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Civic leadership for a transformative social economy

A comparison of city leadership constellations in Italy and the UK

Alessandro Sancino, Michela Pagani, Luigi Corvo, Alessandro Braga, and Fulvio Scognamiglio

Introduction

The concept of social economy comprises multiple actors engaging in processes of value (co)creation ultimately related to addressing human welfare needs and the common good while promoting economic, societal, and environmental value (Krlev et al., 2021). It is now well recognized that the social economy is a driver of societal innovation and institutional resilience, and can generate superior economic value, blended with environmental and social value (e.g. Krlev, 2022; Bengo et al., 2022).

Much has been written about partnerships among the social economy, citizens, the for-profit sector, and the public sector (Bryson, Crosby, & Stone, 2015). However, we know less about *how* such partnerships can enhance public, social, and shared value (e.g., Andrews & Entwistle, 2010; Cabral et al., 2019; Sancino, 2016). Hueske, Willems, and Hockerts (this volume) have dealt with how processes of citizen engagement may improve the legitimacy of social economy activities, in particular their innovations, and how these can be more tailored to the needs of target groups. Carter and Ball (this volume) have clearly highlighted the role of cross-sectoral partnerships, and in particular of formal relational contracting between the social economy and the public sector, as a way to develop a modern function of public procurement for tackling long-standing and entrenched social challenges. We take a middle position in reference to these contributions, in several regards.

First, in this chapter, we focus on the role of civic leadership as an open, either formal or informal agency that can serve the same purpose of promoting coalitions for progress on social challenges. We use the terms of civic leadership to provide a strong local or regional component of distributed leadership for a given place-based geographical context, while, as we explain later, we consider city leadership as the system of city leaders where city leaders are identified from a positional and reputational

perspective. So, city leadership may overlap with civic leadership, but it might also refer to other endeavours too. Second, we consider the public, private, and community/social spheres in combination and look at networks within these spheres as well as connections among them. Third, we adopt a place-based perspective that takes special account of such constellations at the local level.

Specifically, we present an explorative study conducted in two mid-sized cities, one in Italy (Padua) and one in the UK (Peterborough), which aimed at identifying what we call city leaders in inclusive local development. By city leaders, we mean those actors that make things happen at the local level and that have a reputational recognition in one or more of the four main domains of urban governance, namely: political/democratic; public services; business environment; community/social domain. The theoretical consideration and intellectual curiosity behind this study were the following: based on previous research, we are aware that we need multi-stakeholder partnerships and coalitions of civic-minded leaders—who are city leaders? And how could they be engaged in such collaborative governance arrangements? As we show in the next sections, understanding who city leaders are is not a trivial question.

The chapter proceeds as follows. The next section presents the theoretical framework, whereby civic leadership is framed not as a position but as a willingness to take positive agency for a given place or local environment. The third section describes the methodology of the research conducted. The fourth section highlights the findings. The fifth and final section provides reflections on what this means for the role of the social economy in civic and local leadership as well as partnerships.

What is civic leadership and why does it matter for the social economy?

Civic leadership is a form of leadership that starts from a position and role as an active citizen (in the sense of those taking on stewardship for communal issues), attached to a place (both emotionally and/or physically), that from there can originate leadership dynamics directed at making certain things happen. Some examples of civic leadership are individual citizens who organize groups to clean up cities or organize events, but also (social) entrepreneurs and/or organizations who produce social and shared value, public service professionals who solve collective problems, and people working in any role in public institutions who develop processes aimed at public value generation. We usually look at leadership thinking that it is only about formal leaders in positions of power, and consider it mainly in terms of success in business and/or politics, but leadership today is a more complex and distributed phenomenon, precisely because power is multi-dimensional, dispersed across various actors and segments of society, and contextual according to the instances at stake (Battilana & Casciaro, 2021). To provide a concrete example, civic leadership is not just about the formal institutional and political leadership functions in a place, and may be exercised by any individual and/or organizational actor pertaining to any sector as long

as the intention and effects of those leadership interventions are aimed at generating public, social, and/or shared value for a given place (Sancino, 2016). Research on leadership in and of places has bloomed recently (Beer et al., 2019; Collinge, Gibney, & Mabey, 2010; Grint & Holt, 2011; Jackson, 2019; Rapoport et al., 2019; Ropo, Sauer, & Salovaara, 2013), with the aim of delving into the mutual influence of place and leadership and the various forms that place-based leadership can take.

Place is ‘a meaningful site that combines location, locale, and sense of place’ (Agnew, 1987) and a combination of ‘materiality, meaning and practice’ (Cresswell, 2014) which provides a unique configuration of social relations and culture. Place and the feelings of attachment people have to their place are important resources for those seeking to engage in civic leadership processes (Hambleton, 2019). Two elements are widely acknowledged in this respect. First, civic leadership is exercised by both formal and informal leaders, who may belong to any sphere (or sector) of the governance system (Ayres, 2014; Beer et al., 2019; Budd et al., 2017; Hambleton, 2014; Sotarauta, 2016; Sotarauta & Beer, 2017). Second, collective action and collaboration among these leaders are essential for implementing an effective place-based leadership (Jackson, 2019), in line with the recent rise and spread of studies and theories on cross-sector collaboration (Crosby & Bryson, 2005), collective leadership (Ospina, 2017), and multi-actor governance (Bryson et al., 2017; Craps et al., 2019).

Different approaches to conceptualize civic leadership

Several scholars have identified different domains (or realms or arenas) from which civic leadership originates and is co-exercised. In particular, three frameworks should be taken into consideration: the Public Leadership framework developed by ‘t Hart (2014; ‘t Hart & Tummers, 2019); the New Civic Leadership Framework, developed by Hambleton (2015); and the City Leadership Framework, developed by Budd and Sancino (Budd & Sancino, 2016; Budd et al., 2017).

Table 14.1 below summarizes and compares the domains identified in each framework.

As can be noticed, all frameworks give an important role to political leadership and managerial/professional/administrative leadership (that is, the leadership of the public sector and public service delivery). The main difference among the three frameworks lies in the recognition of the leadership by society, namely the leadership that emerges outside government. In fact, the public leadership framework (‘t Hart, 2014; ‘t Hart & Tummers, 2019) puts this domain of leadership under the broad term of civic leadership, whereas the other two frameworks differentiate it into two or three different arenas, using different terminology to identify the same sub-group of city leaders (i.e., community leadership and civic leadership). In this chapter we refer to civic leadership in its expansive meaning; in other words, we consider civic leadership as making a difference for a given place moving from the assumption that this endeavour may be undertaken from political/democratic arenas, from public services arenas, from business arenas, and from social/community arenas—that is, from

Table 14.1 Three perspectives on domains that define leadership with relevance to collaboration at the local level

Public leadership (’t Hart, 2014; ’t Hart & Tummers, 2019)	New civic leadership (Hambleton, 2014, 2015)	City leadership (Budd & Sancino, 2016; Budd et al., 2017)
3 spheres:	5 realms:	4 arenas:
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Political leadership 2. Administrative leadership 3. Civic leadership 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Political leadership 2. Managerial/ Professional leadership 3. Community leadership 4. Business leadership 5. Trade union leadership 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Political leadership 2. Managerial leadership 3. Business leadership 4. Civic leadership

any relational setting where city governance unfolds, as long as at the centre of those leadership interventions there is the intention of improving place-based conditions and generating public, social, and/or shared value in a given place. Thus, readapting from the work of Budd and Sancino, we consider civic leadership as comprising four main governance arenas:

- the political/democratic arena, which deals with the democratic processes and institutional decision-making affecting a city and its citizens;
- the managerial/public services arena, which deals with the public services designed and delivered within a city (e.g., housing, healthcare, education, regeneration, leisure, etc.);
- the business arena, which deals with the processes of (co-)creation of value provided by the private sector;
- the community/social arena, which deals with all the processes provided by the community, the social economy, and all actors operating outside the traditional realms of the public and private sectors.

We use this framework to better understand what governance arenas in different cities look like, who is leading in them, and how separation and collaboration between arenas may matter. In this, we take particular account of the role of the social economy in potentially leading and partnering across arenas.

Box 1 The origins of city leadership in the academic debate

The idea of a plurality of actors who influence (and hence lead) the city and its community has a long history. Hunter (1953) was one of the first to ask ‘who runs the

continued

Box 1 Continued

community?’ by examining the leadership of a US city through the power structures of its community. Rosen (1954, p. 950) excellently summarized the central argument: If the problems which confront individuals and groups in a community are to be dealt with democratically and effectively, can this be done when the citizens are not even aware of who the real leaders of the community are and how they are selected? In this respect, Hunter found that forty out of the half-billion citizens of the investigated city were top city leaders who ‘have a virtual monopoly of big decision-making for the entire community’ (Smith, 1954). Also, most of these leaders were businessmen and the decision-making processes among these leaders were generally hidden and unknown to the public.

A similar research purpose was at the basis of Dahl’s work *Who Governs?* (2005, first published in 1961). Indeed, like Hunter, Dahl investigated the power structure of a US city, finding that city leadership was actually exercised by elected politicians as well as by other types of actors, in particular entrepreneurs and businessmen. This latter point was also supported by Yager (1963), who distinguished four other potential sources of city leadership:

1. Economic groups, which provided the greatest political leadership;
2. The press;
3. Minorities, because of ‘the control they can exercise in close elections’;
4. Mugwumps, namely ‘independent, political, citizen-action groups’.

Summing up, it is clear that city leadership has been understood as a pluralistic and cross-sector form of leadership since the very beginning of its investigation.

Analytic strategy for identifying leaders

According to the literature, the identification of city leaders may result from four main complementary approaches:

- a positional approach, which identifies leaders according to their formal position or office (Bonjean & Olson, 1964);
- an intrapersonal approach, which identifies leaders according to the self-evaluation of leaders themselves (Epitropaki et al., 2017);
- a reputational approach, which identifies leaders according to the evaluation of others, such as followers, the team, and/or the group (Bonjean & Olson, 1964; Epitropaki et al., 2017);
- a decisional approach, which identifies leaders according to leaders’ actions during decision-making processes (Bonjean & Olson, 1964).

For example, Hunter (1953) applied a positional approach, Dahl (2005) a decisional one, and Rapoport et al. (2019) a reputational one from an expert's standpoint.

In this study, our identification of city leaders was based on a combination of the positional and the reputational approaches to leadership (Bonjean & Olson, 1964; Epitropaki et al., 2017). This means that city leaders were identified first according to the formal position they hold and then according to other participants' evaluation. In particular, city leaders were considered both as leaders and as followers of other leaders (e.g., Kellerman, 2012; Uhl-Bien et al., 2014), and this follower–leader relationship was at the basis of the data collection, analysis, and visualization.

Methodology

This study is based on a multi-site (e.g., Bishop, 2012) mixed-methods (e.g., Creswell & Plano Clark, 2017; Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004; Stentz et al., 2012) research design conducted in two comparable cities, one in Italy (Padova, Padua in English) and one in the United Kingdom (Peterborough).

Research setting

A city is considered in this study as a human settlement characterized by a certain size in population and/or density, and by specific governmental, socio-economic, and cultural attributes. In this respect, each city is potentially both a unique and a typical case (Bryman, 2011; Yin, 2009). This means that each city is potentially both an extreme case (namely, a very different case from others) and an average case (namely, a case that is very similar to others), depending on the focus of the analysis and the researcher's perspective. Accordingly, an 'area of homogeneity' was delineated, namely, a population of cities that shares sufficient similar background characteristics and from which specific cities could then be purposively identified. In particular, the following criteria were considered to select the two investigated cities.

National context

Cities are embedded in the national context in which they are located even if engaged in multi-level governance dynamics (e.g., Acuto, 2016). In fact, the national context remains a key parameter in comparative analysis, albeit it 'can both influence and at the same time be irrelevant in shaping city leadership patterns' (Budd et al., 2017, p. 332). To further develop this idea of both significance and insignificance of the national context over city leadership, the countries were selected by building on the results of previous work on city leadership (Budd et al., 2017; Budd & Sancino, 2016). The chosen countries were Italy and the UK.

City dimension

There is a tendency to focus city-based studies on large cities (e.g., New York, London, etc.), despite growing recognition of the crucial yet vulnerable role played by medium-sized ones. They are likely to be intermediary cities, namely ‘cities that generally play a primary role in connecting important rural and urban areas to basic facilities and services’ (Roberts et al., 2016, p. 134), and hence to contribute strongly to regional and national wellbeing (Serrano-López et al., 2019). On the other hand, their vulnerabilities ‘are being underestimated compared to those of megacities for four reasons: limited data, political power, personnel and resources’ (Birkmann et al., 2016, p. 606). Accepting the call to focus more on this type of city (Birkmann et al., 2016; Eurotowns, 2019), we based our investigation on two medium-sized cities. Drawing upon the four leading classifications of medium-sized cities (Dijkstra & Poelman, 2012; Eurotowns, 2019; OECD, 2020; Roberts et al., 2016), we decided to focus on cities with a population of around 200,000 inhabitants.

Political continuity and minimization of bias

Data for this study were collected mainly in 2018–2019. For data quality reasons we selected cities where no local political elections were planned in 2018 due to the end of councillors’ terms. Preference was given to cities to which we had no special accessibility and of which we had no prior knowledge (either theoretical or field knowledge). As a result of this procedure, Padua (Italy) and Peterborough (UK) were selected as research sites. For more information about the cities of Padua and Peterborough please see the Appendix.

Research strategy

Participants in the study were city leaders or key city actors who were selected by combining two sampling techniques based on two leader identification approaches (see Pagani et al., 2021). First, an extensive online desk analysis (e.g., Hewson et al., 2016) based on a positional approach to leader identification (Bonjean & Olson, 1964) was used to select potential participants. In other words, formal city leaders were identified, namely those who formally hold a top management position or who are commonly recognized as leaders (e.g., the leader of the council or the mayor, the deputy mayor, top managers at the town hall and of public organizations, CEOs of businesses and voluntary-sector organizations). Second, participants’ responses were used to identify and recruit further potential participants, in line with a snowball sampling strategy based on a reputational approach to leader identification (Bonjean & Olson, 1964; Epitropaki et al., 2017). Moreover, we attempted to involve city leaders belonging to all four governance arenas characterizing our framework, to guarantee a multi-perspective examination of city leadership. As a result of the sampling process, sixty-six participants contributed to

Table 14.2 Number of participants classified per city governance arenas and city

City governance arena	Padua (Italy)	Peterborough (UK)
Political leaders	15	6
Managerial leaders	8	7
Business leaders	2	7
Community/social leaders	12	9
Total	37	29

the study—thirty-seven in Padua (Italy) and twenty-nine in Peterborough (UK)—as shown in Table 14.2.

Data collection, data analysis, and data visualization

Data were collected through an online questionnaire and semi-structured interviews and triangulated with focus groups. More specifically, participants (i.e. city leaders) have been asked to name at least three important leaders in each of the four governance arenas which are part of our framework. The questions asked were:

In your opinion, who are the most important

1. political leaders in your city today?
2. managerial leaders in your city today?
3. business leaders in your city today?
4. leaders of civil society in your city today?

Participants were provided with the definition of each governance arena as above reported and they had the possibility to answer in any way they wanted (i.e., giving names, formal positions, organizations, groups, etc.); the only request was that they were sufficiently specific and clear that the named leaders could have been easily identified and, possibly, involved in the study. This generated a whole variety of answers, according to participants' perceptions and conceptualizations of leadership and leaders.

A qualitative approach to Social Network Analysis (SNA) (Hollstein, 2014) and network visualization (e.g., Withall, Phillips, & Parish, 2007) was taken to explore data and to identify city leaders. This means that we applied SNA to identify leaders (actors or nodes, according to SNA's terminology) and not to investigate the more common network characteristics (e.g., density, centrality, and so on: Borgatti, Brass, & Labianca, 2009; Scott & Carrington, 2014), as this would have gone beyond the purpose of our study and would not allow the in-depth richness of analysis that was

required to understand not only leadership positions, but also roles and interlinkages between arenas.

More specifically, we began the analysis process by tidying up and preparing the datasets (one for each city) to be imported in Gephi, the network visualization software (Bastian, Heymann, & Jacomy, 2009), for the analysis and graphical representation of data. In particular, first, we integrated the datasets with missing details, where participants had provided insufficient information to identify the named city leaders. Second, we aggregated city leaders according to the available details to limit the dispersion of replies. In other words, in line with multi-level network analysis (Lazega & Snijders, 2015), when different participants named the same leader in different ways (e.g., a) Gillian Beasley; b) CEO of Peterborough City Council; c) Gillian Beasley, CEO of Peterborough City Council—PCC), we aggregated all similar nodes under a unique appellation which could appropriately define the node (e.g., in the previous example, Gillian Beasley, CEO of PCC). This enabled us to reduce the number of network nodes and produced a more effective network analysis and visualization. Then, we classified each identified city leader according to their governance arena. This was one of the most challenging steps because different people might have different perceptions of the functions played by some city leaders. Finally, an ID was assigned to each identified city leader, as required by Gephi.

At this point, we drew the network to support our analysis and reply to our research question (Grandjean, 2015). Every city leader identified by the participants became a specific node in the network visualization and the size of each node resulted from the number of times it was named by different participants. In other words, the larger nodes in the network were the ones mentioned more often by participants. We decided how to display and colour the nodes (i.e., city leaders) according to two elements: first, the governance arena to which they belong; second, their categorization, in order to group together similar ones (e.g., all councillors are grouped together). These groupings are shown with dashed circles around the similar nodes, whereas dotted circles enclose the nodes which represent the same organization (e.g., the organization and its CEO). Groupings of nodes within a governance arena in Figures 14.1 and 14.2 were made to ease readability and comparisons.

Once the network visualization was completed, to focus on the key city leaders of the two investigated cities, we took into consideration only the ones who were named by at least three participants, hiding all other elements of the network. In very general terms, it can be said that to be considered someone's leader it is necessary to have at least one follower, but in terms of influence and capability to mobilize a city and its community, the one-follower criterion is highly questionable and would provide a very dispersed picture of city leadership. The three-mention threshold which we applied for data analysis and visualization seemed reasonable and enabled a better analysis, providing a variegated account of city leadership, but also allowing a focus on city leaders recognized as such by a group of participants.

Finally, the qualitative material collected at the end of the questionnaire or during the interviews was examined, to go deeper into the analysis.

Focus groups

Two focus groups were organized, one in each city, to validate preliminary findings and expand the data collected throughout the study. All participants who expressed their interest (and hence consent) were invited to these initiatives, which in the end counted eight participants in Padua (Italy) and nine in Peterborough (UK).

Discussions during these initiatives were supported by handouts summarizing and representing the preliminary findings that emerged in both cities and hence allowing participants to compare them. More specifically, after a very brief explanation of the network visualization of the identified city leaders, participants were asked to take a minute to look at the representation and:

- raise any questions about Figures 14.1 and 14.2, in order for us to understand if they were easily understandable;
- discuss the network visualizations, especially about the classification of nodes within each city governance arena;
- express their opinion on the representativeness of the network visualizations of the city they were part of.

The qualitative material that emerged from these initiatives was directly integrated with the data and material collected during the online questionnaires and interviews, and it was used to improve the graphical representations and the formulation of findings.

Findings

The overall analysis was conducted using a dataset of 518 entries for Padua (Italy) and 426 for Peterborough (UK), provided respectively by 37 participants in Padua and 29 in Peterborough. Entries represent the participants' leader–follower relationships, or ties using SNA terminology. However, given the decision to focus only on leaders named by at least three participants (as explained in the Methodology section), in total fifty-two city leaders were identified in Padua (see Figure 14.1) and forty-four in Peterborough (see Figure 14.2). The differences in data across the two cities are summarized in Table 14.3.

Looking at Figures 14.1 and 14.2 and at Table 14.3, it can be noticed that the numbers of identified city leaders are very similar. This enabled us to conduct a good comparison between the two cities, despite the expected contextual differences. Before delving into the findings of each governance arena, an important difference between the two cities can already be noticed by focusing on the top three city leaders who received most mentions by participants. Whereas in Padua the central role given to political leaders is evident (two out of the three top city leaders are political leaders, or PL), in Peterborough the situation is more balanced, with one managerial leader, one political leader, and one business leader.

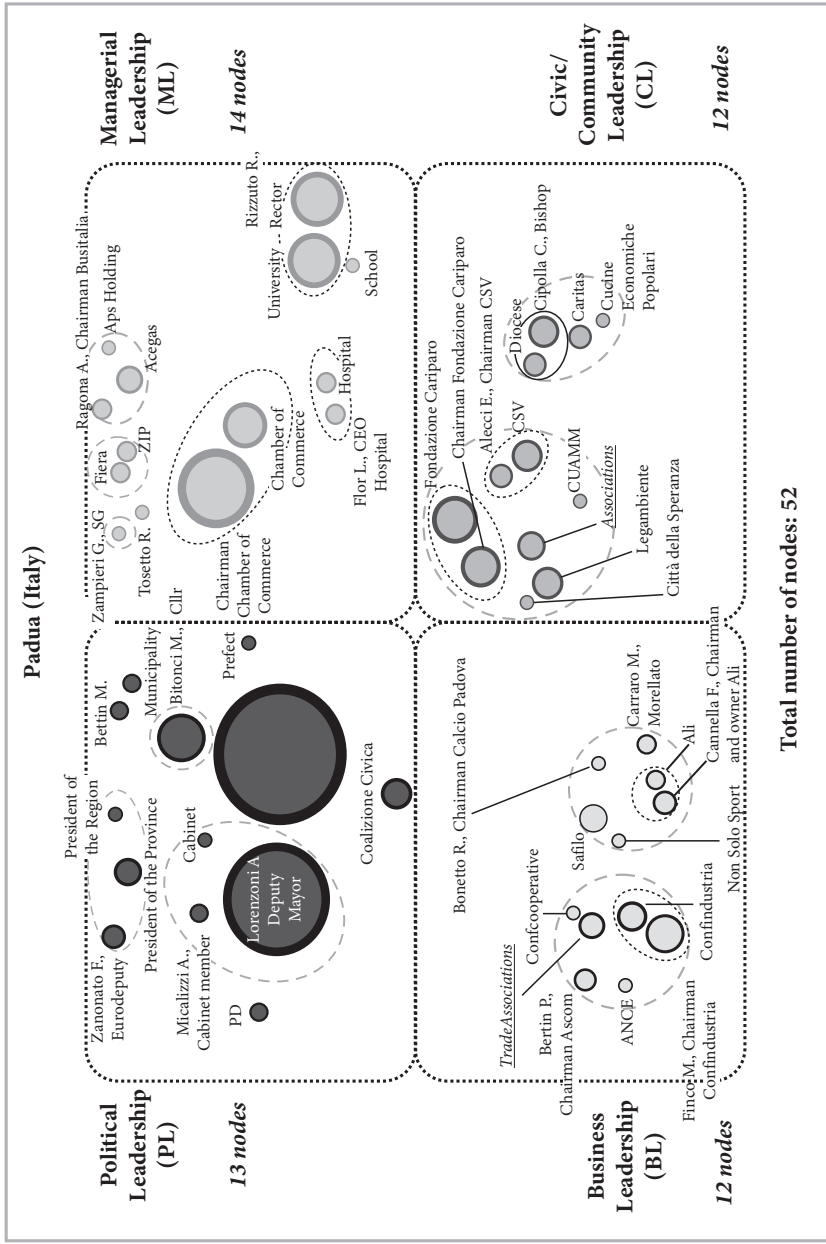


Figure 14.1 The city leader network of Padua (Italy)

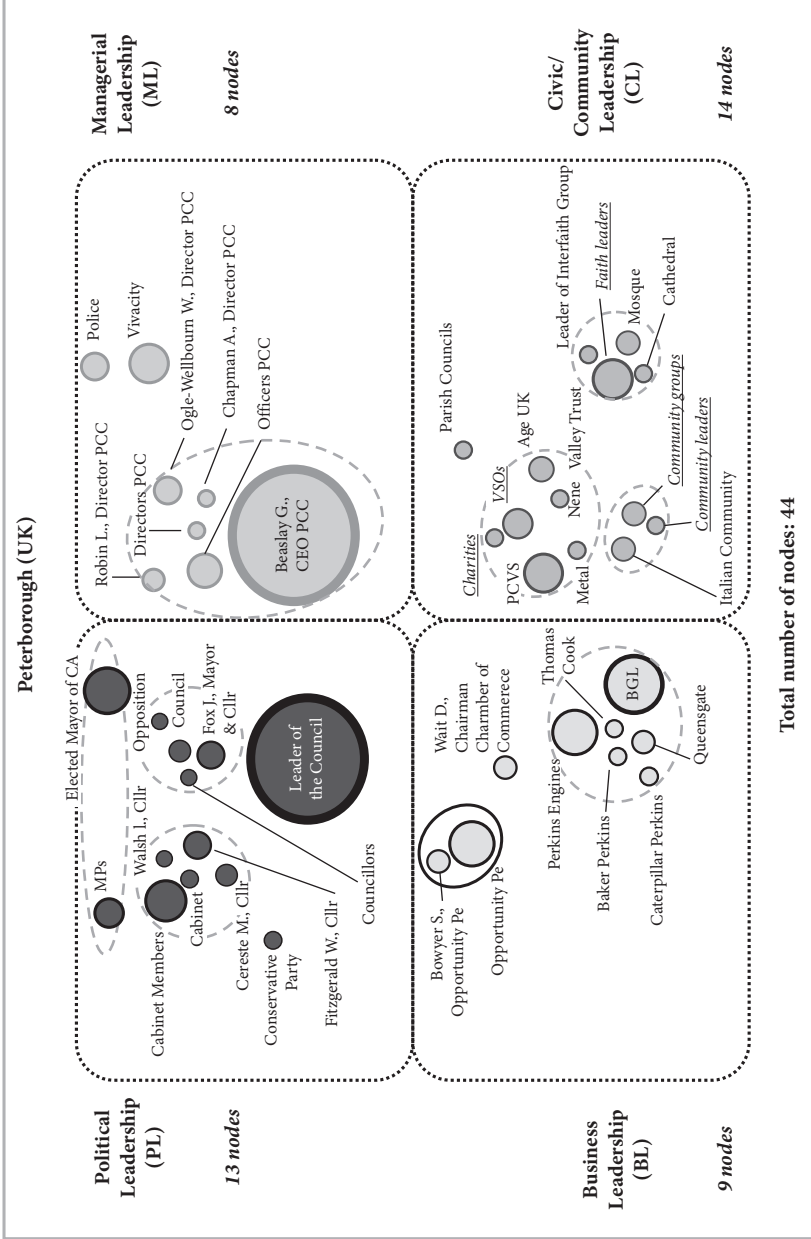


Figure 14.2 The city leader network of Peterborough (UK)

Table 14.3 Differences in city leaders' identification between the two cities

	Padua (Italy)	Peterborough (UK)
No of entries (participants' leader–follower relationships/ties)	518	426
No of nodes in potential CLN (all participants' replies)	204	200
No of nodes in CLN (with more than 3 mentions)	52	44
Top three city leaders	Mayor (PL; 32 mentions); Deputy Mayor (PL; 26 mentions); Chairman of Chamber of Commerce (ML, 18 mentions).	CEO Peterborough City Council—PCC (ML, 24 mentions); Leader of the council (PL, 22 mentions); BGL Group—financial services company (BL, 10 mentions).

Legend: PL = Political Leader; ML = Managerial Leader; BL = Business Leader

Political leaders

In both cities, the analysis focused on thirteen political leaders, mentioned at least three times. As was expected, the identification of the political leaders in the two cities depends on the context in which they enact their role, and hence are obviously different. However, interesting similarities between the two cities can be observed, as Table 14.4 shows.

The dominant political role is recognized in both contexts as being in the hands of the political figureheads of the cities: the mayor (in Padua) and the leader of the council (in Peterborough). The main differences between the two is that the former is directly elected by citizens, whereas the second is elected by councillors. What is surprising is the dominant political role given to the deputy mayor of Padua, who was mentioned almost as many times as the mayor. One interviewee (Pa33_ML) commented that they represent 'two souls of the same political coalition', and hence both have a strong influence.

As regards Peterborough, the second influential PL—mentioned by eight participants and hence far less than the first one—is the elected mayor of the combined authority. According to the UK Local Government Association, a combined authority (CA) is a legal body set up using national legislation that enables a group of two or more councils to collaborate and take collective decisions across council boundaries. It is established by the Parliament; it is locally owned and requires both the initiative and the support of the councils involved.

Table 14.4 Comparison of types of political leaders identified in the two cities

Type of political leader	Padua	Peterborough
Dominant role	Mayor + Deputy Mayor	Leader of the Council
Cabinet	✓	✓
Council	✓	✓
Representatives of higher levels of government	✓	✓
Party with political majority	✓	✓

As one interviewee commented:

The most important political leader in Peterborough is not in Peterborough. It's the Mayor, it's the Combined Authority Mayor . . . The political leadership has shifted to wherever his offices are at the moment . . . And you can walk down the street and not one person you ask would know that position even exists. Let alone who the occupier of the position is.

(Pe20-BL)

Another interviewee noted: 'He is very influential as he can get things done . . . he has a lot of money to allocate to projects' (Pe19-CL). However, his influence is not always seen positively, given the fact that the elected mayor of the combined authority represents the region and therefore a higher level of government and a larger territory, which also includes Cambridge. For example, one interviewee reported: 'The Metro Mayor has pulled the centre of gravity to Cambridge and we are just the periphery' (Pe20-BL). Another interviewee remarked that politicians in the region, who influence Peterborough because it is located in the region, 'play a part in that, but is not foremost in their thought' (Pe27-BL).

An interesting difference between the two cities concerns the role of city councillors. In Padua this role is represented by only one actor (Massimo Bitonci, former mayor and leader of the local division of the Northern League), and in Peterborough by four actors.

A surprising finding is the identification of Massimo Bettin, the mayor's spokesman, as a PL of Padua.

Finally, it is also important to remark that, whereas in Italy there is only one established political governance model that can be operated, UK's local governments can decide which local government structure and political governance model to adopt. Therefore, whereas there are some similarities between the two investigated cities because of the similar governance model (both based on a Cabinet executive), more

differences could be observed between Peterborough and other English cities that, for example, operate on a committee governance model.

Managerial leaders

The analysis focused on fourteen managerial leaders in Padua and eight in Peterborough. In contrast to the findings related to the political/democratic arena, the identified managerial leaders of the two investigated cities are very disparate (see Table 14.5).

Two main types of managerial leaders have been identified in both cities, namely public services providers and managers working for the council/municipality, but with a very different degree of influence in each city. Public services providers in the Italian case are represented by three organizations with different functions (i.e., transport and multi-utility), whereas in the English case only one public service provider was recognized as a leader, namely Vivacity, a not-for-profit organization that manages several culture and leisure facilities on behalf of Peterborough City Council. Conversely, with regard to managers working for the council/municipality, whereas in Padua this aspect of managerial leadership is perceived as having a very limited leadership role, in Peterborough its influence and importance within the managerial/public services arena is strongly visible in the network visualization, especially given the dominance of one actor: the CEO of Peterborough City Council (PCC), Gillian Beasley. She was recognized as a leader by almost all participants (24 out of 29). As an interviewee commented:

The person who manages the city, the most powerful one, without doubt, is the Chief Executive. And her name is Gillian Beasley. She is very good . . . she doesn't just manage the council, she manages the community . . . She is a political actor as well, although not elected.

(Pe11-PL)

Table 14.5 Comparison of types of managerial leaders identified in the two cities

Type of ML	Padua (Italy)	Peterborough (UK)
Dominant role	Chamber of Commerce + University	PCC CEO, Gillian Beasley
Chamber of Commerce	✓	
University	✓	
Hospital	✓	
Public corporations	✓	
Public Services Providers (PSP)	✓	✓
Municipality/City Council	✓	✓
Police		✓

Another interviewee said:

You may have come across Gillian Beasley, that is, the Chief Executive of the City Council; she has been here a long time and I think Gillian is very impressive and I think a lot of the things that we should take pride [in are] testimony [to] the visionary leadership that comes from the managerial class in the city.

(Pe20-BL)

Similarly, another interviewee described her as ‘probably one of the best city council CEOs in the country’ (Pe24-PL).

All other types of managerial leaders identified by participants are considered as such in one city but not in the other. In particular, two of them require brief comment: the Chamber of Commerce and the university. In Italy, both these organizations and their figureheads were recognized as highly influential. In the UK, the former is considered as a business organization and not a public sector one, and, in fact, participants identified it as a business leader. Peterborough does not have a university and this is considered a big limitation of the city, especially in comparison to its neighbour Cambridge.

Business leaders

The analysis focused on twelve business leaders in Padua and nine in Peterborough. In both cities the business leadership arena is quite dispersed, as shown in Table 14.6.

The more influential actors (the biggest nodes in Figure 14.1 and 14.2) received, respectively, nine (in Padua) and ten (in Peterborough) mentions, hence much fewer mentions than some political and managerial leaders. In fact, even though in both cities businesses have been recognized as influential, participants struggled, for several reasons, to identify specific ones which play a city leadership role. Participants were more inclined to recognize as business leaders the umbrella organizations that represent and are the voices of businesses of the local area.

The identification of these organizations seems to strongly depend on the local context. In Padua trade associations play this representative role and are perceived as hugely influential, in line with the national context, where these organizations are

Table 14.6 Comparison of types of business leaders identified in the two cities

Type of ML	Padua	Peterborough
Dominant role	//	//
Trade associations	✓	
Businesses	✓	✓
Opportunity Peterborough (economic development company fully owned by Peterborough city council)		✓
Chamber of Commerce		✓

largely involved in policy decision-making. In contrast, in the English city, Opportunity Peterborough exercises this key role. During the focus group in Peterborough, there was a brief discussion of the identified business leaders within the city. What stood out is that business leaders are probably not aware of or not interested in their civic leadership role. For example, one participant pointed out:

Look at the names that have been mentioned under the private sector. Most of those are absent in the leadership discussion in the city. So, the fact that they are mentioned is significant. When is the last time everybody met, apart from Queensgate, Thomas Cook, Perkins, Perkins . . . they're cited as important leaders in the city, but I don't see them.

(PeFG7-BL)

Another participant noticed:

Businesses rock up here because it is a good place to be based, because they can get cheap office accommodation and cheap housing for the work force, cheaper than in some other places around, but they don't sort of invest in the broader sense in the city and in the community.

(PeFG6-BL)

This BL approach to civic leadership was discussed also during the focus group in Padua. The following conversation was had:

PaFG3-CL: perhaps because there is a tendency to not participate in the civic life of the city, they're too busy on their personal things or there is no willingness to expose themselves.

PaFG6-ML: I think some sectors of society tend to self-reference and hence they tend to avoid facing projects like this, which put in discussion a system of relationships which is taken for granted or overlooked.

PaFG7-ML: Well, the economic sector in Veneto is poorly participative in these initiatives. Entrepreneurs are focused on activities, outcomes, and these research projects are treated with scepticism because either they bring profit to the company or they are ignored.

PaFG1-PL: Maybe the business sector considers research as something of little relevance. I almost feel like there is contempt for research as considered . . .

PaFG1-PL + PaFG3-CL: . . . a waste of time.

Community/social leaders

The analysis focused on twelve civil society leaders in Padua and fourteen in Peterborough. Similarly to business, in both cities the community/social arena is dispersed and lacks a dominant leader (see also Pagani et al., 2021 on this). In fact, the most-named actors received, respectively, eleven (in Padua) and seven (in Peterborough)

mentions, much fewer than were received by some political or managerial leaders. Also, despite the widely recognized important role played within and for the city, especially for the delivery of public services and as a voice for the community (Pagani et al., 2021), in both cities participants struggled to name specific civil society leaders, emphasizing the complexity and variegated nature of this leadership arena:

Pa27-ML: There are no key leaders, but a lot of leaders.

Pe25-PL: It's a very diverse, very confusing picture. And it's completely normal. But of course, if you ask me if I can name a few, it's quite difficult. My answer would be 'it depends'.

This suggests two different things. First, civil society actors might lack visibility despite their vital role in driving, for example, cohesion, solidarity, and care services in the city. They thus continue to operate largely under the radar and are not able to unfold a more encompassing transformational function. Second, the social economy might be community-grounded rather than individually grounded. This makes it much harder to name persons whom the consulted experts likely associate most with the word 'leader', despite our focus on leadership that takes account of actors across entire organizations. Grasping the social economy is furthermore complicated by its diversity, which emerges from the different types of leaders identified, which represent three very distinct spheres of society, as better described in a recently published paper (Pagani et al., 2021):

- the third or voluntary sector sphere, which includes all third sector and voluntary sector organizations, and charities. An exemplary quote well illustrates this sphere: 'You need the voluntary sector to deliver so many things because actually you as a city can't afford to deliver these things, so you need to stimulate and finance the voluntary sector to be out and deliver many services that you can't' (Pe11-PL);
- the faith sphere which includes all faith leaders and faith-based organizations;
- the community sphere, which includes community groups and associations, the neighbourhood, local authority/councillors, parish councils, and some people with no specified affiliation or role.

This nicely illustrates the multiplicity that the social economy comprises, which all chapters of this book demonstrate. However, and interestingly, whereas the first two spheres and leaders are observable in both cities, the latter is recognized only in Peterborough—likely because of the very ethnically diverse character of the city. So, we see that the social economy in Padua seems more formalized, whereas it is more grounded in civil society in Peterborough. This may be another source of variation in how strongly and clearly the social economy is recognized as exercising civic leaders and as partners and collaborators of actors in the other arenas: see Table 14.7 below.

Table 14.7 Comparison of types of civic/community leaders identified in the two cities

Type of ML	Padua	Peterborough
Dominant role	//	//
Third sector	✓	✓
Community groups		✓
Faith leaders and organizations	✓	✓

In the first two spheres, two further interesting elements emerge from comparison of the two cities. First, in both cities, a central actor within the civil/civic sphere is the umbrella organization for voluntary sector organizations, namely the Service Centre for Volunteering in Padua and the Peterborough Council for Voluntary Services in Peterborough. Second, the identified faith leaders clearly represent the different cultural and historical context of the two cities. Specifically, whereas in Padua there is a predominance of the Catholic Church, in Peterborough faith leadership is characterized by having different faiths within the city (in fact, participants mainly named faith leaders in general).

Emerging patterns of city leadership and implications for the social economy

Summing up, two main differences emerge from the findings. The first difference relates to where managerial leadership is perceived to be exercised: whereas in Padua it is identified outside of the municipality, mainly in the Chamber of Commerce and the university, in Peterborough it predominantly lies within the City Hall and, more specifically, in the hands of the CEO of the City Council.

The second difference is concerned with social/community leaders. In Peterborough participants recognized community leaders as relevant for their role in representing different publics, while in Padua a key role was assigned to social/community leaders mainly because of their contribution to sustaining public services, with a particularly important role assigned to a local philanthropic foundation. Consequently, and in the attempt to generalize these patterns to some other areas, it is relevant to point out two general risks, namely that some social economy actors might be invisible to city leadership dynamics if not engaged in formal governance processes (Sancino et al., 2021) and that in turn social economy dynamics might be manufactured ad hoc by more powerful actors (e.g., a philanthropic foundation and/or umbrella organizations) active in this field, with associated risks, but also potentially opportunities (Brandsen et al., 2017).

However, what is surprising is that, despite the differences between the two cities stemming from contextual factors, some interestingly similar patterns also emerged from the findings.

The first dimension are the different ways in which city leadership is perceived. The city leaders from the political/democratic and public services/managerial arenas were clearly identified by participants, and some dominant leaders were easily distinguished (e.g., the mayor and the Chamber of Commerce in Padua; the leader of the council and the PCC CEO in Peterborough). In contrast, participants struggled to identify city leaders from society, providing a more fragmented and dispersed picture of the business and social/community arenas.

Second, it is surprising how two cities of about 200,000 residents came to similar conclusions about the number of recognized city leaders (52 in Padua and 44 in Peterborough) distributed across the four governance arenas. This is an interesting finding, as it suggests that city leadership is quite clustered and condensed. For the social economy this may suggest that the spots to be taken to be recognized are few, so that those organizations would need to make a better job at becoming visible as important players. It might also suggest that the breadth of networks is limited and that collaboration across a diversity of actors (at least in a visible sense that is considered significant) to date is limited. This would undermine claims of multi-stakeholder involvement or mark a potential for collaborative action that is simply untapped, so that the evidence and the theoretical argumentation that progress against the sustainable development goals rests on partnerships are not acted on. This may be a new distinctive area of action and legitimation for social economy actors that is important to flesh out as one of the implications and contributions of this explorative study.

The social economy can indeed generate economic, social, and environmental value through the work of social enterprises, co-operatives, and innovative non-profit organizations. However, this value is somewhat limited when actors within the social economy are not recognized as pivotal to making a difference in places. The example of Padua is quite evident: without the local foundation, many opportunities for creating value might be missed or not considered by other city leaders. In this sense, it is important to develop a civic leadership within and with social economy actors (Macmillan & McLaren, 2012) in order to promote and spur effective collaborative and interactive governance arenas among all types of city leaders, while softening the borders between sectors (e.g., Sørensen & Torfing, 2019).

Conclusion: What does this mean for the social economy and for future research on collaboration in civic leadership?

In this chapter, we explored who are recognized as the city leaders in two mid-sized cities located in Europe (Padua in Italy and Peterborough in the UK), from a starting point that considered leadership as an open and dispersed function that can be potentially activated by any citizen and/or organizational stakeholder. We started off from the recognition of the importance of collaboration, cross-sectoral partnerships,

and collective agency which is place-based as indispensable to address ‘the current and future wellbeing of people, places and the planet relies [and] to resolve the grand and interconnected challenges set out in the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)’ (Boorman et al. 2023).

Our findings tested our framework about the city as an open platform for agency in four main governance arenas (political/democratic; managerial/public services; business; community/social domain) and revealed that this decentred vision of city leadership works in the eyes of the city leaders who participated in our study. However, it is important to point out that decentring leadership (Ayers et al., 2021) does not mean ignoring the power imbalances among actors and the cognitive bias about this understanding of leadership that still exist. Indeed, not unexpectedly, it was more difficult to identify city leaders in the social/community and in the business arenas. In the former, a relatively fragmented landscape emerged. In the latter, we noticed difficulty understanding the civic leadership role of businesses in both the cities.

Drawing from French (2021), we argue that civic leadership may rely on SDGs and place-based shared outcomes, and other symbolic signals, as organizing instruments where civic leadership becomes the function of purpose making, aligning and committing actors into broad coalitions towards ambitious goals that generate shared benefits for communities of people and for the environment (because of its place-based nature) (By, 2021). Differently from other forms of leadership that depart from hierarchical positions of authority, civic leadership is a form of leadership wherein the power to mobilize is potentially open to everybody and no central authority is necessarily needed—even if it might be needed at same points to scale up positive endeavours or to prevent the destruction of public, social, and/or shared value (Esposito et al., 2021). Thus, civic leadership may also be understood as the informal dynamics that bring together actors in coalitions, using place—in its symbolic and material features—both as a resource and as an outcome for civic leadership. However, it is important to note that at some points it might be desirable for civic leadership coalitions to be formally entrenched in collaborative governance institutional arrangements created ad hoc or embedded in existing institutions within the social economy or the public sector (Ansell & Torfing, 2021). What our results suggest, unfortunately, is that while there is some readiness to engage in civic leadership, there is still much work to do to build connections among civic leadership constellations and to make the social economy more visible.

We believe that opening up our cognitive understanding and cultural legitimation of civic leadership as a vocation, calling everybody to act in support of collective place-based goals, may contribute to favouring a conceptualization of the social economy as an agent for social change (and not just a market or state-failures fixer), which is one of the conceptualizations promoted in Part II of this book (see also Klev et al., this volume). Actors in the social economy may indeed take the identification of city leaders as a strategic resource to improve the positioning of their unique strategic capability as being the glue of communities (Rees et al., 2022). They may also do so to

develop a new strategic capability, namely to convene and to orchestrate in a creative way city leaders for the achievement of common place-based goals. The legitimacy of social economy actors toward this endeavour is generally high and well recognized by many stakeholders.

Social economy actors may also consider civic leadership as an engine for transformative social innovation in creating new type of ecosystems that are not only focused on economic, social, and environmental value creation, but that also might engage in power and democratic games that are required for transforming current institutions and for facilitating transitions of current economic and political models of modern governance towards a more civic economy (Chalmers, 2021). In this sense, further research may investigate at a macro level the specific mechanisms to be enacted by social economy actors to enhance the learning, replicability, and—if and where appropriate—scaling up of civic leadership ecosystems in different places, as well as the institutional arrangements and roles at the meso and micro levels to be played out by social economy actors to effectively activate, facilitate, and institutionalize civic partnerships addressing critical and timely challenges connected to sustainable development pathways.

Appendix 1: Main characteristics of the two investigated cities

Characteristics	Padua	Peterborough
Country	Italy	United Kingdom
Region	Veneto (North-East of Italy)	East of England, Cambridgeshire
Above-city government level	Province	Combined authority
Important nearby cities	Venice (30 km away) Milan (200 km away)	Cambridge (48 km away) London (120 km away)
Area	92.85 km ²	343 km ²
Population	211,316 inhabitants (end of 2019)	202,259 (estimated, 2019)
Density	2,275 inhabitants/km ²	589 inhabitants/km ²
Described as	Artistic and religious city	Heritage and fast-growing city with a very diverse community
Political governance model	Strong mayor, Cabinet and council	Council leader and Cabinet
Last election	June 2017	May 2016
Incumbent political leader	Sergio Giordani, mayor (left-leaning independent)	Cllr John Holdich OBE (Conservative)
Cabinet members	10 (incl. mayor and deputy mayor)	9

(Continued)

(Continued)

Characteristics	Padua	Peterborough
Councillors	32	60
Administrative tradition	Napoleonic/Southern Europe	Anglo-Saxon
Local government	Municipality	City council, unitary authority
Managerial/administrative head of local government	General manager (incumbent: Giovanni Zampieri)	CEO (incumbent: Gillian Beasley)
Other important PAs	CCIAA, local health units, university	Local police force, local health service
Important PCs/PSPs	AcegasApsAmga, APS Holding, Busitalia, DMO, Fondazione Irpea, Interporto, ZIP	Opportunity Peterborough, Vivacity
GDP (2018)	Veneto Region: 9% of Italian GDP Padua Province: 2% of Italian GDP and 20% of Veneto's one	East of England: 9% of UK GDP Peterborough: <1% of UK GDP and 4% of regional one
Active companies (2018)	20,730	6,840
Type of companies	Majority of micro-enterprises	Majority of micro-enterprises
Main sectors	Wholesale and retail trade; real estate; construction; accommodation and food sector	Business service activities; distribution, transport, accommodation and food; manufacturing
Most influential companies	Ali, Gottardo, Safilo, Acciaierie Venete	BGL Group, Coloplast, Perkins Engines
Unemployment rate (2019)	5.7% provincial average 5.6% regional average 10% national average	6.2% in Peterborough 3.3% regional average 3.8% national average
Civil society	European Volunteering Capital 2020	Community-focused
Organizations	2'135 association and social cooperatives (10 every 1,000 inhabitants)	347 general charities (1.8 every 1,000 inhabitants)
Main scope of intervention	Culture and environment, social and sport activities	Hard to delineate
Key organizations	CSV Padua Fondazione Cariparo	PCVS
Urban resilience policies	1. Resilient Padua. Guidelines for the creation of a plan for climate change adaptation (publication) 2. Plan and manage green areas as a means for urban resilience (conference title)	1. Responsibilities under the Civil Contingency Act 2004 2. 'Think Communities' project in collaboration with Cambridgeshire
Focus of urban resilience	Adaptation to climate change Infrastructure resilience	Community resilience

Source: Pagani, 2021

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