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How to cite:

Sancino, Alessandro and Budd, Leslie (2018). City Leadership and Social Regeneration: The Potential of Community Leadership and the New Roles for Public Managers and Politicians. In: Sacchetti, Silvia; Christoforou, Asimina and Mosca, Michele eds. Social Regeneration and Local Development: Cooperation, Social Economy and Public Participation. New York/Oxon: Routledge, pp. 175–185.

For guidance on citations see [FAQs](#).

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Version: Accepted Manuscript

Link(s) to article on publisher's website:

<https://www.routledge.com/Social-Regeneration-and-Local-Development-Cooperation-Social-Economy/Sacchetti-Christoforou-M>

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City Leadership and Social Regeneration

The Potential of Community Leadership and the New Roles for Public Managers and Politicians

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Reference: Sancino, A. & Budd, L. (2018), City Leadership and Social Regeneration. The Potential of Community Leadership and the New Roles for Public Managers and Politicians. In: Sacchetti, S., Christoforou, A. & Mosca, M. (eds.), Social Regeneration and Local Development Cooperation, Social Economy and Public Participation, Routledge: New York/Oxon, pp. 175-185.

Introduction

The concept of regeneration, particularly in urban areas, has underwritten the discourse of urban development and renewal in the advanced economies in the immediate decades after World War II (WWII) and increasingly in the emerging economiesⁱ in the last two decades. Regeneration becomes often conflated with renewal, development, and gentrification, all with the prefix urban. But what they share is a set of underlying forces about the material and representational nature of space.ⁱⁱ Particularly, in our contemporary turbulent and changing times, the complexity of placesⁱⁱⁱ goes beyond economic imperatives and does include the manifold socio-economic, cultural, and environmental dynamics. According to Sacchetti and Borzaga in this volume, “social regeneration is about the transformative processes which, through institutional choices that embody cooperation and inclusion, develop opportunities and capabilities for multiple categories of actors, and especially weak categories, leading to societal benefits and community resilience”.

In this chapter, we aim to give a contribution discussing what types of city leadership can contribute towards promoting social regeneration of communities focusing in particular on the roles of public managers and politicians. The structure of the chapter is as follows: the second section sets out a fold-four classification of city leadership; the third section analyses the applicability of this framework in regard to social regeneration; the fourth section discusses the new functions for local governments and the new roles for public managers and politicians to enhance social regeneration of communities; the fifth section concludes with a summary of our main arguments.

City Leadership: Agency and Structure for Social Regeneration

Since the middle of the 20th century, cities and their hinterlands have become the engines of economic development in the advanced and in many of the emerging economies (Glaeser, 2011). The United Nations estimates that over two-thirds of the world’s population will be living in urban areas by 2050 (United Nations 2015).

However, the rapid growth of urbanisation is accompanied by socio-economic and political wicked problems that traditional forms of public policy no longer seem to address. Therefore, in an increasingly fragmented and individualised network society (e.g., Castells, 2004), the leadership to convene actors for activating social and organisational networks and self-adaptive systems becomes all the more important in order to cope with complex contemporary wicked and/or societal challenges (the latter including challenges that are not necessarily wicked: examples of contemporary wicked problems could be managing migration, climate change, and terrorism; examples of societal challenges could be the Sustainable Development Goals spearheaded by the United Nations).

City leadership is here defined as the capacity of people and/or organisations that are in the position—both formally and informally—to activate and lead processes where city and citizens’ inputs, energies, and resources are mobilised for the accomplishment of relevant societal challenges (Sancino, 2017). In particular, drawing upon

previous studies ([Hambleton, 2015](#); Hambleton and Howard, 2013; [Hartley, 2002](#)) as well as upon our previous work ([Budd and Sancino, 2016](#); [Budd et al., 2017](#)), we can identify four forms of city leadership:

- *Managerial leadership*, which deals with the public services (e.g., housing, health care, education, regeneration, leisure, etc.) delivered within a city;
- *Political leadership*, which deals with the democratic processes and decisions affecting a city and its citizens;
- *Community leadership*, which deals with all the community processes provided by the community and its actors operating outside the traditional realm of the public and private sector;
- *Business leadership*, which deals with the processes of (co-)creation of value provided by the private sector.

Within this classification, we can identify four elements of city leadership ([Grint, 2000](#); [Huxham and Vangen, 2005](#); [Bryson et al., 2015](#)):

- *Actors*: individuals, groups of individuals, but also an organisation and/or a group of organisations which play a key leadership role in the life of the city;
- *Structures*: facilities, arrangements, and/or organisations that support and enable city leadership acting as conveners and/or catalyzers—organisations are mentioned also here because they could be both actors and/or structures for city leadership;
- *Processes*: the way in which leaders build, activate, mobilise, and set directions for the followers;
- *Followership*: the nature and type(s) of followership that engage with the leaders and take part in the city leadership system (made up by leaders, structures, processes, and followers).

Forms and elements of city leadership establish patterns that vary according to the contexts, moments, and issues; indeed, as noted by [Hambleton \(2015\)](#), 11):

Place-based leaders are not free agents able to do exactly as they choose. On the contrary, various powerful forces shape the context within which civic leaders operate. These forces do not disable local leadership. Rather they place limits on what urban leaders may be able to accomplish in particular places and at particular moments in time.

What Types of City Leadership for Social Regeneration?

In this section, we discuss some key changing trends for each form of city leadership, and we discuss how they impact on social regeneration.

Political Leadership and Social Regeneration

We can highlight the following as some of the most important trends in political leadership within cities across the Western countries:

- The trend towards the establishment of institutions that resemble the idea of the leader as a great man. Evidence of this can be found in the establishment of directly elected metro-mayors in the UK (see, for example, [Gains, 2015](#)) and more generally in the increasing interests towards the model of directly elected mayors (e.g., [Hambleton, 2013](#); [Sancino and Castellani, 2016](#));
- The declining role of political parties as structures for enacting political leadership at the local level (e.g., [Copus, 2000](#));
- The increasing interactive and participatory nature of political processes (e.g., [Edelenbos and Klin, 2006](#); [Fung, 2006](#); [Torfing et al., 2012](#));

Against this backdrop, even if individual and centralised political leadership brings undoubtedly benefits in terms of public accountability, the nature of social regeneration seems more akin to individual and shared political leadership; in other words, the trend towards the social and institutional recognition of the individual leader should be rather transformed into the institutional establishment and social construction of multiple leaders (so going from the idea of a leader of the city to the idea of the leaders of the city) accountable to the public for specific societal challenges.

Managerial Leadership and Social Regeneration

As indicated above, managerial leadership is about delivering public services within a city. In this respect, public services across all Western countries are currently characterised by the austerity measures implemented in many countries (e.g., Meneguzzo et al., 2013; [Pollitt, 2010](#)) and by the increasing role of the third and voluntary sectors in delivering public services (e.g., [Osborne and McLaughlin, 2004](#)). These trends create opportunities (such as the positive role that forms of community leadership can play in public services—see next paragraph), but also pose threats, such as the marketisation of public services that may lead to the socialisation of public costs and to the privatisation of public benefits. There is an increasing debate on which role should the public sector play in times of stagnating or recessive economies, with some pointing to a bigger and smarter role of public sector in the economy (for example, the Entrepreneurial State advocated by [Mazzucato, 2013](#)); in this respect, Box 9.1 below reports the example of municipal socialism implemented in the 1960s and 1970s in some cities in the UK and US and its positive impacts at that time on social regeneration.

Box 9.1 “Municipal Socialism”

In the 1960s and 1970s, in the UK and US, coalitions of public and private actors organised themselves around the urban growth machine discourses and took on leadership roles in regenerating their towns and cities (e.g., [Cox and Mair, 1989](#); [Molotch, 1976](#)): for example, with the construction of public housing on a large scale. In both these countries, these initiatives may be ascribed to the praxis of municipal socialism in the form of ownership of local public utilities and services, which began in the late 19th century, reaching its apogee at the start of World War I (WWI) in 1914 ([Hunt, 2004](#); [Sheldrake, 1989](#)). This type of leadership acted as an intermediary of change that released many people from dwelling in slums.

Source: own elaboration.

Community Leadership and Social Regeneration

The expansion of public needs and the retrenchment of the welfare state (e.g., [Di Mascio and Natalini, 2015](#)) have been filled by the emergence of a bigger society interested in the self-creation/peer production ([Pestoff, 2012](#), 1104) and co-production with the public sector of the public value through inter-organisational collaboration ([Huxham and Vangen, 2005](#)) or through the engagement of individuals and communities of individuals ([Bovaard, 2007](#)). This means recognising that beyond the state, there are nowadays many more other actors that are contributing to the co-creation of public value ([Bryson et al., 2017](#)); as Benington and Hartley wrote ([2015](#)), “[the State and] public managers are an important part of public value creation, but public value can also be created by elected politicians, by community activists, by private companies, by the media and so on”.

The experiences of co-creation (e.g., [Bryson et al., 2017](#)), co-production (e.g., [Nabatchi et al., 2017](#)), and social innovation (e.g., [Brandson et al., 2015](#)) promoted by community actors are particularly important at the local level as the governmental level closer to citizen ([OECD, 2011](#)) and as the level where citizens feel that they make a real contribution to community building; the renewed sense of community is described by [Nalbandian and Nalbandian, 2003](#), 84) as follows:

in a world that is increasingly interconnected through telecommunications, financial markets, and accessibility to technology, our personal connections to community are challenged as our sense of place and our sense of control over our lives erode, and as diversity in our population increases. The renewed sentiment for community signals an enduring desire for identity, grounding and tradition.

Business Leadership and Social Regeneration

Business leadership and city leadership have been traditionally considered as a major driver of regeneration based upon real estate development interests. However, considering our focus here on social regeneration, we centre our attention on shared value as a concept and practice of business that recognise the importance of the relationship between business and place.

Specifically, the concept of shared value has been recently developed by [Porter and Kramer \(2011\)](#) and can be defined as policies and operating practices that enhance the competitiveness of a company while simultaneously advancing the economic and social conditions in the communities in which it operates. As written in [Sancino \(2016](#), 412), shared value can be considered a sub-segment of the overall private value produced by the private sector. A financial transaction may produce private value in the form of profit, but not necessarily shared value. To take an example, a shared value can be produced when a private firm opens a nursery for its employees. However, the issue becomes how to promote a business leadership committed to the creation of shared value as a pre-condition to enhance the social regeneration of the communities served and/or impacted by business.

The Role of Local Governments

[Solarauta et al. \(2017](#), 188) point out that “academic research and popular accounts of formal leadership experiences point to the need for a significant re-think of the meaning(s), dynamics and drivers of leadership in sub-national

development?"; following their argument, in this section, we focus on the need for rethinking the function of local governments and the role of politicians and managers.

New Challenges for Governing—Re-Imagining Local Governments

Politics and administration have been tremendously changing in the last two decades: on one hand, they are now taking place in new multi-governance levels and contexts; on the other hand, public policies and public services are in many cases co-created and/or co-produced not only by politicians and managers, but also by other actors (such as citizens and civil society organisations, as well as business organisations) with potentially multiple identities (for example, citizens may behave in the same process as clients and/or partners—see, for example, [Thomas, 2013](#)). Moreover, the development of new kinds of democracy (e.g., participatory democracy, deliberative democracy, online direct democracy, monitory democracy (Keane, 2011), etc.) is putting governments across Western countries—traditionally based on representative democracy—and their actors (politicians, public managers, and citizens) under pressures and tensions.

To enhance social regeneration, local governments should therefore understand their new functions in the current new public governance era (see, for example, [Bingham et al., 2005](#); [Osborne, 2006](#)). Today as never before, local governments should be oriented toward a sustainable growth strategy for their territories and communities. Core stakeholders in the local system should take part in designing, implementing, and assessing policies and public services. In addition, various stakeholders and different organisational networks should move beyond the mindset of fragmentation and partiality; this is necessary in order to build a community, one with its own vision and identity ([Putnam, 2005](#); [Sancino, 2010](#)). In this respect, according to [Nalbandian et al. \(2013\)](#), there are three main leadership challenges in local governments: working more actively at the intersection between political and administrative arenas; synchronising city and county boundaries with problems that have no jurisdictional homes; and connecting engagement initiatives to traditional political values.

New Roles for Public Managers

The crisis of representation in political parties ([Copus, 2006](#)) is giving public managers a more political role in terms of community building and facilitating democracy ([Nalbandian, 1999](#)). [Feldman and Khademian \(2007\)](#) argue that the challenge for public managers today is not to build a distinct venue where the public can participate, but rather to do core tasks which create a community of participation where local- and experience-based ways of knowing problems engage with political and technical ways in order to move toward alternative ways of knowing and addressing problems. Overall, the recent literature on the role of public managers has particularly emphasised their role as creators of communities of participation ([Feldman and Khademian, 2007](#)). In particular, in order to meet the challenges of modernising the organisation and building communities, public managers are asked to develop political skills in order to fill the gaps that exist among elected officials and professional staff; among public, private, and non-profit organisations; among departments within local government; and among managers and citizens ([Nalbandian and Nalbandian, 2003](#), 87).

[Nabatshi \(2010, 2012\)](#) has asserted that public managers should address the democracy deficit working collaboratively and horizontally with citizens and infusing government decision-making with reasoned discussions and the collective judgement of citizens. On this point, similarly, [Feldman and Khademian \(2007, 319\)](#) have argued that public managers should undertake two main kinds of work in practicing inclusive management: the informational work and the relational work. The first one is directed toward the goal of informed decision-making, while the second one is directed toward the goal of creating connections that allow people to use that information to deliberate.

New Roles for Politicians

[Sorensen \(2006\)](#) has extensively written about the implications of new public governance processes ([Bingham et al., 2005](#); [Osborne, 2006](#)) on the roles of politicians, arguing how the role of politicians should evolve towards a meta-governance role. Though this shift could undermine representative democracy in its traditional forms, it does not necessarily undermine representative democracy as such: in fact, meta-governance may open the door for the development of a new, strong model of representative democracy ([Sorensen, 2006](#), 99). In particular, Sorensen defines meta-governance as a way of enhancing coordinated governance in a fragmented political system based on a high degree of autonomy for a plurality of self-governing networks and institutions (Ibid., 100). Meta-governance may be exercised by four main strategies by: 1) framing political, organisational, and financial contexts within which self-governance takes place; 2) using storytelling for sense-making and sense-giving; 3) offering support and facilitation to self-governing actors; and 4) participating as meta-governor in processes of self-governance, that is, acting as one of a number of actors who negotiate collective solutions to shared problems.

The role of politicians in governance processes has also been addressed by [Hansen \(2001\)](#). He has described elected councillors as participant co-governors contributing to public-oriented interactions between the many institutions and actors in local governance. According to this author, the traditional vertical political relations and interactions from above and below between elected councillors and voting citizens must be supplemented with lateral relations and interactions among institutions, professionals and users. Therefore, councillors must participate and engage in public deliberations about common concerns of the municipality, ensuring that all citizens get an opportunity to voice their opinion and interests and that the plurality of voices is taken into account at various levels and in various fields of local decision- and policy-making ([Hansen, 2001](#), 122).

Summary

This chapter focused on the relationship between city leadership and the social regeneration of communities. We highlighted forms and elements of city leadership and we discussed some contemporary trends on the four main forms of city leadership and their impacts on social regeneration. Finally, we focused specifically on the functions of local governments and on the new, further roles that public managers and politicians should play to enhance social regeneration of communities.

We believe that social regeneration can be achieved by more than one ways, through a number of paths with varying configurations of factors (patterns) that are related to different societal challenges. For example, dealing with an aging population is a different societal challenge from ensuring community safety and integration within a poor neighborhood.

However, our main argument is that social regeneration could be triggered by patterns of collective (not individual) community leadership promoted by public managers and politicians through the establishment of new democratic structures open to citizens and communities of citizens and characterised by interactivity, participation, social justice, social innovation, and, in some cases, by public deliberation.

Examples of these new democratic structures could be arenas for co-commissioning, co-designing, co-delivering, and co-assessing public services (see, for example, [Nabatchi et al., 2017](#)) and systems for self-governance of the commons within cities (such as neighbourhood committees established for managing public parks) that include logics of interactivity, participation, social justice, social innovation, and possibly deliberation.

Of course, our main argument here solely refers to a kind of democratic procedural condition that enhances social regeneration. However, this condition should be complemented by a substantial condition of social regeneration, which could only be achieved by a more sustainable and responsible business; by a smarter and more resilient government able to rapidly adapt to the changing circumstances and able to focus on the democratic priorities; and by the progressive establishment of a federalist global governance that is able to recognise the possibility of self-governance at the community level but at the same time is able to guarantee basic rights for all human beings on a global scale.

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For example, as China moved from emerging to advanced economy status, its development path was conditioned by applications of stage-growth pole and central-place theories to urban renewal and regeneration (Gondiner et al. 2011).

Henri Lefebvre, the French philosopher and sociologist, distinguishes three types of representation in his thesis of the *Right to the City* within the social production of space (Lefebvre, 1996, 1967). They are:

- Spatial practice: the basic set of characteristics of a locale in which its inhabitants enjoy coherence and continuity in their daily experience.
- Representations of Space: this encompasses the codes by which a place is able to function based upon the way in which its production and reproduction provide some order to these codes.
- Representational Spaces: These involve the complex symbolism of how a place is known to its inhabitants including the publicly unseen subterranean practices and events.

Here we focus on the city broadly defined at all levels of analysis ranging from neighbors to city-regions.