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A Framework for city leadership in multilevel governance settings: the comparative contexts of Italy and the UK

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This paper discusses the role of city leadership in the current multilevel governance settings and provides a conceptual framework for understanding the main elements of city leadership. Forms of political, managerial and civic leadership have been distinguished within city leadership and the main actors, structures, processes and followership patterns are examined using Italy and the UK as starting points of comparison. This comparative framework sheds a light on some common and different features in the city leadership patterns in Italy and the UK, such as the cross-cutting and multilayered administrative context for public service delivery; the common trend towards strengthening the executive side of political leadership rather than the representative one; the growing relevance of forms of civic leadership as a trigger for creating public and social value and for enhancing the resilience of the territories. Main differences deal instead with the role of central government in defining the role of city leaders, where Italy seems to experience a return towards greater centralization and controls, and the UK is experiencing an opposite trend towards the empowerment of local communities. Finally, the paper sets out some future directions for the research agenda on city leadership we are seeking to pursue.

Keywords: city leadership; multilevel governance; local government; civic leaders; public managers; mayors

Introduction

Leadership studies date back centuries, often associated with strategic issues of politics and war. Its roots in social sciences have been exposed again as the shift from the individual characteristics of leaders within organizations to a much more multidisciplinary approach occurs. One of the leading academics in the field, Keith Grint, takes a multilateral approach in mapping the legitimate authority of leadership in terms of space (strategic), time (long-term) and problem (wicked) (Grint, 2000). It is apparent that leadership operates in a normative environment, both multidisciplinary and multilateral. It is also evident that this conceptual variant of leadership has migrated from management scholarship to territorial politics and policy in respect of the multiple settings and levels of governance (e.g., Bailey, Bellandi, Caloffi, & De Propris, 2010; Collinge & Gibney, 2010; Collinge, Gibney, & Mabey, 2010; Grint, 2010; Kroehn, Maude, & Beer, 2010; Mabey & Freeman, 2010).

More recently a number of authors have established place-based leadership as an increasingly important form of enquiry. Several of them have pointed out that

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place-based leadership in existing multilevel governance (MLG) settings can be the key variable for understanding differences in socio-economic performance, resilience, and recovery of localities and regions (Beer & Clower, 2014; Gibney, Copeland, & Murie, 2009; Liddle, 2010; Rodríguez-Pose, 2013; Sotarauta, Horlings, & Liddle, 2012; Sullivan, Downe, Entwistle, & Sweeting, 2006). However, the pertinent point is the question of where governance ends and leadership begins (Sotarauta, 2014). Given the multi-ness and multiple nature of the former, and the multilateral perspective of the latter, there is a significant opportunity to establish fully place-based leadership in an analysis of a more complex governance landscape.

In this paper we seek to contribute to this enquiry by examining the role of city leadership in a contemporary context within MLG settings. This concept has gone through the weft and weave of academic, policy and practice fashion, but its analytical purchase in changing European settings attests to its durability (Stephenson, 2013).

MLG is frequently distinguished by two types: one more formal and governmental, the other more informal and based upon institutions of governance (Hooghe & Marks, 2001). Recent work on mobilizing leadership in cities and regions by Beer and Clower (2014) pointed out the importance of city leadership in relation to government *and* governance. Thus, it is apparent that city leadership has a powerful role to play in providing a bridge between the two types of MLG. Within MLG the issue of city leadership is gaining analytical traction, but given the variegated nature of the European Union's sub-national socio-economic and administrative territories, there is no one ideal–typical model. Accordingly, the possibility of exploring city leadership from an internationally comparative perspective (within Europe) holds out the prospect of mining a rich seam of analysis.

This paper sets out a conceptual framework in order to compare the evolution and development of city leadership, using Italy and the UK as contextual cases. We draw upon the literature, secondary material and general evidence in order to explore the potential utility and robustness of this framework. In particular, the three types of leadership – managerial, political and civic – are useful in developing the framework as a heuristic methodology to be applied to particular cases in future research. The cases of Italy and UK were chosen because – even with different and peculiar institutional and civic traditions – they represent two countries that have recently experienced increasing pressure toward devolution and decentralization. This provides the analytical narrative for taking a research agenda forward that will start with a direct comparison of a city in Italy and one in the UK. From this base, the analysis will be expanded to include other intra-European Union comparisons.

The paper is structured as follows. The first section provides the backdrop to the study being proposed. Firstly, discussing the main features of the current MLG settings and the need for city leadership. Secondly, conceptualizing city leadership. The next two sections comprise the Italian and UK contexts. The final section summarizes the main arguments and sets out the directions for future research.

Situating city leadership in a multilevel governance context

Multilevel governance framework

MLG provides a useful framework for analysing the multi-ness of governance within the European Union (Hooghe, 1996). The legitimacy of this concept has been strengthened because its provenance comes from investigating the changing governmental

landscape in the European Union (Hooghe, Marks, Arjan, & Schakel, 2010). Even if there were a stronger commitment to MLG, as proposed by the European Commission's Committee of the Regions, it is still constrained by its vertical and horizontal dimensions (Committee of the Regions, 2009; Benz & Eberlein, 1999). Consequently, it does remain limited in fully addressing the cross-cutting, multilayered and multidimensional governance challenges for the European Union. MLG has been charged with the same degree of elasticity and elusiveness as the global concept of governance (Bulmer, 1993; Jordan, 2001, 2005; Piattoni, 2009; Stubbs, 2005). Bache and Flinders (2004) offer this defence: 'While multi-level governance remains a contested concept, its broad appeal reflects shared concern with increased complexity, proliferating jurisdictions, the rise of non-state actors, and the related challenges to state power' (pp. 4–5).

Without getting into arcane disputes among political scientists, the following definition of MLG appears to be a reasonable starting point:

> Multi-level governance characterizes the changing relationships between actors situated at different territorial levels and from public, private and voluntary sectors. […] Most specifically, multi-level governance crosses the traditionally separate domains of domestic and international politics to highlight the increasingly blurred distinction between these domains in the context of European integration. (Bache, 2005, p. 5)

The challenge for MLG, however, is the very nature of its multi-ness. Clarke notes that whereas MLG tends to treat relationships of scale and space as vertical, governance in general is multiple, multilayered and multidimensional and cross-cuts across orthogonal coordinates. Indeed, he points to the way in which the weaknesses of earlier versions have in a sense been addressed. This is because this mode of analysis is located in governance processes whose reach has become multinational in dealing with transnational change, operating within and between national sovereignties (Clarke, 2009). Conventionally two types of MLG are distinguished:

- Akin to federalism, this consists of limited and non-overlapping jurisdictions within a restricted number of territorial levels. The focus is on specific governmental purposes rather than on a set of policies or issues.
- A more complex and fluid type that consists of a larger number of overlapping and flexible jurisdictions with a focus that is much more on specific policy sectors and issues. Like most governance structures, there is a tendency to instability as the policy environment alters, but it is designed to seek optimal decision-making (Hooghe & Marks, 2004).

The first relates to government systems and the second to governance processes, so that we can see that city leadership can provide a bridge between the two. That is, city leadership engages simultaneously with government and governance in more devolved and decentralized systems. We define government as the formal exercise of political power, based upon legislatively binding institutions, codes and processes by a legitimate authority. We then define governance as the process in which organized interest groups and their representatives are attributed public status in respect of their involvement in public policy formulation and implementation. The legitimacy of these interests depends on their ability to deliver upon bargains made with governmental bodies in policy domains. The combination of city leadership and the different types of MLG does, however, open up a new range of possibilities at different territorial scales, breaking out

of a vertical ordering in the distribution of authority and powers. Moreover, it opens up the possibility in many European Union nations for a more comprehensive system of cross-cutting regulation of centre–periphery relations (Thomas, 2013).

The need for city leadership

There is an increasing interest in the role of cities in creating economic growth and resilience (Glaeser, 2011; Jessop, 1990; Rostow, 1960; United Nations, 2012). However, the degree to which city leadership is being revived and flourishes clearly depends on extant systems of government and processes of governance (Sancino, 2010). In England changes to the system of local government also underpin the conditions for further devolution with the Cities and Devolution Bill currently going through the UK parliament. That is, central government will devolve more powers and expenditures in some policy areas to sub-national governmental bodies on condition that an elected mayor is established. We return to this point in the discussion of the UK.

According to the Summary Report of the Third Warwick Commission *Elected Mayors and City Leadership*, the pressures for directly elected mayors are a consequence of the need for increased strategic leadership at different sub-national levels (University of Warwick, 2012). The authors advance five reasons for these pressures:

- A response to the rise of the network society that otherwise disperses responsibility and a demand for greater accountability from political leaders.
- An attempt to reinvigorate democratic politics and civic engagement in the face of apparently widespread political apathy.
- A localist and decentralizing reaction against the rise of the centralizing power of the state or super state (European Union).
- The realization by some local politicians in certain areas that they can make the most impact through elected mayors, not traditional party politics.
- The return of 'personality' to the political agenda in place of depersonalized party systems.

These are global and local contextual factors that have to be negotiated in providing meaning for city leadership. However, there is a danger that it becomes a conceptual chimera whose practical application turns out to be inchoate and inconsistent. It is this possibility that disciples our approach to situating city leadership in MLG settings.

Conceptualizing city leadership

The literature and debates on leadership in the area of business and management is well established. For example, Grint (2000) asks four related question concerning how leadership is established and coordinated:

- Who? Identity.
- What? The strategic vision the organization wishes to achieve.
- How? The tactics used by organizations to achieve their objectives.
- Why? The persuasive communication used to follow leaders.

Thus these four simple questions are crucial in analysing the development of leadership at this scale.

Conceptually, it is possible to distinguish between three sets of institutions that together provide the capacity to govern any given city or locality.

- Government itself.
- Corporate business:
- The network of influential civic organizations that can shape public debate on policy issues (Stone, 1989).

All three domains can provide platforms for the emergence of local and regional leaders (Hambleton & Howard, 2013).

In this paper we seek to investigate the concept of city leadership in two ways. On one side, drawing upon Hambleton (2009) and Hartley (2002), we distinguish between the three subtypes that make up the concept of city leadership:

- *Managerial leadership*: provided by public managers working in local government organizations.
- *Political leadership*: provided by the local political class and in particular by those local politicians in charge of implementing city programmes and plans (e.g., the mayor – where established – and members of the cabinet).
- *Civic leadership:* provided by all civic leaders operating outside the traditional realm of the public sector, but that with their behaviours – both as individual and as individual representatives of non-profit or business organizations – contribute to the achievement of relevant city social outcomes.

On the other side, by drawing from Grint's four related questions (we investigate the actors (who); the structures (what); the processes (how); and the followership patterns (why) existing across the three subtypes of city leadership in Italy and UK. The observe side of leadership is what is termed followership of which there are four principles:

- *Trust*: accountability to followers of leader(s) and transparency of actions.
- *Stability:* communicate confidence to those who follow.
- *Compassion:* empathy and passion for causes leader(s) espouse.
- *Hope:* leader(s) display belief in the policies and processes they propose (Peterson, 2013).

In considering city leadership in Italian and UK contexts our perspective is guided by the following quote: 'City leadership, however, is not monolithic; rather, it represents different sectors (i.e., public, private, and non-profit) as well as different institutions and constituencies that vary depending upon locality' (Vanderleeuw, Jarmon, Pennington, Sowers, & Davis, 2011, p. 2).

City Leadership in Italy

Background

The Italian state is divided into four levels of government: central government; 20 regions – the intermediate sub-national governments with strong legislative power; provinces and metropolitan cities; and municipalities. Municipalities, provinces and metropolitan cities (consisting of more than 8000 *comuni*, 10 *città metropolitane* and about 100 *province*)

make up Italy's two-layer local government system. Each municipality has a mayor, an executive cabinet, a city council and an administrative body. The mayor is head of the executive branch, is elected directly by the citizens (as are the city councillors) and appoints members of the cabinet, who are not necessarily elected by the citizens. Provinces and metropolitan cities are the second tier of government and are indirectly elected; they both are governed by a president (with functions and powers similar to that of a mayor) who is supported by the council who is indirectly elected by the councillors of the municipalities that are part of the province or of the metropolitan area. Italian local government can be considered a type of local government system based on the 'strong mayor' model and which is rooted in a *Rechtstaat* administrative culture where the legalistic bureaucratic traditions of a 'Napoleonic' heritage are still alive (Mouritzen & Svara, 2002). The overall position of the key elements is set out in Table 1.

Managerial leadership

In Italy, the managerial form of city leadership rests with city managers. The role of city manager is at the moment established only for municipalities with more than 100,000 inhabitants (only 45 municipalities reach this level in Italy). All the other municipalities do not have a city manager, but a general secretary (the traditional 'warrantors' of the legality and conformity of administrative acts). This institutional choice made by the Italian legislature is quite interesting because it underpins the idea that a formal leader in charge for managerial leadership is necessary only in medium-size and big cities. Consistent with this view, general secretaries played mainly a bureaucratic role focusing almost exclusive inwards on 'making bureaucracy works', being more manager of their municipalities rather than managers of their cities (Sancino & Turrini, 2009).

Table 1.   City leadership patterns in Italy.

	Managerial	Political	Civic
Who – leaders	City managers (only for municipalities with more than 100,000 inhabitants)	Directly elected mayors	Distributed leadership across several civic leaders types – key role of solidarity, sport and spirituality
What – structures	Municipality as a generalist institution, plus many public agencies, local quangos and municipal corporations operating in given policy fields. High plurality and high fragmentation	Strong powers concentrated in the hands of the directly elected mayor. Emphasis of political arrangements on the executive side, rather than on the representative side	High fragmentation, mostly small, local and value-based civic organizations. High relevance of trade unions and the church as national actors present in each territory
How – processes	Externalization co-production decrementalism	Individual and local issues based	Depend heavily on public sector funds. Very informal and value based
Why – followership	Mainly institutional type of followership, civic followership (e.g., co-production of public services) is developing	Medium-to-high electoral participation	Key role of volunteerism. Social contacts and values proximity rather than reputation as the enabling factor of civic leadership

In terms of the structures of managerial leadership, government action at the local level is spread through the municipality and other public agencies operating at the local level. The municipality is the only generalist institution, whereas there are many other public agencies operating at the local level that act in a given policy field (such as, for example, safety or health). Overall, the structure of the local government sector in Italy is characterized by high pluralism and fragmentation of public sector organizations that resulted in a silo mentality and often caused problems of lack of coordination and of duplication of the tasks covered. For example, in the case of local quangos, the latest survey found that there are about 29,000 participations in about 6500 local organizations (with different legal forms) (Dipartimento del Tesoro, 2013). In terms of leadership processes, Italian local government organizations and their public managers operate in particularly turbulent and contradictory contexts.

Increasingly they face a top-down trend characterized by reduction financial transfers from the central government. At the same time, a bottom up trend characterized by the greater demand for public intervention coming both from more informed and more active citizens as particularly those affected by the economic crisis. In response public managers have reacted by prompting three main kinds of leadership processes:

• Budget reductions to cope with the less public money available.
• Externalization with the aim mainly focused on the cheapest bidder regardless other aspects such as quality.
• Involvement of third organizations users and citizens in the delivery of public services.

Finally, in terms of followership, we have already said that public managers in Italian local government tend to have more an inward focus; previous research has estimated that the time spent with stakeholders outside the institutional boundaries of the municipality is approximately around 15% (Sancino, Meneguzzo, & Cristofoli, 2014; Sancino & Turrini, 2009).

However, even with a kind of followership that is mainly institutional, the experiences of users and citizens involvement in the co-production of public services is also growing across all the Italian local governments. This shows that the followership of managerial leadership may expand beyond traditional institutional boundaries.

Political leadership

The key actors in Italian city leadership are undoubtedly the directly elected mayors. They were introduced in Italy in 1993; this reform introduced a presidential local government model, replacing the previous model based on a proportional system The widespread view is that this reform is considered as a successful one (Baldini, 2002, p. 374).

Directly elected mayors have immediately become the key gatekeepers of citizens' and civic groups' interests and issues. Consequently, mayors (and members of cabinet) have substantially replaced parties in their traditional role of mediation and representation of civic interests and issues. It has as emerged an 'ask-the-mayor' model in regard to both the main administrative and political issues (Sancino & Castellani, 2016).

In terms of political leadership structures, Italian local government systems are designed to give to directly elected mayors' extensive full powers in many governance and administrative issues. For example, mayors have the 'personal power' for appointing not only the members of the cabinet but also representatives from local quangos and

municipal corporations. They are in charge of executive matters whereas the function of overview and scrutiny is delegated to the city council, which also has approval powers on the main administrative acts, such as budget approval and land planning.

In terms of political leadership processes, the Italian context is characterized by two concomitant trends. On one side, the influencing power of national political parties is increasingly reduced. On the other side, the influencing power of lobbies and local group of interests is dramatically increased. The impact on processes of political leadership is twofold: they are mostly mediated by individual relationships, rather than organizational relationships, and they are generally based on emergent issues (Sancino & Castellani, 2016). Magnier has pointed out this personalization of local power who describes its consequences for both the decision-making process and the representative process (Magnier, 2004). With regard to followership, the proportion of local electoral participation is generally quite high (around 70%), despite a downward trajectory in the recent years. It is, however, considerably above the average voter turnout in the UK, at around 36% at last count.

Civic leadership

The function of civic leadership is naturally dispersed across all the actors outside the institutional boundary of public sector that play a leadership role for the creation of relevant social city outcomes. Thus, if it was relatively easier identifying who are the managerial and political leaders in Italian city leadership, this task is much more difficult when focusing on the civic side of city leadership. Like in other countries, civic leadership in Italy is very relevant and distributed across a wide range of civic leaders, such as social entrepreneurs, leaders of local non-profit and voluntary organizations (in particular sport leaders), spiritual leaders etc.

Trying to delve into the multifaceted and peculiar features of civic Italian leaders, we can say that civic leaders in the Italian context tend to emerge particularly from those involved in matters dealing with solidarity, sport and spirituality; on this latter matter, even if with a downwards influence, the role of the church is still very relevant in many Italian cities (especially the smallest ones), particularly if this is compared with other countries such as UK. In terms of leadership structures, the function of civic leadership in Italy is exercised by 347.602 local civic organizations with a growth rate of 37.3% from 2001 to 2011, the date of the last survey available (ISTAT, 2014). Thus, there is an extraordinary rate of growth in the numbers and fields of work of civic organizations showing that, considering the difficulties that Italian economy has experienced in the last decade, a great contribution in social cohesion has certainly come from this sector.

Civic leadership is generally enacted by individuals operating in small organizations, in most of the cases built around informal social relationships and common values (e.g., Putnam, 1993). Beyond social contacts and informal processes, civic leadership in Italy is heavily dependent by government funds and volunteerism. In fact, only one out of five civic organizations has formally established a function of fund raising to achieve financial autonomy (ISTAT, 2014). In terms of followership, the data on volunteerism are indicative of the ability of civic organizations to involve a vast range of the Italian population in pursuing civic action; the number of volunteer is estimated around 4.7 million. On this last matter, again social contacts and the sharing of the values pursued by civic organizations seem to be the most relevant factor for activating and mobilizing citizens.

City leadership in the UK

Background

This section does not set out the system of sub-national government in detail but provides a contextual commentary of how the three subtypes of leadership proposed in this paper may evolve, as the UK moves along the path to greater devolution. Prior to 2009, decentralizing reforms focused on the region. The current focus on city leadership is based upon elected mayors as this is a condition of further devolution of in England and Wales, as the structure of local government begins to change. The baseline structure of the UK local government system stems from the Local Government Act 1972, which introduced the two-tier system of metropolitan and non-metropolitan counties, and metropolitan and non-metropolitan districts:

- Twenty-two unitary authorities in Wales; 32 in Scotland; and 125 in England, mainly serving urban areas. They cover the majority of public services that are delivered locally (see Local Government Association, 2011, for full details).
- Twenty-seven county councils in England and these cover a further 201 smaller district councils. They cover the same services as unitary authorities with the exception of leisure and recreation; environmental health; waste collection; and planning applications. District councils cover housing; leisure and recreation; environmental health; waste collection; planning applications: and local tax collection.
- In London, the boroughs provide all services with the exception of passenger transport, whilst the Greater London Authority (GLA), which covers the whole metropolitan area, is responsible for highways, transport planning, passenger transport and strategic planning.
- In Northern Ireland, 26 councils were reduced to 11 districts in April 2015, but with new powers over planning, local economic development and urban regeneration in addition to those associated with unitary authorities.

Proposed changes to the operation of the system began with the 'localism' narrative and discourse under the Labour administration between 1997 and 2010. In its early years, this administration devolved significant powers to Scotland, Wales and Greater London. The extension of regional devolution in England faltered with the referendum rejection of regional government in the North East in 2004 and the abolition of the regional development agencies (RDAs) in 2010. It can be argued that a quasi-regional agenda is continuing following the passing of the Local Democracy, Economic Development and Construction Act of 2009 that permits the formation of combined authorities (CAs) (Sandford, 2015). Following on from the Local Government Act 2000, the Localism Act 2011 established elected mayors as the basis of leadership in sub-national government. The amalgamation of these elements is the essential condition for further devolution in the Devolution Cities and Local Government Devolution Bill 2015–16 shortly to become law. These changes mainly apply in England as it follows the devolution path established in the other nations of the UK.

Whither leadership within all these governmental changes is an open question. But, as noted by Hildreth in his review of localism: 'the concept of leadership became increasingly muddled. This was an era of understanding that neither local government, nor any other agency rooted in a locality, could solve complex problems in a local

economy […]' (Hildreth, 2011, p. 709). Hildreth's discussion of three types of localism flags up local governance. Other authors have questioned the survival of local governance based upon a community framework (Stoker, 2011). CAs may provide the scale and scope to ensure effective devolution. Differences in administrative and territorial scale as well as economic capacity, however, do constrain this possibility. Moreover, the local enterprise partnerships (LEPs) often cross-cut CA boundaries as well as being seen as central to any coherence in more devolution of sub-national government, This is compounded by the introduction of City Deals and Growth Funds that are based upon the negotiation of a set of implicit and explicit contracts with central government (Cabinet Office, 2015; Waite, 2015; Wilcox, 2015). The conditionality of an elected mayor for more devolution for CAs suggests that the leadership model is returning one of individual characteristics of leadership within organizations. Yet the dynamics of inter-governmental and governance relations, suggest that more multilateral and distributed forms are more appropriate. Table 2 is an attempt to match the three subtypes of leadership against the four questions of how leadership is coordinated and negotiated. The comparison with the Italian situation is illustrative of differences, but also difficulties in a less determinant environment as devolution proceeds.

It is apparent that proposed devolution in the UK makes this case difficult to fit easily into our conceptual framework. This is because the UK does not have a conventional form of 'cross-cutting' regulation of its governmental powers across horizontal and between vertical levels found elsewhere in the European Union. Instead, cross-cutting regulation takes in a range of policy and management domains on a multi-scalar and increasingly multi-institutional basis. In respect of a MLG setting, it does seem that the UK (and in particular England and Wales) is moving towards the Type II form.

Managerial leadership

This form of leadership has been increasingly manifest in the UK as different administrations have flirted and then implemented different forms of decentralization and devolution. An elected leader of some type appears at first glance to be at the heart of managerial leadership. The Local Government Act 2000 introduced two models of local government: elected leader and cabinet; and elected mayor and cabinet. This replaced the committee system based upon leader elected by councillors.

The Localism Act 2011 gave local authorities greater discretion and inducements for retaining some expenditure, as well as permitting the return of the committee system in some instances. The role of the chief executives is often overlooked within this type of leadership. They have no formal political power but are important intermediaries between managing the functional policy and service delivery responsibilities, as executed by senior officers, and the political leadership exercised by elected members. The following quotation provides a useful summary of the position:

> The number and range of chief executives' real accountabilities is not recognised either by statute or by their employment contracts and is therefore left to be resolved by each individual council. This reality is not always welcomed or accepted by political leaders who see their chief executive as being simply responsible to the leader, the cabinet, or the council. Yet, if the council fails to satisfy the other masters, particularly national inspectors, and receives a poor report as a result, the chief executive is usually the one held to account.

Table 2. City leadership patterns in the UK.

	Managerial	Political	Civic
Who – leaders	Ostensibly the political leader but within local government chief executives plays an increasing role. In other governance organizations (e.g., local enterprise partnerships (LEPs)) collaboration and partnership arrangements over particular functions extending this form, particularly in larger combined authorities (CAs)	Mixture of leader and cabinet; and elected mayor and cabinet models with return of the committee system in some instances in local government in England and Wales since 2011. Rationalization of councils in Northern Ireland. But large CAs may presage more but different city-regional governance	Distributed individual leadership across several civic leaders types – key role of solidarity, sport and spirituality as in Italy but a possible tendency to clientelism by non-profit organizations due to contracting for government services
What – structure	Municipality as a generalist institution, but changing local and city-regional structures and powers may promote greater managerial leadership. Many public agencies, quangos and joint bodies, e.g., LEPs operating in given policy fields as collective governance	Increasing powers concentrated in the hands of the new directly elected mayors in combined authorities . Increasing emphasis of political arrangements on the executive side rather than on the representative side	Increasing fragmentation as smaller, local and value-based civic organizations merge and become national and more corporate players. High relevance of business interests in local economic development, enterprise and skills promotion
How – processes	Outsourcing (quasi-privatization). Co-production of public services within and without combined authorities. Variable incrementalism and encroachment by non-state interests	Local issue-based shifting to city-regional administrative and territorial entities	Depend heavily on public sector funds through competitive bidding for contracts. Becoming more formal and corporate
Why – followership	Mainly formal institutional type of followership, with little local discretion	Low electoral participation	Key role of volunteerism. Social contacts, proximity and governance reputation as the enabling factor of civic leadership

 (p. 6) We believe this is the major source of tension between leaders and chief executives – and to some extent between other officers and politicians. (SOLACE, 2006).

Chief executives also have an intermediary role with respect to central government and local/regional agencies outside the direct control of central government. In some senses, their managerial *and* political leadership credentials have been strengthened with the rise of what can be termed the 'contract state' and the 'audit state' (Moran, 2001; Grey & Sedgewick, 2013).

Political leadership

In a UK context, the managerial imperative is never far from political leadership. A framework is set out in Figure 1 (Leach, Hartley, Lowndes, Wilson, & Downe, 2005).

Leach et al. (2005) set out the four key leadership tasks as:

- Maintaining a critical mass of political support.
- Developing strategic policy direction.
- Seeking to further leadership priorities outside the authority.
- Ensuring task accomplishment.

Most of the discourse on political leadership is undertaken at the national level as successive administrations have reinforced the trajectory of centralization. The occasional nod in the direction of devolution and decentralization, notwithstanding in framing city leadership in the UK boundaries between managerial and political forms tend to blur. If we take the four key leadership tasks, the following observations may be apposite:

- Clearly any elected official needs to combine accountability and legitimacy. In the case of directly mayors in the UK, there is a basic authority bestowed by the direct election of a mayor.
- In this respect, an elected mayor should have 'the capacity to identify and focus on clear priorities for action' (Cabinet Office, 2001). The elected mayor can act as a figurehead in this respect. The degree of local strategic discretion is limited, however, in that there is currently a limited resource base with few instruments to achieve strategic objectives.
- There are two dimensions to extending leadership. Firstly, engaging with other stakeholders in a locality in order to advance strategic decision-making. The introduction of LEPs, in 2011, as sub-regional economic development agencies and their likely enlargement into quasi-regional economic development agencies is an example of how extending leadership is important.
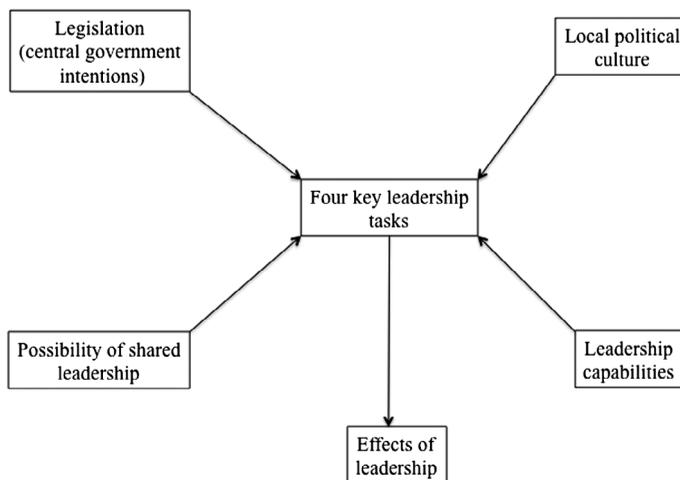

Figure 1.   Framework for understanding political leaders.

- There is an inherent tension between the elected mayor and cabinet model in that the latter often derive their authority from the efficiency of the functional/administrative responsibilities of the chief executive and his/her officers. They are also frequently part of wider professional networks across the UK.

One can see that elected mayors as take on the role of strategic decision-maker this may mitigates the informal political power of chief executives. One conclusion is that the present position of the currently small number of elected mayors in the UK pushes them towards civic leadership.

Civic leadership

Like much of the history of sub-national government and governance in the UK, civic leadership is and has been a variable concept and practice. One can argue that civic leadership saw a revival in the 1980s in reaction to the increased centralization of the Margaret Thatcher administration that scrapped the large metropolitan boroughs, including Birmingham, London and Manchester. Many of the leaders of these metropolitan regions saw themselves as the political torchbearers opposing an over-bearing centralized state. Paradoxically, a newly elected Conservative central government has begun to reverse this process, albeit under very conditional changes on a rather inchoate basis. In a sense, the current proposal for elected mayors for 'powerhouse' conurbations appears to be a managerial imperative that disguises a political one. Yet, the imperative for a more devolved UK stems as a result of a reaction to growing inequality of wealth and income and its spatial distribution is a civic one (Martin, Pike, Tyler, & Gardener, 2015).

That impetus is reviving in the UK in the involvement of non-profit organizations and community groups in seeking to transform their local/regional habitus. One example has been the development of task forces in combating the effects of large plant closures, of which the Longbridge plant of the MG Rover automotive company in the West Midlands being notable. As Bailey, Bentley, de Ruyter, and Hall (2014, p. 6) note, they were 'task-oriented, temporary, non-statutory partnerships with multi-sector but selective membership'. They further note:

> Taskforces were characterized by their diversity in respect of sectoral and spatial remit. However, they had in common the provision of an institutional platform to permit rapid mobilization of expertise and resources of national and regional stakeholders in response to economic crisis.

At the time of writing, civic leadership is starting to coalesce around the closures of steel plants in the North of England. We can also observe civic leadership promoting newer forms of socio-economic activities, based upon creative and digital industries as greater spatial balance within the UK is pursued (Centre for Cities, 2015).

If cities and regions are the crossroads and meeting places (Bristow, 2010) in which local and global forces interact, then comprehensive forms of civic leadership are an imperative. Moreover, this form of city leadership is one that coheres with what appears to be disparate interests into an institutional framework. This framework may provide the means in which socio-economic resilience and collaborative can be aligned and actioned in multi-governance and multi-scalar settings.

Conclusions

This paper provides a general comparative framework for investigating city leadership in Italy and the UK. In differentiating between each of the forms of leadership: managerial; political and civic, we propose a conceptual framework to be applied at the city level. Populating this framework has shed some light on common features but also differences in the city leadership patterns in Italy and UK. The common features include the following:

- The cross-cutting and multilayered administrative context for public service delivery that is often dispersed through a range of different public organizations.
- The common trend towards strengthening the executive side of political leadership rather than the representative one.
- The growing relevance of forms of civic leadership as a trigger for creating public and social value and enhancing the resilience of the territories.

The last feature about civic leadership points to the need of moving from a leader-centric perspective of city leadership towards a more distributed and collective view of leadership processes. Furthermore, the need to arrange political and managerial structures that enable this form to contribute to a changing governance environment.

These two conclusions relate to the MLG settings in both national contexts. That is, the more vertically structured form of type I MLG appears to becoming reinforced in the case of Italy; the number of lowest-tier governance institutions, notwithstanding. In the changing situation of the current proposals and policies for more devolution in the UK, one can perceive a shift towards type II governance. That is, in what seems to be an incomplete and seemingly inchoate system, the role of governance institutions has become crucial in making these changes effective. One example is the discourse of the Northern Powerhouse to create more economic growth in the cities of Northern England, which partly rests on creating a single transport body, Transport for the North, that incorporates different local and regional interest (HM Government, 2015).

In this unfolding of events in both countries, the three forms of city leadership appear not only to provide the bridge between the vertical and horizontal dimensions of MLG but also the cross-cutting and multilateral means of managing governmental change. In this sense, this conclusion seems to confirm Sotarauta's contention that city leadership starts where governance ends (Sotarautu, 2014).

Our intention is to pursue a future research agenda on city leadership in two main directions. Firstly, we aim to construct an index that measures the relative levels of the different types of city leadership within each city. It is apparent that the different forms of leadership can be more discretely identified in Italy compared with the UK where the first two seem to merge. It is also apparent that the policy of expanding the number elected mayors in the UK will lead to ineffective outcomes if this form of governance is not set within distributed leadership that incorporates community interests and organizations in any city/region. In other words, the greater the amounts of civic leadership, the more likely will the position of elected mayors be accountable and legitimate.

Secondly, we aim to undertake a direct comparison of two medium-sized cities, one in Italy and the other in the UK, by applying our framework. Interrogating the results of this project will provide insights into whether the approach we are developing has pan-European promise and possibilities.

Disclosure statement

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