which people live and work, and which are typically concerned with a lesser scale than the district for which the local council is responsible. That has resulted in the following definition of community governance as a:

> *collaborative approach to determining a community's preferred futures and developing and implementing the means of realising them. In practice it may or may not involve one or more of the different tiers of government, institutions of civil society, and private sector interests (McKinlay et al 2011).*

3 Globalisation

Two aspects are considered: the implications for efficiency and the rise of metropolitan centres.

Efficiency

The present wave of globalisation really only got under way at around the time New Zealand local government went through its last major restructuring. One consequence is that the organisational design which was put in place, even although it was largely driven by a new public management framework, did not pay great attention to the likely long-term implications of globalisation. Amongst these are:

- An unrelenting pressure on the tradables sector. In New Zealand this can be seen especially in the impact on manufacturing, and the ongoing concerns about the relatively high New Zealand dollar, which itself is a direct consequence of globalisation.

- An associated imperative for entities in the non-tradables sector to be as efficient as they possibly can be. This applies especially to entities such as local authorities which can be significant contributors to the cost structure of firms in the tradables sector, not just through the immediately obvious impacts such as the level of rates and charges, but through how local authorities undertake their activity, including timeliness of decision-making.

In Australia this has seen a refocus on the nature of local government activity, and on the types of measures needed to lift performance.

The Australian Productivity Commission's recent report on the regulatory role of local government (http://www.pc.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0007/118564/local-government-volume1.pdf) emphasised the importance of ensuring consistency across the regulatory and related activities of councils to minimise the costs which business and other users face in complying with regulatory requirements, or in undertaking work for councils. In essence the Commission was putting forward the view that the regulatory and other requirements of councils should only differ, as

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between different councils, when there were compelling local reasons for the difference. This approach was expressed in the following statement of principle:

There is a case for state, territory and local governments to assess the mechanisms available to harmonise or coordinate local regulatory activities where the costs of variations in local regulation exceed the benefits.

In a similar vein, the Ernst & Young report, Strong foundations for sustainable local infrastructure(http://www.regional.gov.au/local/lgifr/files/20120622-strong-foundations.pdf),prepared for the Department of Regional Australia, Local Government, Arts and Sport, argues the case for greater collaboration amongst councils in dealing with infrastructure. This includes the establishment of structures which would allow the joint ownership and management of infrastructure assets as a means of achieving needed efficiencies and economies of scale, as well as the ability to structure financing arrangements not readily available to individual councils.

The Rise of Metropolitan Centres

This is one of the most profound changes affecting local government worldwide. In 2007 the percentage of the world's population living in urban centres passed 50% for the first time. It is expected to increase to approximately 70% by 2050.

Think back 10 or 15 years, and most of us believed that the emergence of the Internet meant that location would become less significant, especially for knowledge workers - you would be able to connect by e-mail, by videoconference and increasingly by various social media.

The exact opposite has happened. It is now becoming clear that face-to-face contact is more, not less, important and concentration in cities will increase. The reality can be seen in the growing dominance of large cities within their own local economies.

The principal driver behind this has been the changing nature of the international economy. Growth is now substantially driven by some tens of thousands of multinational enterprises engaged in high skill-based activity. A recent review of research in the discipline of economic geography (McCann and Acs 2011) spells out what this means in practice:

- Whereas up until the early twentieth century, city growth was largely a matter internal to the individual nation-empire-state; today, the situation is the reverse. In a world of falling trade barriers and increasingly permeable national borders, combined with falling spatial transactions costs for low knowledge activities and rising spatial transactions costs for high-knowledge activities, the global connectivity of cities is therefore critical, rather than simply the scale of cities. Modern transportation and communications technologies and the ability to exploit knowledge assets globally mean that the performance of a country increasingly depends on its city-regions, whose performance in turn increasingly depends on the connectivity, global engagement and competitive performance of its multinational firms.

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- Obviously, cities that are too small to provide the scale of international transportation infrastructure necessary to be part of these global networks will be unable to sustain global companies in the long term. Yet, infrastructure alone is not the answer, as there does appear to be a minimum threshold of approximately 1.5–2 million people in order for a city-region to achieve sufficient knowledge-related agglomeration effects to sustain the local multinationals.

The implications for New Zealand are obvious. If the minimum threshold for achieving the agglomeration effects required to sustain a significant multi-national presence is 1.5-2 million people, then New Zealand has only one credible contender to be an effective internationally recognised metropolitan centre; Auckland.

What is the logical response for New Zealand's other urban centres? To try somehow to compete against Auckland, or to look for means for supporting and leveraging off Auckland's success?

4   Functional versus administrative boundaries.

In New Zealand, it has been traditional to view issues of local government structure and area of influence as delineated by geographical boundaries - so the discussion about the future governance of the Wellington region has been very much about how to readjust geographical boundaries and within those the functions which local government may perform.

Internationally, the focus has moved on. Although for many purposes geographical boundaries will remain a defining feature of local government, there is also a growing sense that some of the most significant activities which local government will be involved with, such as economic development, are much more dependent on the functional boundaries - the actual zone of influence of a particular city or region, rather than the formal legal boundary.

This was emphasised in the work of Sir Michael Lyons in his 2007 report on the structure of local government in England, *Place-shaping: a shared ambition for the future of local government,* in which he highlighted the importance, for governance purposes, of considering the economic footprint of major centres, best defined in terms of journeys to work.

This theme has increasingly been picked up by the current coalition government through initiatives such as its city deals initiative (HM Government 2011).This offers significant devolution of decision-making over major resources in return for cities demonstrating the capability to deliver with an emphasis on the functional rather than administrative boundaries:

> To unlock their growth potential, local leaders in the core cities will need to work effectively across their economic footprint.

In a similar vein, the leading Canadian academic and researcher, Andrew Sancton, has argued (Sancton 2008) that city regions will never be self governing because

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their effective functional boundaries are always changing. His classic illustration is the creation of the mega-city of Toronto with a population in excess of 2 million people. Its ability to be effectively self-governing is severely limited by the fact that it covers only a little more than 50% of the population of what is conventionally recognised as greater Toronto and only around one third of the Golden Horseshoe, recognised as the extended Toronto metropolitan area.

In each case the emphasis is on the need for cities, and city regions, to work collaboratively with councils and others elsewhere within their economic footprint.

For Wellington, one obvious question is why is it that the future governance of the Wellington region is being debated without any consideration being given to the Marlborough Nelson Tasman area which is clearly within the economic footprint of greater Wellington.

5   Changing demands for engagement

Read any discussion of the voting turnout at local authority elections, and you will read a tale of doom and gloom - voting turnout is continuing to decline and this is seen as overwhelming evidence of disengagement from the democratic process.

Closer examination suggests that this is a somewhat myopic interpretation of one aspect of citizen behaviour. The evidence is growing that many citizens regard voting as a relatively irrelevant activity if its purpose is to influence the decisions which their council takes.

European research shows that many people are at least as interested, and seek their involvement, through other forms of engagement including network, consumer and participatory democracy. Network democracy is a variant on the theme that much of community governance is negotiated between formal and informal institutions, including civil society. Consumer democracy reflects the fact that on a number of matters citizen engagement is essentially as a service user rather than as a participant in the democratic process. Finally, participatory democracy reflects the fact that increasingly citizens want to be engaged in those decisions which affect 'their place' (Haus& Sweeting, 2006; Schaap et al, 2009).

A recent Australian example shows how this changing attitude is coming through in practice. One of Sydney's northern beaches councils, in a recent community satisfaction survey, was extremely surprised to find that engagement was at the top of its community's priorities. As its general manager commented in a blog:

What has surprised the council about the survey results is the fact that residents appear to be less concerned about what I would call the 'traditional' activities of local government – and much more interested in what could loosely be termed participatory democracy. The survey findings go on to say that out of ten drivers of satisfaction – what residents really want – the top two were access to Council information and support and community involvement in decision-making. development came third, domestic waste fourth and perhaps most surprising of all, maintaining local roads came seventh.

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Australian councils are not all so surprised at the growing demand from citizens for involvement in decisions which affect them. A number have developed quite innovative ways of working with their communities. Yarra Ranges, a large peri-urban council within the Melbourne metropolitan area, actively encourages the development of what it terms township groups - local community-based organisations in the numerous towns and settlements within the council's district. The council recognises as township groups organisations which have demonstrable support within the community, and some assurance of continuity. It doesn't much matter exactly what the group was formed to do, so much as that it has broad-based support. The council works with individual groups to help develop their capability, assists them in accessing grants and other funding for community purposes, and meets with them on a regular basis. It's a clear recognition of the role of councils to support the development of strong community-based decision-making (see McKinlay et al op cit).

6   'Wicked issues' - the local government role

Some issues seem to defy the best efforts of governments to find adequate means of coping. These are often referred to as the 'wicked issues'; problems which resist solution regardless of how much resource governments throw at them.

Internationally, we are seeing more than just the beginning of a recognition of the reality that states on their own are not well equipped to deal with problems of this type. Problems of individual, family or community dysfunction clearly need something more. That something is the unique local knowledge and networks, and ability to encourage community engagement, which local government can provide.

It is not just about better outcomes as some kind of social good; it's also very much about managing the state's fiscal risk. There is growing evidence that effective partnerships across the public sector and with communities not only increase the quality of outcomes, but also reduce costs.

England provides an example of a gradual evolution towards this understanding. In 2000, the Local Government Act was rewritten to give local authorities the power to promote community well-being. This was coupled with an obligation to develop community strategic plans, to be done under the umbrella of local strategic partnerships (LSPs)encompassing the local authority, key public sector agencies and community stakeholders.

LSPs were to be the vehicle for greater collaboration, including a move towards co-management at the local level of the budgets of government agencies - an objective which proved remarkably, but unsurprisingly, difficult to realise both because of active resistance, and inertia within the system (and some practical difficulties including different administrative boundaries for different agencies, and the difficulty of achieving continuity in attendance at partnership meetings).

Several years ago the then Labour government moved to what it described as Total Place, an initiative under which departmental spending within the locality would be

handled at a devolved level with the objective of bringing together all public spending under a single planning process. This approach had not really started to impact before there was a change of government.

The Conservative Party within the new coalition government then began speaking of Big Society, the idea that governments had intruded too far into peoples' lives and it was incumbent on government to hand over more responsibility to individuals and communities. This somewhat inchoate policy direction was succeeded by a commitment to Open Public Services (the open public services white paper can be accessed at http://www.egov.vic.gov.au/focus-on-countries/europe/countries-europe/united-kingdom/government-initiatives-united-kingdom/government-and-politics-united-kingdom/open-public-services-white-paper-in-pdf-format-603kb.html). This placed an emphasis on devolution to individuals and communities, including the right to challenge how services were delivered.

More recently, the coalition government has committed to what it terms Whole Place, an initiative the centrepiece of which is the use of community budgets to bring together all spending within a given area. The objective is expressed on the website of the responsible department as:

A Community Budget gives local public service partners the freedom to work together to redesign services around the needs of citizens, improving outcomes, reducing duplication and waste and so saving significant sums of public money.http://www.communities.gov.uk/localgovernment/decentralisation/communitybudgets/

Canadians have been experimenting with what is known as co-design, and a Canadian adviser has been working with state and local government in Victoria introducing co-design in an aspect of human services. The Municipal Association of Victoria has been leading a pilot project in conjunction with the Victorian Department of Human Services working through a series of community-based workshops.Codesign is described in the following extract:

> Traditional service delivery treated the public as passive recipients of government programs and services. The 'citizen-centred' revolution gave the public a clear voice in service improvement by tying it to client feedback, such as satisfaction surveys. Co-design is intended to extend the role of the public and invite them to contribute to the design of the services. It can lead to further involvement with the public also participating in the production of services in the future (Lenihan & Briggs, 2011).

Another emerging trend is the growing disenchantment with the traditional approach to consultation. Typically, consultation involves an organisation (a council; a government agency) developing a proposal, publishing it, and inviting submissions from the public within normally a period of one month. Submitters will usually be given the opportunity of appearing in person before the decision-making body, which has an obligation to read written and hear oral submissions with an open mind. Once hearings have concluded, the organisation will then make its decision.

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This approach has its origins in a court of appeal decision considering the obligations of the then Wellington airport authority to consult with Air New Zealand when setting landing charges. This is hardly a direct parallel with the situation of a citizen or ratepayer making submissions to the usually much better resourced council or government agency considering a proposal.

In practice, this process is now recognised as much more likely to create divided communities, rather than result in a community consensus on the proper way forward. The better approach now emerging is one of dialogue between the council or agency and its communities. It takes longer, usually starts earlier (it is often expressed as the difference between consulting on the council or agency's answer to its own question and discussing what the question should be), but has a much better prospect of resulting in a genuine consensus.

Another innovation supporting different approaches to addressing the 'wicked issues' which most societies confront is France's "27th region".It is a conscious attempt to provide afocus on innovation for France's administrative regions, bringing together public officials and others in a safe environment to experiment described as:

One example of a 'safe space' for innovation is the [27th Region](#) in France. There are 26 administrative regions in France. This virtual 27th 'region' is intended to provide the other regions with the space and opportunity to design and develop innovative approaches to policy. Its goal is to foster creativity, social innovation and sustainability in public institutions, through community projects, prototyping and design thinking. See http://www.socialinnovator.info/ways-supporting-social-innovation/public-sector/strategic-issues/safe-spaces-innovation

7   Governance of local government activity

An emerging concern both for local government, and for officials and researchers taking a close interest in the field, is the structural imbalance between the role of elected members, and that of executive management. The present arrangement, which is intended to achieve a separation between policy and implementation, has been argued as a parallel with normal practice in the corporate world. In reality, this is not the case. Elected members have much less influence than a board of directors of a company - among other things, directors are by law responsible for "the management of the company." Elected members by law are not responsible other than for oversight of the CEO.

This is coupled with a significant imbalance in resourcing with most elected members of the belief that they do not have the ability to obtain independent advice - something which is not only a normal feature of corporate practice in the private sector, but can be a legal obligation if directors wish to demonstrate that they have properly discharged their role.

Other jurisdictions have been addressing this issue by increasing the powers of elected members relative to management and otherwise redesigning local government structures. Directly elected executive mayors have been a feature of

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French local government for many years. This form of mayoralty was introduced for local government in Germany and Italy in the 1990s (Wollman undated).

England has also experimented with the directly elected executive mayor model, with the best known example being the Mayor of Greater London. However, generally the endeavours of successive UK governments to encourage the adoption of the elected executive mayor option have not been successful.

The more significant initiative, and one designed to underpin the role of elected members, was the change in the Local Government Act in 2000 to provide for what amounts to Cabinet government within local government. Under this approach each council (with the exception of some smaller councils which have been permitted to opt out) has a Cabinet of up to 10 members (each with decision making within their portfolio), headed by either an executive mayor, or by an elected council leader (elected from amongst sitting councillors). The typical English local authority will have a large number of councillors - often 60 or 70 and sometimes as high as 100 or more - so that the great proportion of councillors are in practice backbenchers with little involvement in decision-making.

Backbench councillors now act more as community advocates. As ward-based councillors, they work closely with the communities they represent. They are also responsible for what is known as the scrutiny function. This is a statutory role under which they have the power to review performance of council activity. This can include running quite detailed enquiries into council programs, including public hearings and the commissioning of independent reports. The purpose is to ensure that notwithstanding the relatively tight decision-making arrangements within English local government (but in practice less tight than in New Zealand, given the powers of the chief executive), there is some contestability and opportunity for informed public input. The typical outcome of a scrutiny exercise will be a report with recommendations for any changes the scrutiny committee believes should be implemented. Although recommendations are not binding, the suasive force of publicity can be powerful.

A final shift, which is gaining momentum, is the use of arms-length entities. For some time New Zealand has been an effective leader in terms of good practice because of the existence of a well-designed (but not always well administered) post-establishment governance framework within the council controlled organisation provisions of ourLocal Government Act.

English local government now appears to be moving ahead more quickly than New Zealand in the use of arms-length entities as a direct result of the very major cutbacks to council funding as part of the coalition government's austerity program, coupled with its much stronger emphasis on devolution through initiatives such as Whole Place and the devolution provisions in the Localism Act.

Many councils are now actively pursuing opportunities themselves to devolve activity to employee and/or community-based organisations, including worker and community cooperatives. There is also a growing emphasis on sharing services through council owned companies (but without the benefit of the post-establishment

governance provisions which New Zealand has), as the Localism Act gave councils a general power of competence which among other things, replaced quite restrictive provisions on the ability of councils to operate through companies.

8   Questions for Wellington

I want to conclude this presentation by posing a number of questions for Wellington based on the trends I have covered.

How to leverage off the rise of Auckland?

Much of the material I have seen emanating from Wellington and looking at the region's future, especially in economic growth terms, has focused on how to compete with Auckland. Current trends in the growth of metropolitan centres internationally suggest that a strategy of competing may not necessarily be in Wellington's best interests. If Auckland is New Zealand's only credible candidate to become an internationally recognised metropolitan centre, and a location of choice for multinational enterprises, then the better approach may be to focus on how best to leverage off Auckland's success.

Wellington has a number of strengths, which could be complementary to those of Auckland, especially given Auckland's inevitably superior access to international markets. Should you be looking at how best to exploit those so they become among the drivers of the Wellington region's approach to economic development?

Are you reforming for 20th or 21st-century local government?

The proposals and discussion documents currently on the table appear to be very focused on re-arranging current arrangements around current functions.

As I have attempted to demonstrate in this presentation, trends internationally in the role and function of local government are pointing to a much more significant and all inclusive role in the governance of communities either than is contemplated by current reform proposals coming out of the Wellington region, or by government policy. There is a strong argument that form should follow function, and function should be determined by considering what will be the needs of Wellington's communities over the next 10-20-30 years, not by looking back at arrangements which were seen as suitable for the late 1980s and early 1990s.

What value do you place on local democracy?

It has become almost commonplace in New Zealand to treat local government as though it was primarily some form of locally owned infrastructure company with a few other functions tacked onto it such as local regulation and the provision of some arts, culture and recreation facilities.

It's an approach that largely negates one of the two principal functions of local government, the promotion and expression of local democracy. This is much more than applying the narrow compliance-based requirements in local government

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legislation for consulting with communities. It is very much about working collaboratively and recognising the different interests and needs of the different parts of the district for which local governments are responsible.

Reviving the commitment to local democracy is much more than just some kind of political ideal; it's also an important element in rebuilding local economies, and gearing up to deal more effectively with the 'wicked issues' which have resisted resolution for so long.

It is also almost certainly a prerequisite for being able to cope with some of our emerging challenges, including the impact of an ageing population. Ageing in place, which is the stated ideal for responding to the needs of an increasing population of older people (and a rapidly shifting dependency ratio), is going to require much greater community engagement and the emergence of different forms of voluntary activity. Is Wellington ready to commit to a revival of local democracy not as the antithesis of efficiency but as its necessary complement?

Can Wellington combine optimising efficiency with stronger and more targeted participation?

As I outlined in the early parts of this presentation, optimising efficiency is now an imperative for local government. Too often this can be interpreted as requiring a shift away from greater participation other than, perhaps, along the lines of consumer democracy, that is, treating citizens as customers and applying standard commercial customer relationship management tools.

The practical reality is that the many different communities which make up the Wellington region - and for that matter the individual councils within the region - have different needs and different preferences. Efficiency which ignores effectiveness - delivering the services people want in the way people want them - is not efficiency.

Nor is it necessarily a least cost approach even if you ignore externalities (that is, the negative impact of inappropriately designed services or inappropriate delivery). One of the lessons which local government internationally has been learning is the importance of working closely with its communities in order to draw on their knowledge and get their support. It is this that has underpinned the growing emphasis on community governance in Australia - supporting 'fit for purpose' approaches to enabling more effective engagement and where possible community decision-making in order to get the nuanced outcomes which individual communities seek.

What commitment is Wellington prepared to make to ensuring that its many and different communities each have their own effective voice on those matters which are important for them?

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