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SYMPOSIUM

The Transformation of Urban Political Leadership in Western Europe

OLIVIER BORRAZ and PETER JOHN

In the two decades since the early 1980s, Western European local political executives and how they operate have changed, sometimes profoundly. Most notable has been the shift toward the direct election of mayors in a number of countries, such as Germany, Italy and Norway; and also England, when municipalities decide to. Along with stronger collegial bodies in some Nordic countries and the reinforced status of mayors in France and Spain, these phenomena suggest that reformers have promoted and adopted stronger styles of urban leadership and have sought to strengthen the local executive function.

Along with the identification of a trend, there are a number of hypotheses that may serve as explanations, which this article develops later, but which may be briefly mentioned at this point. The first considers strong leadership to be a functional response to the complex character of networks, interest groups and partners that city officials and politicians need to manage if they are to formulate and implement policies effectively. These horizontal structures are a reaction to the institutional fragmentation that characterizes urban politics at the beginning of the twenty-first century. The second is the 'New Political Culture', as advocated by Clark and his collaborators, whereby the new kind of political leadership reflects changing elite and citizen values (Clark and Hoffmann-Martinot, 1998). The third is a variant of the Europeanization argument whereby the move towards stronger forms of local leadership is seen as a response to the increasingly powerful European Union institutional framework and policies, which provide ideas, models and new standards for local elites. The fourth claim is that some sort of institutional mimetism or transfer has taken place, according to which different institutions adopt similar forms in order to achieve higher recognition and legitimacy from their citizens and in response to the concerns of policy-makers in higher levels of government. The four claims are not incompatible. In fact, they can complement each other and may reinforce the trend towards stronger local political leadership in Western Europe.

As the articles in this symposium demonstrate, these hypotheses do not seem to be confirmed fully by the experiences of the countries under study. The 'fragmentation thesis' seems to be more of a problem for the elites than a motive for institutional change. Rather than focusing on the success of 'new' leaders' owing to direct election, the authors insist on the difficulties they face when handling large and complex networks. They find it hard to deal with the many sets of issues in urban politics and to respond effectively to the plethora of local interest groups. The findings do not indicate that leaders correspond to the New Political Culture model either, even though there are some examples of this phenomenon. Nor is there much evidence of influence from the European Union, either directly through the Commission or indirectly through networks and standards. Mimetism counts, but it usually occurs inside a country, such as in Germany; it does not appear to be the driving force behind the transformation taking

place on a cross-national scale. In other words, even though the four initial claims should not be discarded, they do not offer a clear and simple explanation of the general trend scholars, such as those in the articles that follow, observe. There is a need to look more closely at the different countries to find other possible explanations. In doing so, and bearing in mind that these articles are a selection of important cases within Europe rather than a comprehensive review, three general features emerge.

First, the move towards stronger leadership is first and foremost a response to particular expressions of the 'legitimacy crisis' occurring in local and national politics as expressed by lower electoral turnout and the failure of traditional mechanisms of political accountability. Second, even if most of the countries studied in this symposium have strengthened the legitimacy and electoral power bases of their local leaders, they have rarely enhanced their powers. Often they do not have adequate institutional resources to accompany their new role. Third, local leaders vary in their capacity to manage large and complex networks, sets of issues and interest groups, variations that could, in time, spell out a new north-south divide. Before coming back to these three features in more detail, we start by characterizing the context of European local government and reviewing the argument many scholars have made about its transformation during the last 20 years.

Western European local government: the same story, different features

The trend towards stronger local leadership styles and institutions is not specific to Western Europe as other countries throughout the world have adopted similar reforms. But two elements make European local institutions of government unique and justify that we should look more closely at the changes taking place. Firstly, these countries share a common political heritage. Cities have played a unique role — politically, economically and culturally — since the fifteenth century (Bagnasco and Le Galès, 2000). Their influence slowly receded to the point where, during the nineteenth century, nation-states formed or consolidated. In the course of the twentieth, many turned into welfare regimes. This institutionalized framework, which governed the exercise of political power, forms the baseline from which to observe the stresses that have emerged and have restructured local and national politics since the 1970s. Most countries have engaged in reforms to decentralize authority and responsibilities, have liberalized regulatory powers and have given more autonomy to locally elected levels of government. Along with the move toward a more internationalized economy and the evolution of stronger European Union institutions, these reforms have often succeeded in changing the policy outputs and styles of decision-making of local government as well as the shape of the local state.

Secondly, these changing leadership patterns may fit into an emerging European institutional and political context. The contention is that these new styles and models of urban leadership, either individual or collegial, only make sense in a European environment that favours stronger local institutions and greater horizontal networks. In other words, these emerging leaders aim first and foremost to become European politicians. Though there will be no uniform model of leadership across Europe, the different experiences and institutions share some common traits: they aim to counteract the complexity and diversity in urban social and economic life with stronger modes of leadership; they may rely on an increasing institutional mimetism whereby European networks and professional associations, through which ideas, experiences and models travel, are shared or discussed; they refer, often explicitly, to the European Union polity and policies to build their capacity for action and their legitimacy. Hence, our interest in changing leadership patterns derives from the hypothesis that if previous styles and models of local leadership were strongly linked to the nation-state, as suggested by Page and Goldsmith (1987) and Hesse and Sharpe (1991), new styles and models should

increasingly be influenced and seek to cohere with European Union institutions and policies.

Even though the evidence found in the articles that make up this symposium offers little to uphold the above argument, scholars should be careful before discarding it for two reasons. The first has to do with the size of cities. The large and middle-size European cities, particularly those with a history that dates back to the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, seem to fit in more with this line of argument than the smaller ones. With Le Galès (2002), we argue that a specific class of European cities is re-emerging and it is probably in those places that the Europeanization of leadership may best be observed. Smaller cities, on the contrary, are often left out of these influences even though they constitute the largest group. The second reason is related to the kind of inquiry researchers need to engage when researching cross-national influences. These sorts of phenomena are not easily observed as national features still dominate the practice of local decision-making. This situation calls for more precisely defined research to evaluate the impact of the European Union on local government. For the moment, however, the country reports that follow indicate that the influence exerted by the EU on the structures of local government is relatively limited.

Would a wider comparative scope between cities across the world have given us a better clue as to what exactly accounts for the general trend towards stronger local political leadership? The answer is most likely to be in the affirmative, at least on a general level. But we are looking for more fine-grained explanations. By choosing countries that share a common history and show distinct traits, we are able to pick out specific influences without having to discuss more general political, economic, historical and cultural factors. The articles stress that behind the similar trends profound contrasts still remain, overlaying older differences in governing systems. What is of interest is the interplay between long institutional traditions, international/supra-national pressures and particular opportunities and incentives that may foster or limit institutional reform. As ever, the interaction between particularism and universalism remains at the core of comparative political analysis. Thus, as a prelude to the country studies, we explore these two pressures.

Leadership in local government

Until the 1980s, scholars found it useful to oppose the cluster of countries in the south of Europe with those of the north, even though other typologies suggest alternative distinctions (e.g. Mouritzen and Svara, 2002). In particular, this opposition helped to distinguish different forms of leadership, which varied according to the type of local government and its relationships with the institutions of the central state. Comparative studies found that political leaders in 'southern' systems, such as France and Italy, played an important role in the articulation of interests and the balance of power as opposed to the 'northern' countries where the greater resources and autonomy given to local government corresponded with weaker patterns of leadership (Page and Goldsmith, 1987).

Tarrow (1977), in his classic work *Between Center and Periphery, Grassroots Politicians in Italy and France*, described how the mayors of the primary local government units, the communes, brokered between the centre and locality. Mayors had close contacts with other local political actors and citizens, and they used their gatekeeper role to access resources from central government. Strong mayors occurred in post-Napoleonic states where the primary units of local governments were small and had few functions. This pattern of local political leadership applied, with some differences, to France, Italy, Spain, Portugal, Greece and Belgium. The legal discretion and financial autonomy was low, but leaders had good access to the centre and this was the basis of their legitimacy (Grémion, 1976; Page, 1991).

Many northern countries, on the contrary, had more collective modes of leadership combined with greater discretion and autonomy even though there were considerable variations in the structure of the executive from one country to another, and even within the same country, such as in Germany. The collective mode of operation could reside in collegial bodies or in a series of more or less independent committees. In most cases, political parties played a major role, as in the UK for example (Saiz and Geser, 1999).

In other words, before the 1980s, practices of strong individual leadership existed in the south, with power and legitimacy vested in the office and person of the mayor who often acted as a broker between central and local actors and was often a powerful national politician as well as being the local boss. In contrast, in the simplified picture of the northern countries, collegial processes appeared to predominate. While the decisions of the elected council as a whole were legitimate, there could be collective cabinet-style of government and the leader was the chair of the executive. In theory the former system represented local interests well. Mayors deployed their personal contacts to extract favours for the locality from the all-powerful central government organizations. At the same time, the central state invested mayors with responsibilities and duties that did not emanate from an electoral mandate. The mayor became a visible manifestation of both local and national interests and had power accordingly. In the northern model, decisions were made more collectively, closer to party interests and linked to the different services of the council. The leader needed to ensure the consent of the different parts of the organization. Of course, it is easy to undermine this simple view. The account of the south best fitted Italy and France; the mayor was in a weaker position in Spain and Portugal after decades of authoritarian rule. There are a variety of practices in the north, from collective decision-making to where the mayor has extensive power. Nevertheless, as with other matters, the stereotype was designed to illuminate rather than accurately reflect the structures and the exercise of power.

The move to governance

There has always been a tension between fragmentation and coordination in urban politics. Urban life strikes the observer by its complexity, in particular the varied forms of economic, social and cultural practices that coexist in densely occupied spaces. The different economic, family and cultural units have a tendency to want solutions only to their problems, to compete with each other and to seek a relatively autonomous status in the urban system through segregation and migration. From the mid-nineteenth century to the 1970s, local governments throughout Europe sought to manage these tensions and complexities. From then on, it seemed necessary to invent new styles and procedures in order to forge unified strategies in a given territory so that all groups may benefit and that a place, like a city or a region, has a clear identity and is able to realize its interest, especially when dealing with outside actors, such as the economic competitors, national governments and the European Union. Before we come to these styles and procedures, we must outline the main strains local governments have experienced.

Fragmentation has been the result of the increasing pace of reform of public services and institutions in the 1970s. Most Western European countries reformed their institutions of local government by adding powers and tiers of elected authorities, as in France, or reforming the legal framework for service delivery, as in the UK. Central and state governments sought to improve the quality and performance of public services through the tools of the New Public Management, as in the UK and Sweden, or by giving local institutions more freedom in organizing themselves, as in Finland and Norway. Reformers, such as those in Sweden and Italy, placed great stress upon improving local democracy through schemes to improve citizen and user participation. Metropolitan power structures were installed, sometimes with limited results, as in Germany, the Netherlands and Italy (Jouve and Lefèvre, 1999); at other times they met with some success, as in France (Baraize and Négrier, 2001). More generally, urban

government is but one amongst the many other local political institutions that have arisen from the extensive reforms of sub-national government. A prime source of conflict has been with the regions, which have their own politicians and compete with resources and functions with local government. The Europeanization of sub-national government may place further responsibilities and adds to the number of organizations local government officials have to deal with. And the many public and semi-public organizations need to be coordinated.

Such pressures have been enhanced by the fiscal austerity that has been a reality of local politics since the 1970s (Newton, 1980) through increasing responsibilities for providing public services, an inadequate local tax base and the declining willingness of central governments to provide the finances to pay for the rising costs of the welfare state. In contrast, there have been some brief periods when central government offloaded functions and created new levels of government, such as France, a period during which local government enjoyed a state-sponsored beneficence. Places also varied to the extent to which they experienced fiscal austerity (Mouritzen, 1992). The Nordic countries, for example, did not experience fiscal strains, except Finland in the early 1990s and Sweden from the early to mid-1990s.

Fragmentation also results from economic change, which has intensified the pressures on municipalities. The large enterprises and public sector organizations that provided stable employment in many localities have now been wiped out or reduced by economic competition and reforms in the public sector. The loss of traditional industries and the search for investment provide practical challenges for local leaders. They also cause a political crisis because many social democratic party supporters were employed by these industries. Such a change in economic fortunes means that the local government has to address both the needs of traditional supporters and those of a wider constituency. Internationalization necessitates potent local solutions to draw in investment (Judd and Parkinson, 1990).

In parallel, it is argued that there have been changes in political culture and behaviour. Clark and his co-researchers suggest that there is a post-industrial political culture where the old left-right issues do not have such salience as before (Clark and Hoffmann-Martinot, 1998). The implication of challenges to hierarchy, the plurality of values, the influence of ideas, such as environmentalism, and the power of new social movements is that mayors cannot act so freely as before and recruits must appeal to new groups and articulate a broader, more liberal set of issues whilst at the same time not disturbing the institutions of the market economy. The agenda of politics is driven by these social forces. Some leaders adapt; others cannot. As with the changes in the economic context of local politics, the crisis may enhance the power and status of the elected leader. On the other hand, new conditions may call for demands to reform the institutions of leadership, particularly where collective forms of leadership appear to hold back the autonomy, impair the legitimacy and inhibit the creativity of the people at the top. Elite political cultures also shape the opportunities and beliefs of local political leaders as they are drawn from the membership of local elites and need their loyalty.

As mentioned above, urban governments have to deal with greater European Union regulation and standardization. Not only are large sections of their activity covered by European rules, such as environmental protection, economic development and social housing, and not only must they learn to master European Union policy-making procedures; they also have to adapt to a growing number of norms and standards, either political, such as partnership in social policies, or industrial, sometimes carried into effect by consultants and at other times by professional associations, but always in a voluntary manner (Brunsson and Jacobsson, 2000). More generally, they must work hard to obtain resources and recognition from the EU. Linked to European Union influence, the policy transfers have become much more of a reality as information flows increase and policy-makers seek to draw lessons from the different institutional environments across the world (Rose, 1993). Institutions, such as the European Union, may facilitate them. In this context, policy changes rapidly and reformers seek new institutional solutions to policy problems.

Leadership in governance

The notion of governance is one way to analyse the changes in local politics, polities and policies, a term that has been used by many authors (Stoker, 2000; John, 2001; Le Galès, 2002). Governance may be defined as a flexible pattern of public decision-making based on loose networks of individuals in key public, para-public and private bodies at various territorial levels. The concept conveys the idea that public decisions rest less within hierarchically organized bureaucracies, but take place more in long-term relationships between these key individuals. Governance implies that these networks are more open, complex and potentially unstable than hitherto; and bargaining and the building of trust tell more of the story of political life than the standard operating procedures of bureaucracies, the closed regimes of party government and the hidden power of local elites. In particular, governance implies there are stronger and new networks between government and non-government actors (Stoker, 1998). It does not just seek to describe a more networked form of politics; it also refers to the capacity of governing systems to coordinate policy and to solve public problems in a complex context (Pierre, 2000). No one organization or individual commands enough authority to ensure that certain public choices become authoritative and turn into implemented policies. In this context, policies and programmes normally adopted by mayors or by ruling party groups no longer work as neatly as before, so new solutions become appropriate, whether it is revitalized mayors or reformed institutions.

Nonetheless, governance does not replace government, neither as a form for organizing political action nor as an analytical concept. Governance suggests a shift in the way researchers study political action, moving away from just formal institutions, procedures and routines to focus on more flexible processes based on negotiation and collective action. Yet government persists. Moreover, some authors suggest that governance organizes frames of action which in due time could contribute to new forms of government (Borraz and Le Galès, 2001). In other words, it is necessary to combine the study of government and governance, if only because legitimacy remains embedded in governmental rules and procedures while governance emerges to solve the demands of practical policy-making. Thus new patterns of governing continue to be rooted in historical and cultural contexts. Changing leadership patterns are strongly linked to the emergence of governance processes in the management of local public affairs in a form that is 'path dependent' rather than necessarily transformative.

Leadership is crucial to the functioning and success of local governance. The politics of decentralization, networks, participation, partnerships, bureaucratic reform, rapid policy change and central intervention need powerful but creative figures to give a direction to local policy-making. In a time of institutional fragmentation and complexity, leaders can make the shifting framework of individuals and organizations work together. They can recreate local identities and senses of purpose in an age where locality has lost its association with traditional industries and well-defined spaces of economic activity. Whilst creating the need for better leadership, the transition to governance imposes intense strains on those who exercise policy choices. They have to make sense of the complexity and cope with novel circumstances. As Stone comments (1995), good leadership comes out of difficulty and from the need for challenge and vision when times have become hard. This comment draws attention to the two sides of the problem of executive leadership — the person and institutions — and the argument that reform of the latter could lead to better persons and opportunities in the main office.

In this sense, local leaders qualify as skilled social actors, 'who mobilize cooperation among others by generating and propagating cultural frames. Cultural frames are representations of collective problems and solutions that help other actors to link their own interests and identities to a collective purpose' (Stone Sweet *et al*., 2001: 8–9). This definition is largely inspired by the works of Chester Barnard in his classic work, *The Functions of the Executive* (1938). The leader's function is to create forms of cooperation between individuals or groups by helping them forge stable conceptions of their role and identity, in order for them to engage in a collective action bearing

meaning. To do so, the executive must demonstrate a capacity in building and wielding frames that give meaning to a situation or a problem, suggest solutions or lines of action, and establish links with actors' identities and interests. These frames operate as narratives that build up a collective interest in a specific context: 'Actors with social skill work to construct the identities and interests of collectivities, and thus work to define the social space. In any particular situation, they have to link their current conception of those identities and interests to the concrete issue at hand. Since identities and interests are abstract, they are at least partially open to spin and interpretation. This gives leaders some leeway when it comes to determining which groups should be brought into discussions about how to organize a particular policy arena.' (*ibid.*: 20).

Leaders also have leeway to choose the specific principles, norms and standards they wish to apply or refer to in making policy. These are not defined exclusively by the centre; they belong, on the contrary, to different spheres of regulation, whether market, hierarchy, network, community or the state. Furthermore, the European Union is an important supplier of norms and standards, amongst which local leaders pick out the ones they deem appropriate or apply those they consider necessary to obtain recognition and resources. Hence, the creative functions of leadership are an important dimension of their power. In this way, we bring European accounts of political leadership much closer to the practice in US politics. In a context of business independence and institutional fragmentation, there is need for leaders to guide urban regimes (Stone, 1989), using their powers to persuade (Neustadt, 1960) to get things done.

Nonetheless, institutional structures, forms of party organization and competition and local political cultures still count in that they foster certain types of leader, whether directive or responsive, and offer varied opportunities to generate governing capacity. Furthermore, as we noted earlier, the capacity to appeal to the community as a sense of place is both a resource and a constraint for local leaders: a resource in that it offers a lever to mobilize support, a constraint given the fact that a leader will have little chance of succeeding if he cannot adjust his policies to the local patterning of the economy, society and politics.

Finally, stronger leadership models do not entail systematically a more personal style of decision-making. We need to consider that leadership is often a plural rather than an individual activity. Leaders rarely act alone and the move towards stronger leadership models could very well foster more collegial practices. As we underlined earlier, urban life is striking in its complexity and the multiple interests that compete between each other. Plural leadership patterns and styles often constitute a solution to manage this complexity and diversity (Borraz, 2003). In some cases, an individual leader will be all the more powerful given his or her capacity to foster collective modes of decision-making — all the while standing out as the individual power-holder. We would even suggest that this condition, along with the creative capacity mentioned above, are two decisive elements that make for strong leadership. In turn, strong leadership at the local level is, from a governance perspective, a major contributor to the institutionalization of European local government. Reform of the executive may be complemented by new mechanisms to enhance democratic participation and accountability, which many countries have adopted in recent years (Loughlin, 2001).

Leadership and institutional change

In light of the previous changes and new challenges for policy-makers, what has actually changed in the practice of leadership in Western Europe? First, urban leadership has become more high profile and dynamic, even within the existing structures. Many local politicians increasingly seek to be charismatic and to tie their name to a major development or infrastructure project. Leaders in contrasting institutional systems often seek to be local 'boosters', to lead development coalitions

and to break free from the constraints of party hierarchies. They feel less constrained by party ideology; they have developed popular policies and initiatives whilst at the same time seeking to please business leaders. They have also sought to acquire a European standing, both for themselves and for their cities. In so doing, they have entered into partnership, competition or conflict with other public officials and sub-national governments and they have strived for more recognition of their role and legitimacy in their national political systems as well as in the European polity.

Second, the above-mentioned pressures have affected the decision-making systems. Beginning in the 1980s, a cross-European movement emerged to reform the executive structure of local government. Experts, pundits and politicians underpinned the inadequacy of systems of collective decision-making to the challenges of contemporary decision-making. These challenges require stronger leadership but the institutional rules prevent the person in office from asserting power and developing effective policies. They also pointed to the fact that collective forms of decision-making and party lines of control trammel many leaders. Hence, in many parts of Western Europe, collective forms of decision-making have given way to systems of leadership that rely on direct election and control over the levers of power. In large countries, such as Germany and Italy, the transformation is near complete; in other places there are more subtle reforms. In France, strong metropolitan governments give urban mayors the opportunity to reinforce their authority as chairs of new institutions that could in due time provide for directly elected presidents. In Norway, the Oslo experiments suggest more collective forms of decision-making may be appropriate. In the UK, the legislative provision for different forms of leadership implies the strengthening of executive structure takes different forms based on local choice (Gains *et al*., 2003; John, 2004). But historical experience indicates that once a bandwagon sets in motion, municipal competition can often spawn directly elected mayors.

This tendency may be enhanced given the possibility of cross-national policy learning. New practices have spread across Western Europe as some countries and municipalities have experimented with new forms of leadership. Professional associations, either of chief executive officers or of mayors, serve to diffuse new ideas and models. Consultants also play a major role in the spread of best practices and other standards. As important has been the transfer of ideas about the economic policy agenda or, more recently, social policies. Political leaders have gained a reputation for delivering prosperity to their localities. The European Union and its research projects on urban policy have also been influential in changing views about local politics.

In other words, there are at the present time functional and competitive pressures in favour of a system of directly elected leaders where once parties and coalitions held sway. Not that institutions and party groupings remain silent with these leaders, but they too must adopt different ways of doing business. To analyse these changes in leadership styles and institutions, the articles presented in this symposium suggest three features should come under closer scrutiny.

The legitimacy crisis

The adoption of directly elected mayors and, more generally, the move towards stronger leadership models are a response to lower electoral turnouts and the difficulty of achieving political accountability — what is often termed a legitimacy crisis. This decline in the workings of representative democracy is marked in Norway, England and Germany, and is part of a more general transformation in Italy (following the *mani pulite* scandal). In England, for instance, the government expected that directly-elected mayors would incorporate more directly transparency and accountability in the decision-making process whilst simultaneously reviving the interest of citizens in local affairs.

This situation calls for three general remarks. First, to varying degrees, all European countries are experiencing lower election turnouts. Even though this trend occurs at other levels of government, reformers are looking towards local institutional reforms for

appropriate answers. Furthermore, the call for greater accountability has been continuously growing, albeit arising from scandals and mishaps. There is a call for fuller democratic debates in such areas as environment and health or simply pressure from social movements for a greater role in the decision-making processes. Once again, local government is not the only culprit. Yet, this level of government attracts the attention of the reformers.

Second, in line with the previous remark, reforming local government is generally thought to be a suitable answer, not only for solving local problems of low electoral turnout or accountability, but also in tackling the more general legitimacy crisis. In no way is this concern new. During the 1960s, in particular, reforming local government was seen as an answer to what was then already diagnosed as a legitimacy crisis. At the time, the problem was not so much a question of participation or accountability as a question of adopting efficient structures of government — notably in countries that relied on local government to produce and distribute welfare services, such as the Scandinavian countries and England. Reformers considered inefficient structures to be a threat to the legitimacy of the system. Later on, the social movements and political conflicts of the 1970s also led to a demand for institution reform — and once again local government was at the forefront. Reforms in France, Italy and Spain, starting during the 1980s, best illustrate how the reform of local government is part of a more general effort to 'democratize' a country bottom-up (Genieys, 1997; Calise, 2000). It is no coincidence that these countries also have a large number of municipalities. Hence, European local government is characterized by the position of these structures, along with their functions, which operate in a larger institutional framework dominated by the nation-state. When this framework comes under stress, it usually tends to look to the local level for answers.

Third, the outcomes of the reforms are generally disappointing. Voter turnout still continues to decline and the legitimacy of local government has not improved even if mayors have gained, in some cases, higher visibility. But greater prominence can sometimes lead to highly personal styles of leadership that critics later denounce. Once again, the story is not new. The reforms of the 1960s, notably the amalgamation of local government, led to deeply bureaucratized and unresponsive structures, against which the reforms of the 1970s tried to find solutions through citizen participation and neighbourhood committees (Bogason, 1987; Lane and Magnusson, 1987). Not only was the solution disappointing, but it led in some cases to unanticipated effects. Once again, too high expectations and the inevitable subsequent disillusion have been a familiar pattern over the recent reforms.

Legitimacy without resources

The most striking finding from the case studies presented in this symposium is that reformers have not given many additional resources and powers to the newly elected leaders. In Italy and England the mayors have gained unprecedented legitimacy and visibility through their direct election, but little else to help them face the challenges of local governance. They face acute pressures from their policy environment; they have to deal with high expectations from citizens, the media and interest groups; they have to manage complex systems of actors; and they assume an ever greater number of tasks. But they must work with much the same resources as their predecessors. Germany is an exception. In those *Länder* where mayors combine political and administrative leadership roles, they can find the means to implement their policies. In contrast, Italian and English mayors lack the institutional resources to carry out their role effectively.

As expected, direct election gives mayors legitimacy to act and a capacity to foster cooperation and to mobilize support. But leaders often work within a stringent system of checks and balances. In Germany, the position of the local council and the possibility for recall limit the mayor's range of action. Even in England, the council can choose to exercise important powers of blockage and delay. Furthermore, mayors in those countries must often operate within deeply entrenched political cultures that are more

intent on favouring compromises and in looking for a consensus between the different political parties and the interests they represent. This situation often occurs in places with strong political parties, such as the Nordic countries, but to a lesser extent in Germany.

Finally, the newly elected leaders must also work within a multi-tier system of government in which their position is not assured and must be fought for. This vertical competition, which may be observed to varying degrees in each country, is new and calls for capacities leaders must largely invent or learn by observing their counterparts in countries that are already familiar with such a form of office.

This situation, in which highly visible mayors must work with the same resources as their predecessors, but under tougher constraints, poses a threat to the reforms. If the mayors fail to accomplish what is expected of them, this could further weaken the legitimacy of local government. Such a threat may be observed in the Italian case, where the visibility of the new mayors and the expectations of the citizens, especially their tendency to transfer a large number of issues to the mayors, will not match the means they have at their disposal. Italian mayors have few resources to manage complex partnerships or even to lead their communities.

A north-south divide in governing styles?

The case studies suggest that the local leaders are developing new capacities to counteract the lack of control over the levers of power. Previous work had already started to point this out. Cole and John's (2001) study of networks in France and Britain, for instance, found that dynamic leaders had emerged in the four localities they studied. Leach and Wilson's (2000) study of England finds that leadership has become much more prominent since 1980.

More than ever before, local politicians seek to widen the agenda, to engage with business and to introduce new policies whilst seeking to please their traditional supporters. Leaders have learnt that old practices of doing business within political parties do not work so well and that they need to build coalitions outside their political parties, sometimes becoming populists (Clark and Inglehart, 1998: 26). The leader of Manchester, for example, sought to bring a coalition together to obtain the 2000 Olympics. In Barcelona, the 1992 Olympics were used to regenerate the city (Garcia, 1991). Many of the potential conflicts the games could have caused in Spain were alleviated by the charisma of mayor Maragall (Hargreaves, 2000). Joan Clos, mayor since 1997, has sought to rejuvenate the city. Barcelona hosts the Forum 2004 and will have a high-speed rail link with France, an expansion of the port and airport and regeneration of one of its most rundown areas. The last point is particularly important as the activities of leadership have been directed to flagship economic regeneration projects. Hence, mayors are powerful in the Spanish system and are becoming more so, but they have to depend on the activities of other majority coalition partners (Stoker and Travers, 1999).

Much depends on the leaders' ability to wield influence above party politics and to have a direct relationship to the citizens. Mayors have increasingly made a name for themselves, even in countries where the job did not attract strong personalities. The type of personal motives and style becomes essential for success as personality is all the more important to mobilize and negotiate support for their strategies. They ought to have charisma, but they also need diplomacy, talent and perseverance, energy and probably a touch of megalomania.

Along with this transformation, the mayors have to get their cities or localities moving. Hence, there is need to produce strategic plans and give priority to land-use and economic development, often with little attention to the poorer areas of the city (Harding *et al*., 1994). Little originality is perceptible in the actions undertaken by the different leaders — and some policy transfer may be observed, due to the different networks that have multiplied within the EU and the role of consultants in diffusing 'best practices' and standards.

But if this strategy can succeed in prominent cities in Europe, it largely failed in England. In the period before the reform of the local executive, some British leaders aspired to a more high-profile role and led economic development coalitions; but they often foundered on their lack of power, the ease at which they could be deposed by their supporters, the lack of permanent career path and the need to move to take national office (Cole and John, 2001). If there were some mayoral figures waiting for new powers, local party systems were not ready for the change. The failure of the vast majority of English localities to choose the mayoral option is testament to longevity of collective forms of decision-making in local political cultures. The case of London's elected mayor, Ken Livingstone, underpins the lack of any real capacity to act within the larger London governance even though the mayor exerts a strong hold on the Greater London Authority. As Sweeting (2003) suggests, this has largely to do with the mayor's limited autonomy and the fact that he is heavily reliant on central government for funding.

In spite of some similarities in the operation of governance and the role of the institutions throughout Europe, the Franco-Spanish comparison suggests a possible difference between the north and the south of Europe in the capacities leaders still possess. The articles in this symposium suggest that mayors in the north are more intent on managing complex networks of actors while developing capacities to represent their city's interests to decision-makers, groups and public outside. They often face more complex political situations, in particular strong political parties and councils with no clear majority with which they must negotiate support. They have to cope with new institutional arrangements in urban government at regular intervals of time. As the article on Germany suggests, the mayors must use persuasion, interaction and networking in order to muster political support for their policies.

The mayors of the south, on the contrary, have always represented their city's interests to gain extra resources. They also benefit from a more relaxed and supportive political environment and enjoy more leeway in organizing the procedures for decision-making. Their recent initiatives, such as large infrastructure projects and strategic economic development plans, are designed to enhance the territorial basis of their power (Pinson, 2002). These strategies aim to mobilize support for the elected officials and their policies. The legitimacy of the leaders and their policies is a result of these efforts rather than given at the start.

This distinction does not imply that the politics of place does not count in the first group of countries. But it does not have the same purpose. In Spain, France or Italy, 'a sense of place is often a product of history and inherited traditions. It is sustained by patterns of social, political and economic interaction focused on the location. Places with the strongest sense of identity tend to be communities with strong traditions and old-established civic and other institutions' (Keating, 1991: 20). For the local leaders in these countries, 'places can be made and remade through political activity, economic and social interaction, the media and external challenge, but cultural legacies make this easier in some locations than in others' (*ibid.*: 20). In the UK and the Nordic countries, by contrast, such legacies are less frequent. In other words, while leaders of the south can mobilize the sense of community as sense of place as a major resource in their political action, their counterparts in the northern countries have to muster other means to achieve similar results.

This distinction, if we go one step further, presents a paradox. The reforms in England, Germany and the Nordic countries give rise to strongly personalized politics. To survive, leaders find they have to free themselves from their party's grasp and find new political resources to sustain them in office. Mayors have often become more charismatic figures in northern local political systems. The mayor of Rotterdam, Bram Peper, for instance, presided over regeneration and growth in Rotterdam for more than a decade, though he gained a reputation for corruption, allegedly using the city's credit card as his own. But the port of Rotterdam flourished despite the scandal. It now rivals Amsterdam as a cultural centre and the city hosted the final of Euro 2000. High-profile mayors have also emerged in Germany, such as Frankfurt's Petra Roth. And then there is Ken Livingstone in London.

This prominence is less marked in Spain and France, and even arguably in Italy, where the conspicuous mayors of the past, who had the capacity to represent their city to outside interests and gained legitimacy from their position as intercessors, are slowly giving way to lower profile individuals or at the least more distinct 'local' leaders. This downsizing does not imply that they are completely losing their visibility, as the mayors of Montpellier, Barcelona or Naples amply testify. But the basis of their legitimacy has evolved and, along with it, their style of government. In so doing, it is their capacity to act from, within and through a given place that has become important. As a result, they increasingly need to adjust their strategies much more to the needs of their territories. In countries of the northern group, the effort rests more on network building and management through deliberative processes, negotiation and cooperation. The leaders in these countries find new political resources to sustain the newly found legitimacy, acting on a more personal basis to foster cooperation and unhindered by traditions of community leadership. In the southern group, on the contrary, leaders must find and build their legitimacy locally to the point where there is often little future for them outside their constituencies.

Nonetheless, stronger local executives in all countries do not necessarily entail weaker central government power. But the reforms symbolize a shift in governing style towards more procedurally constructed policies. Central government does not now have such a monopoly in formulating rules, implementing programmes and distributing resources. Local leaders now have to adapt to the resources wielded by other levels of government, whether sub-national, national or European, and even the influence of such powers as the judicial. This can, in some cases, suggest stronger constraints on local leaders' capacities, but in others offer more leeway in choosing their partners or their opponents, and more generally in building coalitions, networks and institutions. In other words, if urban leaders have rarely been given renewed powers through the reforms, some are able to find in a highly complex institutional environment the opportunities to enhance their authority and capacity for action.

Olivier Borraz (o.borraz@cso.cnrs.fr), Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique, Centre de Sociologie des Organisations, 19 rue Amélie, 75007 Paris, France and **Peter John** (p.john@bbk.ac.uk), School of Politics and Sociology, Birkbeck College, Malet Street, London WC2A 7HX, UK.

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