

Voluntary Sector Review

Place Leadership and the role of Third Sector and Civil Society

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Abstract:	Only relatively recently, place leadership has become an important debate in the leadership studies and public administration literatures. From a place leadership perspective, there is clearly a potential role for third sector organisations and the voluntary engagement that citizens can play for places through different activities, such as for example social innovation, public services provision, civic engagement, advocacy, enhancement of the quality of life, strengthening of social bonds and social cohesion. However, the topic of civil society and third sector organisations is still neglected in research and public policy debates on place-based leadership. Our themed issue aims at filling this gap.
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Place Leadership and the role of Third Sector and Civil Society

Introduction

Only relatively recently, place leadership has become an important debate in the leadership studies and public administration literatures. This debate documents an increasing recognition of the role of various stakeholders in networked collaboration, and of the collective effort needed to achieve democratic and social outcomes at a variety of scales including locality, town, city and region (Bolden, Gulati, & Edwards, 2019; Hambleton, 2014; Sancino, 2016). A core contention is that leaders lead and influence places but their leadership is also shaped and constrained by the discrete nature of those different places (Budd & Sancino, 2016; Jackson, 2019).

A growing body of research in place-based leadershipⁱ notes the limited ability of the available theoretical approaches to clarify and to explain the factors influencing the development of places due to their variability (Sotarauta, Beer, & Gibney, 2017). No two places are the same, as public services and leadership are historical products of particular socio-political legacies. Nor are places facing exactly the same challenges. Said that, leadership is now increasingly seen as a significant element in how places seek to find innovative ways of providing public services, and attempting at least to enhance local and regional performance (Beer et al., 2019). As a result, the leadership, (place) identities and economy are more and more interlinked (Koning & Waistell, 2012).

Place-based leadership is unique in analysing various factors in the development of places. These factors include geographical levels, social, civic, and political relations, and networks. It can relate to neighbourhoods, cities, but also regions (e.g. Collinge & Gibney, 2010a, 2010b; Sotarauta & Mustikkamäki, 2012). The advantage of the place-based leadership approach is that it analyses multi-agency and multi-level activity (L. Horlings, G., Roep, & Wellbrock, 2018). Thus, it can help to explain differences in various institutional and cultural contexts.

From a place leadership perspective, there is clearly a potential role for third sector organisations (TSOs) and the voluntary engagement that citizens can play for places through different activities, such as for example social innovation, public services provision, civic engagement, advocacy, enhancement of the quality of life, strengthening of social bonds and social cohesion. However, the topic of civil society and TSOs is still neglected in research and public policy debates on place-based leadership.

The collection of papers in this themed issue discusses and defines broadly speaking two types of voluntary engagement in place leadership. The first concerns voluntary civic leadership in which individual activists take the lead (Barton, Handley, Wilmers, Sharland, & Menzies, 2021; Dang & Seemann, 2021; Potluka & Fanta, 2021). Initiative represented by individual leaders from TSOs characterises this type of voluntary engagement. Although it is collective leadership type of place-leadership, the individual leaders are in a position of speakers representing opinions of their groups. The second type concerns third sector leadership in which TSOs or socially connected groups collectively engage in place leadership (Lough, 2021; Pagani, Sancino, & Budd, 2021). In this type, collective leadership overlaps the individual one. Distinguishing two types of voluntary engagement follows the turn from individual leadership to collective leadership, mirroring a significant development as in general leadership scholarship (Terry, Rees, & Jacklin-Jarvis, 2020).

Place leadership

Place leadership can be considered simultaneously as a theoretical perspective, a multi-disciplinary research stream and a policy theme. It follows that there is no single accepted definition of place-

1 based leadership as that will depend on which of the three general meanings is being usedⁱⁱ. The
2 first meaning refers to a conceptual perspective that takes place as the point of departure and
3 observation for understanding and explaining leadership. For example, you may take the
4 perspective of a favela (or conversely a gentrified neighbour) to understand and to explain the
5 meaning and the effects of (place-based) leadership.

6 The second meaning, the multi-disciplinary research, refers to several, connected but quite
7 dispersed, academic disciplines which are researching place-based leadership to expand their field
8 of knowledge (Sancino, Budd, & Pagani, 2021). So, here you have for example regional studies
9 focusing on place-based leadership to explain economic outcomes of regions (Beer et al., 2019) and
10 public administration linking place-based leadership with local governance, public services, or
11 politics (Hambleton & Howard, 2013; Potluka, Kalman, Musiakowska, & Idczak, 2017; Sancino &
12 Hudson, 2020). Even the International Relations discipline has begun to focus on cities and city
13 networks as new political actors (Acuto, 2013).

14 The third meaning points to policy debates around what are the best governance configurations to
15 lead cities and/or rural areas, often pointing to some key figures like the role of Mayors and/or
16 governance arrangements such as combined authorities or city regions (Roberts, 2020). More
17 recently, place-based leadership has also been associated with debates around the split in votes for
18 populist leaders between rural and urban areas (Rodríguez-Pose, 2018). However, for the purpose
19 of this introductory essay, what is perhaps surprising is the relative absence of the third sector and
20 civil society in the academic and policy debate on place-based leadership.

27 **The third sector role in place-based leadership**

28 Activating citizens in relation to the public sector may take many forms. People can be involved in
29 improving public goods, in co-producing public services, and participate in defining and
30 implementing public policies and/or innovative solutions (co-creation). In the case of this themed
31 issue, we were particularly interested in the role of civil society and TSOs in dealing with collective
32 issues and in relation to the public sector (Brandesen, Steen, & Verschuere, 2018; Potluka, 2021).

33 Place-based leadership approaches tend to underline the importance of collective leadership
34 (Sotarauta & Mustikkamäki, 2012). The interaction among key stakeholders may start in informal
35 networks and develop into official networks and working groups combining economic, social, and
36 environmental objectives of various stakeholders to drive transformation of places. These strategic
37 networks often cover not only traditionally accepted public sector representatives (or companies),
38 but also third sector and community leaders (Hambleton, 2019; I. Horlings & Padt, 2013; Sotarauta
39 & Beer, 2017; Stough, 2010). Particular combinations of social relations make communication and
40 dialogue about visions among stakeholders one of the most important attributes of successful
41 places.

42 Sharing power is also an important issue in place-based leadership. Though political power is likely
43 to remain firmly in the hands of elected politicians, there are indeed other types of power. Activist,
44 or civil society leaders can use other types of power: information power; the capacity to engage
45 others in social networks; the capacity to provide expertise when solving place-based problems
46 (Sotarauta, 2016).

47 Formal political support and funding from public budgets could be a weak point of TSOs as they do
48 not have direct influence on them. In some countries, local political initiatives are dependent on
49 obtaining support from formal political parties and/or political movements. For example, a recent
50 study of capital cities in Central and Eastern Europe suggests that, though the governments try to
51 centralise the political system, about two thirds of local politicians across all parties are members
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1 of local TSOs. Furthermore, about one third of the local politicians are directors or members of the
2 boards of TSOs (Potluka & Perez, 2019). Such an engagement enables TSOs to gain political
3 consideration through their political networks and also public funding for their projects (Egdell &
4 Dutton, 2017).

5 While bottom-up engagement brings new ideas and new solutions, it can transform from informal
6 leadership to formal one. This happens, for example, when informal networks become formalised
7 and the boundaries between them and the public sector begin to blur. In such a case, informal place
8 leadership begins to adopt principles and procedures as formal leadership.
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10 Certainly, the issue of devolution and the governance and 'leadership' of place remains a contested
11 area. For example, in the UK, following the 2010 election, the new Coalition Government sought to
12 dismantle the regional infrastructure created by the previous New Labour Government and its
13 predecessor the Conservative Government (1979-1997). Both governments had subscribed to area-
14 based approaches to economic and spatial planning as well as 'urban regeneration'. New Labour
15 introduced different models of municipal governance and launched a number of initiatives aimed
16 at drawing in the third sector as corporate partners. Nonetheless, in these initiatives the distribution
17 of power remained unaltered, even if a cadre of professionalised workers in the third sector were
18 supported and sponsored into new roles in these new settings.
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20 The decision of the Coalition Government to continue to support 'city regions' seemed to go against
21 their rejection of the regional approach adopted earlier (Durose & Rees, 2012). Arguably it was an
22 experiment in creating new forms of governance (those that opted in had to accept city mayors) but
23 one which not radically changed the status quo. For example, sceptics pointed to the lack of real
24 power being transferred and, in the context of austerity, to the shifting of the focus of blame to the
25 city mayor for defending the cuts implemented at the central level (Diamond, 2014). The
26 implications of new city, and 'city region' mayors have been much discussed in the political science
27 literature, but the implications for the third sector remain again under-explored (Beel, Jones, & Rees
28 Jones, 2018; Rees & Rose, 2015). The under-developed nature of systematic and longitudinal studies
29 of third sector leaders make this an important area to examine given their presence on strategic
30 boards and agencies and the formal infrastructure in place not just in the UK but in a number of
31 advanced economies.
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33 Moreover, we know that, although creating and maintaining local and informal networks can have
34 an immediate impact at a policy level where city leadership exercises discretion, this does not
35 always secure a set of sustained changes (Diamond, 2012; Pearce, 2010). Indeed, especially in the
36 UK as a consequence of the austerity measures introduced after the Global Financial Crash by the
37 Conservative-led Coalition (2010-2015), those non-state agencies established over 40 years ago to
38 support voluntary or community based projects have lost significant infrastructure and capacity to
39 maintain their role (Barton et al., 2021). There have, however, been some initiatives which have
40 been aimed at creating non state agencies with a limited remit and subject to different regulatory
41 powers. These developments can be seen as weakening the relative authority of 'city hall' in very
42 limited ways. Arguably, the fragmentation of authority of local state institutions is an intended
43 outcome for those that advocate a neo liberal approach. It follows on from a period of change and
44 innovation at the local level in the UK which parallels a number of developments elsewhere
45 (especially in the USA and within Europe).
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47 The lessons learnt from a period of both innovation as well as actions taken to protect local services
48 in the 1980s are worth examining. The 'going local' approach adopted by a number of Labour-run
49 authorities were alternative economic strategies and experiments encompassing participatory
50 approaches to local decision making and offered a distinctive alternative to the Thatcher
51 government. They also informed the practice and priorities of the New Labour Government after
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1997. These approaches also shared a common assumption that while non-state agencies might be part of new service delivery, decision-making still remained at 'city hall'.

Returning to a broader European scale, this is a relevant issue in the light of the current attempts of the European Commission in promoting participative approaches in implementation of the Green Deal. Finding solutions to places' problems requires innovative approaches and flexibility. This makes activists and TSOs valuable stakeholders, not least because they have the advantage that they are less bound by formal procedures and thus they are able to come with innovative solutions (see, for example, the case of social innovation in Gundeldinger Feld in von Schnurbein, Mayer, & Potluka, 2021), though such lessons are not necessarily transferrable to other jurisdictions without taking into account local specifics.

Contribution of the themed issue

All the papers in this themed issue have in common to focus on the role of the third sector and civil society in determining the local development, sustainability and resilience of the place(s). Potluka and Fanta (2021) investigate how third sector leadership influences local development in rural areas. Dang and Seemann (2021) explore the characteristics of collaborative housing initiatives that lead to a positive attitude towards such projects. Lough (2021) focuses on how place-based leadership can enhance community resilience pointing to a specific type of place-based leadership, which is bottom-up 'organic' leadership. Pagani et al. (2021) investigates the local leadership of civil society from a positional and reputational perspective. Barton et al. (2021) outline the history of two environmental partnerships from the perspective of third sector leaders.

The papers focus on different scopes of place-based leadership, such as community resilience; public value co-creation through collaborative housing initiatives; local development and attractiveness of a municipality to new residents; environmental governance and regeneration; public services delivery and local advocacy. In other words, they all assume place-based leadership as an antecedent, tool, resource, etc. that is part of formal and informal systems of governance and has effects and consequences into relevant public outcomes. The unit of analysis of these studies vary from communities (Lough, 2021), cities (Pagani et al., 2021), cross-sectoral partnerships (as well as Barton et al., 2021; Potluka & Fanta, 2021), and initiatives/projects (Dang & Seemann, 2021).

Four papers out of five treat place-based leadership as a driver/enabler (with a simplification we may say as the X of Y), while Pagani et al. (2021) as a consequence (as the Y of X). Specifically, Potluka and Fanta (2021) explain that the presence of third sector leaders taking part in local intersectoral partnerships has the potential for local development and to attract new residents thanks to the higher social capital they generate. Dang and Seemann (2021) found that elements related to the social sustainability of places (civic engagement, inclusion, integration and diversity) are more important than economic factors for participating in collaborative housing initiatives. Barton et al. (2021) provide some key features for cross-sectoral partnerships to work (e.g. accountability and openness; creativity and risk taking; early confidence building and national advocates; limited financial gains) and find that the incorporation of a charity at the heart of these programmes was fundamental to make the whole greater than the sum of its parts. Lough (2021) has shown that bottom-up and centralised governance processes have different but complementary roles to enhance long-term community resilience. Pagani et al. (2021) have investigated place-based leadership as a consequence finding that place leaders belong to three different main spheres: third sector, which deals mainly with public services delivery and advocacy/representation work; community, which deals with initiatives directed towards people part of a specific ethnic/interest group and sheds light on the multitude and diversity of civil society; faith, which brings back one neglected area and source for place based leadership, which is the role of religion.

1 The complex relationship between place-based local leadership and non-local external leadership
2 and the power dynamics among civil society and government are key issues, either apparent or
3 immanent, in all the papers, calling for more critical studies on those elements. For example, as
4 Lough (2021) has highlighted, there is difference between leadership by local communities and
5 manufactured place-based leadership by governmental forces.

6 Finally, all the papers conclude that third sector and civil society in their multiple roles have a
7 comparative advantage in providing a social infrastructure made up of, for example and amongst
8 the others, intermediation, representation, connection and bonding, that are fundamental to make
9 flourishing creativity, quality of life and human capital which are at the root of economic competitive
10 advantage (Feiock, Moon, & Park, 2008). Moreover, a tension, which is not new in studies on third
11 sector, arises from a place-based leadership perspective too, that is how much the sector is
12 absorbed in doing things which provide public goods and services that are not provided by the State.
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16 **Concluding remarks**

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18 The origins of both civic and third sector leadership start from individuals who are motivated to
19 improve their living conditions in their neighbourhoods, towns and cities. Though they may invest
20 primarily in efforts for their benefit, such civic leadership activities have high positive externalities
21 for neighbours. Moreover, generally speaking it is accepted that local activists know the local needs
22 very well. The knowledge of people's actual needs (or social problems to be solved) is a crucial
23 aspect for successful design and implementation of any public policy (OECD, 2001).
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27 In this respect, as Guthey et al. have noted "a shift towards place-based thinking may lead to
28 scholarly research and management practices that deal more effectively – at local levels – with such
29 thorny issues such as social justice, global climate change, alternative energy and economic
30 inequality to name but a few" (Guthey, Whiteman, & Elmes, 2014, p. 262).
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33 Place is one key element of our multiple overlapping identities. We believe the concept of place
34 should be taken more seriously in understanding and explaining the activities of the third sector and
35 more broadly of civil society. For example, the idea of meaningful experience(s) is one of the key
36 constructs of the concept of place (Agnew, 2016). In this respect, it is through the act of taking care
37 of the place and its communities, wherein the experience of the third sector and of civil society is
38 often initiated, legitimised and nurtured. Thus, adding the meaningful experience(s) and the place
39 lenses to interrogate examples of contemporary leadership is particularly illuminating, especially to
40 describe, understand, explore and explain dynamics of leadership within and across the third sector
41 and civil society.
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45 Although the papers published in this themed issue shows the role of the third sector leaders as
46 important and positive for local development, we are also aware of limits of this concept. The third
47 sector leadership discussed in the papers usually focuses on local issues and does not cross the
48 boundaries of a locally demarcated area (for instance neighbourhoods, urban districts, cities, or
49 micro regions). Future research should question the instrumental role of the third sector and civil
50 society to enable place-based leadership as a tool for economic development, and critically review
51 that perspective. For example, civil society leaders may well harness the potential of place to
52 generate meaningful experiences with an inclusive rather than exclusive purpose - but our empirical
53 grasp of such phenomena is limited.
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57 Future studies might also deal with the issue of power in the relationships occurring among third
58 sector, business and the state. However, this requires moving from a sectoral perspective towards
59 complex interactions that cut across sectors (Dekker & Evers, 2009) and towards a better
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recognition of the role of public purpose and place at all its levels (Jackson, Nicoll, & Roy, 2018), from the neighbours to the planet, such as for example in the fight against climate change.

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ⁱ In this article, we use the terms place-based leadership and place leadership interchangeably.

ⁱⁱ Some definitions of place-based leadership have been attempted by Stough (2010) and Hambleton (2015). The first speaks about place-based leadership as 'the tendency of the community to collaborate across sectors in a sustained, purposeful manner to enhance the economic performance or economic environment of its region' (Stough, 2010, p. 177). Hambleton (2014) defines place-based leadership by contrast explaining that place-less leadership is a leadership that is not concerned with the impact and consequences of its decisions on places and communities.

January 5th, 2021

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3 To whom it may concern,
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7 Please find enclosed our manuscript entitled '**Place Leadership and the role of Third Sector**
8 **and Civil Society**', by Oto Potluka, Alessandro Sancino, John Diamond and James Rees, which
9 we would like to submit for publication as an editorial to the themed issue on Non-profit
10 leadership in local and regional development in the journal Voluntary Sector Review.
11

12 Only relatively recently, place leadership has become an important debate in the leadership
13 studies and public administration literatures. From a place leadership perspective, there is
14 clearly a potential role for third sector organisations (TSOs) and the voluntary engagement
15 that citizens can play for places through different activities, such as for example social
16 innovation, public services provision, civic engagement, advocacy, enhancement of the quality
17 of life, strengthening of social bonds and social cohesion. However, the topic of civil society
18 and TSOs is still neglected in research and public policy debates on place-based leadership.
19 Our themed issue aims at filling this gap.
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22 We believe our themed issue would appeal to a broad audience, such as the readership of the
23 Voluntary Sector Review, as a wide-reaching journal publishing original research on non-profit
24 organizations and voluntary engagement.
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27 We confirm that this manuscript has not been published elsewhere and is not under
28 consideration by another journal. All authors have approved the manuscript and agreed with
29 submission to the Voluntary Sector Review. We have read and have abided by the statement
30 of ethical standards for manuscripts submitted to the Voluntary Sector Review. The authors
31 declare that there is no conflict of interest.
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37 Yours sincerely

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39 Oto Potluka
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