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A REPORT ON

A Regional Studies Association International Research Network Seminar

Linking Urban & City leadership: Making connections and identifying leadership needs

Co-convenors: Professor Joyce Liddle (University of Aix-Marseilles) Dr John Gibney (University of Birmingham); Professor Markku Sotarauta (University of Tampere); Professor Andrew Beer (University of South Australia); Professor John Shutt (Leeds Beckett), Dr Oto Potluka (Basel University, Switzerland); Professor John Diamond (Edge Hill)

Held over the 20th-21st October 2016 at the Institut de Management Gouvernance and Territoriale Gouvernance (IMPGT) Aix-Marseille Université, France, this most recent seminar was one in a series convened since 2010 by members of the Regional Studies Association's international research network on Leadership in Urban and Regional Development. The convenors are grateful to the all administrative staff at IMPGT for their support, in particular Gaelle Flouw for her excellent organization skills.

We concluded the last research network event held in the University of Birmingham in November 2015 with a series of questions that we wanted to explore in this event. Of particular importance was the question of the formal/publicly acknowledged roles and contributions assumed by individual leaders and groups as they lead urban and regional projects and places; everyday activities, motivations and relational dynamics embedded in processes of enactment of leadership; how different policy contexts shape (or frustrate/create barriers) to place leadership. We also hoped to further conceptual/definitional clarity in leadership research; bring together studies beyond the mainstream urban and regional studies, especially comparative cross-country and cross-scale research, and learn from examples of on-going 'action research' that is stimulating novel relationships between academics/policy-makers and practitioners. It is Important to tap into a growing body of work across a wide spectrum of research activities and build on the strengths of existing descriptive and narrative accounts of place leadership.

The aim was to continue to share research undertaken by an international community of scholars and develop critical reflections and make sense of the ever changing and often contested roles of leadership in urban and regional places. It was hoped to appreciate some of the broader changes impacting on place leadership and identify gaps in knowledge and understanding. The two day

gathering in Aix was attended by 25 participants, and the audience listened to informative, challenging and provocative papers from 14 speakers working on various sub-national leadership research in UK, France, The Netherlands, Finland, Switzerland, the Visegrad countries, Georgia, Italy and the USA. The convenors were encouraged to see that the event attracted some early career researchers attending their first research network event.

Following a warm welcome by the host **Professor Joyce Liddle**, the main event proper was preceded by a separate Round Table, held in collaboration with IMPGT and the International Research Symposium on Public Management (IRSPM), and chaired by **Professor John Diamond** (Edge Hill). The aim was to explore how academic researchers might bridge the gap between Universities and the worlds of policy and practice, and twelve attendees created a 'collaborative space' to share perspectives, as well as inform new ways of adopting novel approaches in bringing academics/practitioners together. A wide ranging discussion ensued on crossing academic and policy/practice boundaries; the construction and sharing of knowledge and the legitimacy of theory; cycles of action and reflection; transformation of practice; different models of partnership; professional learning; negotiating roles, complexities and accountabilities and sharing problems. Delegates also shared ideas on co-design, co-construction and co-production of research problems and how to remove important barriers to collaborative learning.

This pre-event was an excellent precursor to the first rate presentations that followed. Contributions constituted a good balance between theoretical and empirical research papers drawn from the countries mentioned earlier. Moreover, after each paper the programme had sufficient time built in to facilitate broad discussion and lively debate. On day one, the first set of papers included a theoretical paper on place leadership and the social contract from **Martin Quinn** (Leicester, UK), followed by **John Gibney** (Birmingham, UK) and **Alyson Nicholds** (Coventry, UK) talking about re-imagining leadership as an emancipatory enterprise. The final paper in this session by **Joyce Liddle** (Aix-Marseille) used paradoxical leadership to provoke an understanding of pre-referendum and post-Brexit changes in the UK. The second session included contributions on leadership in central Europe (**Oto Potluka, Judit Kalman, Ida Musialkowska, Piotr. Idczak**, Switzerland and Visegrad Universities); two separate academic and practitioner papers from Georgia (**Giorgi Vashakidze**, IDHEAP and **Katie Gomelauri**, Innovations and Reforms Centre, Georgia), and then **Martiene Grootens** (Tartu, Estonia) examined a comparative place leadership project in the Netherlands and Estonia.

In the first session of day two, **Markku Sotarauta** and **Nina Suvinen** (Tampere, Finland) examined Institutional agency and leadership within a science based industry, then **David Smith, Will Rossiter, Daniel Mc Donald Junior, Michael Ehret**, (Nottingham Trent, UK) examined urban leadership in the Post Industrial City. In the second session **Leslie Budd** and **Alessandro Sancino** (Open University, UK) compared city leadership patterns in sport across five European Cities, then **Hugh Bartling** (Chicago, USA) used climate change to assess policy leadership in the suburbs. In the final session, two further UK papers considered whether Brexit will deliver

devolution through the Northern Powerhouse, West Midlands Engine and the entrepreneurial governance of LEPs (**John Shutt**, Leeds, and **Gill Bentley**, Birmingham), whereas **Ania Ankowska** (Northumbria) examined the accountability question in governance in Greater Manchester, through Devo Manc.

After each presentations numerous discussions (which continued over tea and lunch breaks) allowed participants the opportunity to explore different conceptions and meanings of 'place leadership'; provoked discussion of the relative strengths and weaknesses of different theoretical and methodological approaches, and stimulated new international collaborations aimed at understanding, categorization and explaining sub-national leadership.

The aim of the seminar was achieved as it succeeded in bringing together an established international network of scholars keen to build an international community of learning, but it also attracted some early career researchers. In previous seminars we had discussed varieties of place leadership, in particular the experiences of multi-sectoral actors across multi-level jurisdictions/varied legal systems. We also identified how individual and institutional actors (formally and informally) mobilise resources, broker new power relationships, advocate new ways of working, and lead urban and regional change within periods of austerity. The limits and possibilities of place leadership are well rehearsed and generally well understood, but researchers need to develop new data bases of comparative place leadership and co-ordinate findings cross-nationally. We currently lack a clear appreciation of the cultural dimension and how place leadership in varied settings engages multiple types of actors and institutions. Significant questions remain on 'What links leadership together across multiple sectors governance levels?' and 'Who are the entrepreneurial leaders who navigate and lead innovative, divergent paths to change, by redesigning novel solutions within fluid spaces for action?'. Moreover, 'How do they capture the imagination, take risks and gain trust?' Clearly the visibility (or otherwise) and accessibility/accountability of leadership and whether or not it operates top-down or bottom up requires deeper investigation.

Areas of general common interest regarding future research and engagement activity that surfaced in these papers, and more broadly in the research seminar, included:

- Clearer thematic framing of place leadership, and identification of key variables for investigation and enquiry
- Identifying the missing ingredients that embed leadership, and link to resources, people, political/economic/social/administrative/environmental systems
- Linking adaptive capacities/power to policy streams of activities
- Gathering data bases of cross-national leadership in different cultures and coordination of findings
- Linking leadership in regional studies to social and political theories
- Different approaches to leadership drawn from other disciplines eg emancipatory, paradoxical, dynamic leadership (many others were highlighted during the event)

- Identifying the roles of individual leadership & institutional entrepreneurs/navigators who creating new rules of the game and redesign systems for achieving this
- Informing policy and practice-further developing the research network's engagement with policymakers and practitioners, in an action research for leadership enquiry or engaging with practitioners in the coproduction of knowledge.
- The learning surfaced from action research could contribute to improvements in leadership policy and practice, and inform the development of curricula and pedagogies relevant to future generations of urban and regional development leaders.

After all papers and discussion, the convenors facilitated a reflection on the two days' proceedings to assess the future direction of the RSA research Network and consider the timing and venue for the final event of this round of RSA funding. Participants also discussed the practical issues in producing a Special Edition of a journal with a selection of paper outputs from this seminar. A far reaching and wide discussion ensued, and a number of important directions for future research were highlighted.

The next research network seminar will be held either at Open University in Belfast or The Institute for Place Management, Manchester Metropolitan (both in UK) in Autumn 2017 or Spring 2018 where network members and other participants will continue collaborative discussions and reflections in this important field of enquiry.

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