El estudio comparado de la gobernanza local: hacia un enfoque global

The Comparative Study Of Local Governance: Towards A Global Approach

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ABSTRACT

The comparative study of local governance has been too focused on the institutional arrangements of the systems of different nation states rather than the more fundamental issue of the societal functions performed by local government. This article focuses attention on four societal roles that local government systems undertake. They can support political identity, underwrite economic development, facilitate social welfare provision or act as a lifestyle co-ordinator through the practice of community governance. Linking our investigation to the embedded societal roles of local government in different systems opens up the opportunity for a more genuinely global comparative perspective. It also helps us to understand the likely forms of politics associated with different systems of local governance. It also enables us to explore the sustainability of different systems of local governance. It is suggested that a strong system of local government is likely to be one that is able to combine societal roles to a substantial degree. A vulnerable local government system is one trapped with one function that in changing societal and economic circumstances could find itself under threat.

KEYWORDS: Comparative local government, societal roles, local politics, sustainability.

RESUMEN

El estudio comparado de la gobernanza local se ha focalizado excesivamente en los arreglos institucionales de los sistemas de los diferentes Estados-nación en lugar de centrarse en el tema esencial de las funciones sociales que desempeñan los gobiernos locales. Este artículo centra su atención en cuatro roles sociales que desempeñan los sistemas de gobierno local. Pueden proporcionar identidad política, garantizar el desarrollo económico, facilitar la provisión de servicios sociales o actuar como coordinador de la forma de vida mediante la práctica de la gobernanza comunitaria. La vinculación de la investigación a los roles sociales asumidos por los gobiernos locales en los diferentes sistemas proporciona la posibilidad de adoptar una perspectiva global comparada más genuina. También ayuda a comprender las formas que adopta la política asociada a los distintos sistemas de gobernanza local y permite explorar la sostenibilidad de los diferentes sistemas de gobernanza local. Se sugiere que un sistema de gobierno local fuerte es probablemente más capaz de combinar los roles sociales de forma sustancial y que aquellos más vulnerables quedarán atrapados por una sola función que, en un contexto social y económico cambiante, puede quedar amenazada.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Gobierno local comparado, roles sociales, política local, sostenibilidad.

SUMARIO

This article sets itself the rather ambitious task of identifying a global typology of local governance. Can a framework be offered that would enable comparisons to be drawn among all states that have a scale of economic, political and societal development to grant not only a de iure but also a de facto role to local government? The comparative study of local government institutions is dominated by a concern to comprehend the range of local government systems (for pioneering efforts see Humes and Martin, 1969; Hesse,1991) and as a result we certainly know more now than fifty years ago about how the position of local government varies between states. We have seen many valuable contributions but few that have a global reach and too many try to make distinctions based on constitutional or institutional factors which in some respects make the task of global comparison harder. In this article we argue that our starting point should not be the form of local government or its constitutional or institutional expression but rather the substance of its societal role. We need do make such a move if we are going to develop a more global perspective on local governance because a focus on the details of services provided, constitutional autonomy and institutional arrangements and relations with other tiers of government provides descriptive richness but sacrifices comparative capacity.

A typology is developed based on arguments about the core societal roles on offer within different local government systems. The typology offers a four-fold classification based on the idea that local government can deliver a sense identity, a base for economic development, a social welfare and redistributive role and, finally, a role as an enabler of lifestyle choice. The claim is that these types are mutually exclusive and exhaustive, reflecting the construction values of all good typologies (George and Bennett, 2005, pp237-9).

An effective typology also provides the stage for subsequent theorising. The next part of the paper takes us from typology towards typological theory in that it argues that each societal role of local government is associated with particular forms of political structures and practices. The final stage of the argument looks to how sustainable the societal roles of local government

are likely to be. All local governance functions are under pressure from the forces of social and economic globalization and other process of change. Some are more effectively embedded in their societies than others. This discussion in turn provides the basis for judging the long-term health of local government systems in different countries in terms of the mix of roles they can command. The article begins by briefly reviewing the challenges involved in developing an effective classification of local government systems.

THE CHALLENGE OF CLASSIFICATION

It is difficult in many respects to underestimate the sheer challenge of the study of comparative local governance (see Stoker, 2006 for a fuller discussion). Even within one country it is possible to spend a lot of time and effort in describing internal differences in institutional form and practice. Nation state comparison is tough enough but at least in terms of democracies there are only 121 of them (Diamond, 1999). Within any one country there might be several different tiers or levels of local government and the form of each might vary according to local choice or local circumstances. The truth is that the complexity of local governance institutional arrangements often magnifies the challenge of understanding within countries and makes the task of comparative study very taxing.
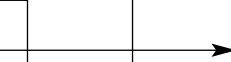
Approaches to developing the comparative study of local governance have notwithstanding these difficulties tried to identify some basic institutional differences between systems. Lidstrom (1999, pp 100-6) distinguishes between approaches that focus on historical or present day criteria. Historical heritage might lead in one direction in terms of the distinctions drawn; while a concern with present day realities might lead in other directions. The former option could lead to the overlooking of recent developments. If the focus is the current position it appears that there are a range of institutional factors that you could focus on. You could take the overall scale and size of budgets and staff available to municipalities; alternatively you could use criteria of formal local government autonomy and freedom from central control.

Given a focus in this article on where local government stands in world it would seem appropriate to look to present day features of local government to develop a classification. But which features? The dominant form of classification in comparative local governance looks at local government systems as a whole and links together a range of factors. According to Lidstrom (1999,103) 'the most widely accepted and frequently cited' is that provided by Hesse and Sharpe(1991). There are three main groups according to this categorization: a Franco group that would include many of the countries of southern Europe, an Anglo group based around the UK and Ireland and to some extent the United States and New Zealand and finally a north and middle European variant including the Nordic countries, Germany and the Netherlands. Page and Goldsmith (1987), Page(1991) Batley and Stoker(1991), and John (2001) where the focus is more narrowly on Europe adopt a similar classification with a strong division between Northern and Southern countries. Norton (1994,pp 13-14) in what is claimed to be a classification of 'world systems of local government' does add a Japan group and splits the United States and Canada away to a separate North America group. Denters and Rose (2005, 10-11) with a more world focus adapt the Hesse and Sharpe model but distinguish between local governments embedded in unitary and federal systems.

The difficulty of all these classifications is that they mix various constitutional and institutional details to produce frameworks that are rich in capturing variety but poor as tools for comparative analysis. Details of the services provided by local government, its autonomy from other tiers of government and its legal standing do offer insight into differences. But as a basis for comparison the very level of detail when they recombined into broad categories creates a problem in that there are such big differences within each of the groups using the institutional criteria used to drive the classification. The Denters and Rose (2005) classification, for example, ends up with six types of local government system and some very strange bedfellows. The top two squares are occupied by Italy and Belgium, both of whom it is speculated might be heading towards federal systems, suggesting that the distinction between unitary and federal is less absolute in practice and more of a continuum. The Spanish case could also be seen to be on a similar institutional journey. Australia would generally be regarded as having a weaker local government system than most parts of the United States. The Netherlands, Nordic countries and Poland also looks like an odd grouping

Tabla 1
A basis for comparison?

Form of local government	Unitary	Federal
Southern European	Italy / Belgium →	
Middle European	Netherlands, Nordic countries, Poland	Germany Switzerland
Anglo	United Kingdom New Zealand	Australia, United States

Fuente: Adapted from Exhibit 1.2, Denters and Rose(2005) p11.

A further problem with all of these classifications is their narrow and western focus. They are concerned almost entirely with mature rather than new wave democracies but it would seem relevant to consider the position of local government in these settings in eastern Europe (Bennett,1989, 1993; Coulson,1995) and elsewhere. Indeed in Latin America there is a strong argument to say that local government has been a major site of experimentation for new forms of democratic practice in post-authoritarian regimes (Selee and Peruzzotti, 2009). In many southern and developing countries local government has also been a site for innovation and major decentralisation initiatives over the last decades (McCraney and Stren,2003). The quality and nature of that decentralisation may vary but in Asia, Africa and Latin America we have seen the emergence of new protocols of governance and municipal management at the local level in part as a response to the sheer scale and complexity of the processes of urbanisation that have been occurring (Stren, 2003). And even those countries where a full scale democratic practice is novel or only partially established reform measures have generally seen local governments in these countries gain substantially more power, again in reaction to rapid social and economic change.

We need to make a conceptual leap forward to enable us to grasp and analyse the emerging global world of local government. Typologies routed in a focus on a narrow range of countries are not good enough in today's context. The new world of local governance demands a broader comparative perspective so that we can learn from each other. But existing comparative frameworks are too narrowly focused on a few western concerns and not sufficiently global. Moreover they are too dominated by a focus on formal institutional differences rather than by a concern with the practices and functions of local governance systems. We need a new global typology to enable us to take forward our understanding.

TOWARDS A GLOBAL TYPOLOGY OF LOCAL GOVERNANCE

Comparativists are in danger of being tripped up by the complexity of the systems of local government that are in the process of being created. We need to think about a simplifying framework in which to present a comparative yet global understanding of local governance. One key question to ask of any system is what are its core functions? In case of local governance, I argue, the focus, at the beginning of the twenty first century, is on expressing identity, social investment (economic development), social consumption (welfare) or post-material concerns (lifestyle issues). These four functions, broadly defined, offer an exhaustive specification of the core functions of local government systems throughout the world and are mutually exclusive. I will try to justify these arguments below. The former will prove more difficult than the latter.

One of the most established functions of local government in many systems is the expression of identity. This societal function of local government is a strong feature of several systems. Local government means something to its citizens because it expresses where they were born or where they live. To say you are from a particular village, town or city can be a source of pride. Local government matters to citizens because it says: " this is where I am from and who I am". Local government systems especially those that are long-established and little reorganized in terms of their basic scale-France and Italy provide examples- would appear to be particularly well-placed to express identity. In some instances, such as where distinctive languages or cultures are at stake within a nation state, a local government institution can come to be an important carrier of political identity as for example would appear to be the case of Barcelona.

The forces of globalisation are seen by various scholars as threatening this role of expressing political identity. Thompson (2010, p.135) notes how 'some have argued that globalization is producing the political flourishing of something like global civil society or cosmopolitan governance'. This empirical observation is accompanied by 'normative arguments that suppose that political identity has moved beyond the state because the state was always an artificial constraint on the possibility of global political community, and suggest that globalization offers the possibility of something more humanly authentic' (Thompson 2010, p.135) . However others see normative claims and empirical trends pointing to stronger local and regional identities

in the context of nation states. In particular argues Thompson (2010, pp.135-6) 'communitarians of different kinds have resisted these approaches and argued that states still express specific identities that belong exclusively to their own citizens and which these citizens cannot readily change. They have insisted that cosmopolitans empirically underestimate the continuing political significance of particular, culturally-grounded, human communities whilst they themselves reject the normative desirability of subjecting those communities to the moral demands of a universal politics'. Identity claims can still be made by many local government systems and they provide a source of legitimacy and an expression of their underlying ethos. Indeed one way of reconciling the demands of the global and local is to encourage citizens to operate under the mantra of "Think Global, Act Local".

The issue of economic development is relevant to the core function of many local government systems. In the UK the role of Victorian local government as a handmaiden to the industrial revolution is widely recognised (Stoker 1988). Land use planning and regulation of housing, industrial and commercial development are central to this function. The provision of venture capital or other forms of industrial development support are also common activities. But the role can also be expressed through direct provision. Providing basic infrastructure for water, sewerage, or energy provision, building roads, developing transport remain central tasks for local government systems stretching from China, through Brazil and the United States and to South Africa. These tasks are often accompanied in the subtle tasks of human capital development, providing education, training and skills for a workforce.

The economic development role can come in a variety of forms but one of the most prominent and virulent is when local government takes a role as the organiser of a growth machine (Harding 1997). As Goldsmith (1992, p.395) explains:

'In these countries, the paramount task of local government is to promote the economic health of its community. Growth is paramount, with services to property-fire, police and transport-being the major activities providing the foundation on which growth can take place. 'Boosterism' is a term sometimes used of the general ethos described'.

Local government can establish for itself a powerful role and one supported by embedded business and economic interests in undertaking this function as the promoter of economic development.

Again the role could be seen as under threat (see Dicken 2003) as the nature of economic activity changes in the face of global competition and as the spatial specificity of industry shifts in a new industrial era less reliant on access to market outlets, raw materials, power sources or immobile manufacturing facilities. Yet these spatial factors still remain important to some degree and there are further counter arguments to suggest that locality remains relevant in economic development. Locality factors arise in the attraction and retention of skilled workers to locations and the importance of industrial networks of provision in providing particular localities with an advantage in various production niches. Being a media town or textile city - where similar types of industries can co-locate- could appear to be economically important lever to pull.

Local government has a third core function associated with welfare provision and redistribution. Initially this role might have been seen as involving public safety, some income support and others activities to provide for basic needs. But welfare functions have developed in many countries to take on a wider range of higher needs for education and advancement. This role is prominent in parts of Europe according to Goldsmith (1992). He points out the prominence of welfare provision and its embedded support both from local citizens and service-providers as a key feature of local government systems. In these systems issues such as equity and redistribution shape 'the growth and working of local government, which has acted as the producer and deliverer of welfare-state services, such as education, housing and transport. Countries such as (West) Germany, the Netherlands, Britain and the Scandinavian group have all been concerned in the period since 1945 with the provision of a wide range of the collective consumption goods which comprise the welfare state' (Goldsmith 1992, p.396). But the welfare role is also prominent in Latin American local government and in local government systems in East Asia, China, Africa and virtually every part of the globe. The scale

of the resources available and the effectiveness of the support provided by welfare services vary enormously but the basic idea that local government has an embedded role in welfare provision and redistribution is a prominent one.

The social welfare function is under pressure in some countries from fiscal demands created by ageing population profiles, advances in technology leading to more expensive treatments and increased expectations about the quality of services to be offered. In those systems where these roles are prominent in the activities of local government it is possible to predict some tensions and some realignment of responsibilities.

The final role for local government is the least well-formed and embedded but has risen to prominence in a range of local government systems in recent decades. The role involves local government systems stepping beyond welfare service provision and narrow support for economic development to a broader co-ordinating role in supporting citizens changing and developing lifestyle choices. John(2001) and Denters and Rose (2005) suggest that the emergence of a *community governance* role in response to changes in social and economic context and citizen demand is a key development in local government systems in many places, especially in several of the advanced industrial economies. Echoes of this emerging community governance role can however be found in local governance systems around the world (Stoker, 1998).

Community governance or co-ordination can be seen as a role that has emerged as a response to changes in people's lifestyle and the complexity of modern life and its associated challenges (Stoker,2004). Complexity also results from the sheer technical difficulty of what many local governments now attempt to do in the public sphere. They have moved from hard-wiring challenges to a concern with soft-wiring society. It was enough of a challenge to build schools, roads and hospitals and ensure the supply of clean water, gas, electricity and all the requirements of modern life. But so much of what they are trying to do now is about soft wiring, getting healthier communities, ensuring that children from their early years get the right stimulation and the right environment in which to grow and develop, trying to find ways in which our economy can grow in a way that meets the challenges of globalisation and the need for sustainability. Soft wiring challenges are complex.

Complexity is also reflected in that there is a boundary problem in a lot of public policy arenas. Who is responsible for keeping us healthy? Is it the citizen who should eat and drink appropriately, the state that should provide good advice or companies that should sell healthier food? We know it unfair to ask the police, on their own, to solve the problem of crime. We know that for our children to become educated needs more than better schools. In short, complexity comes from the fact that the boundaries between sectors of life and different institutions have become increasingly blurred.

So complexity of function, scale, purpose and responsibility are part of the modern condition and community governance is the response because it is only through giving scope for local capacity building and the development of local solutions which we can hope to meet the challenge posed by these complexities. The solution to complexity is networked community governance because it is only through such an approach that local knowledge and action can be connected a wider network of support and learning. In that way we can get solutions designed for diverse and complex circumstances.

These four roles for systems of local government- identity expression, economic development, social welfare and community governance-are distinctive and capture different types of activity. But is the list exhaustive? Are there other roles widely undertaken by local government systems? That is a more difficult claim to establish but from my knowledge of local government systems around the world I would say that the four roles capture the major societal functions of local government systems. But we are left with one question that local government comparativists could ask themselves: does a local government system somewhere in the world do something not captured by these four types of activity?

How could we use the typology? What we can say immediately is that different countries are unlikely to have their local government systems exclusively assigned to one role or the other and so another analytical challenge is to work through the implications and dimensions of different mixes in order to develop a more

sophisticated understanding of local government systems. Allocating a societal function to a system could be done in a variety of analytical ways. The amount of public spending on a role is not always going to be the most appropriate guide. We will need to develop criteria to make the judgements by that mix hard evidence about spending and staffing with soft evidence about ethos and understanding. Systems could be classified according to their primary or secondary functions. Systems could be compared between those that appear to be able to mix roles and those that struggle to before one function effectively. Comparisons could be made between systems that have a shared societal role as prime function. Or comparison could be drawn across a role, looking a system where it is prominent compared to systems where it is less prominent. In short one of the virtues of the typology is the range of questions and dimensions for comparison that it provides.

TOWARDS A TYPOLOGICAL THEORY OF DIFFERENT PRACTICES OF LOCAL POLITICS AND MANAGEMENT

A typology can only be the beginning of an analysis. To identify four broad types of activity against the broad brush criteria of a core societal activity of a local government system is arguably valuable but there is a danger in the end of producing an exercise in more effective description at best. Is it possible to move from a focus on typologies to what George and Bennett (2005, p235) call typological theorising which can provide 'a rich and differentiated depiction of a phenomenon and can generate discriminating and contingent

explanations and policy recommendations'. The first foray into such theorising comes with an argument that certain types of local government activity appear to be associated with certain forms of local politics (see Table 2).

The societal roles undertaken by local government systems of identity framing, economic development, social welfare and community governance encourage and are supportive of certain types of civic culture and local politics. Civic culture is the term identified by Almond and Verba (1963) and they draw a distinction between three types of political culture. Each type captures citizens' orientation towards their polity. The first is the *parochial* political culture where the citizen has little direct contact with the formal and specialized agencies of government and spends much of their time unaware of the political system. But the parochial has a sense of local community and identity. The second orientation is referred to as the *subject* political culture. Here the orientation of the citizen is as an observer with an awareness of the political system in general but a lack of engagement with it on particular issues. This orientation is used by Almond and Verba to characterize a substantial element in British political culture in the late 1950s as deferential. But deference towards the political system is only one response that could be in tune with Almond and Verba's subject culture. The subject culture can lead to citizens seeing the political system as legitimate or in a more negative light. Crucially this culture is rather defined by its passive orientation towards the outputs of the system. The crucial question for subject political culture is does the political system deliver? Finally the *participant* political

Tabla 2
Forms of local government function and associated politics

Associated form of	Identity	Economic Development	Welfare provision	Community Governance
Local Politics	Representative and clientelistic	Regime Building	Collective and partisan	Networked
Civic culture	Parochial	Pacification	Subject	Participant

culture is one where citizens understand the political system and are orientated towards being actively engaged with it both in general terms and over particular issues. Again that engagement may lead to positive or negative elevations of the political system but the orientation towards engagement remains.

In Table 2 it can be seen that I have added a fourth type of civic culture associated with the economic development role, namely the idea of civic culture premised on the pacification of citizens. The trickle down of the benefits of economic growth are sold to them collectively and offered in more targeted way to those that are in a position to question and challenge. The key insights into this form of politics come from Clarence Stone's famous study of the regime politics of Atlanta in the United States (see Stone, 1989, 1993; Stoker, 1995, Mossberger and Stoker, 2001). Politics in local government is this rampant boosterish form of economic development is driven by the social production model of power. Stone describes the political power sought by regimes as the "power to," or the capacity to act, rather than "power over" others or social control (Stone 1989, p 229). Achieving the capacity to act is by no means certain; cooperation needs to be created and maintained (Stone 1993). Regimes overcome problems of collective action and secure participation in the governing coalition through the distribution of selective incentives such as contracts, jobs, facilities for a particular neighborhood, etc. As Stone points out, the benefits realized by participants may be purposive as well as material - for example, the opportunity to achieve an organization's particular goal, such as civil rights (1993).Cooperation does not imply consensus over values and beliefs, but participation in order to realize "small opportunities" (1993, p11). Because of the resources it controls, business is a key participant in governing coalitions focused on economic development (Stone 1989,p 7). Nevertheless, the relative strength of business, the composition of particular businesses engaged in the coalition, and the presence of other interests, such as neighborhood groups or environmental groups, will vary from place to place, and may change over time.

Broadly, as indicated in Table 2, the argument is that a parochial culture appears to fit best with a local government that defines itself as

about identity. The idea of government being seen as distant as well as expressing identity for the citizen requires some explanation. It reflects a relationship where knowledge of the governmental role or judgement about its performance is subordinated to understanding that its core value is as a public face of a community. In some instances a great deal of respect can be given to local elected representatives who are seen as both the key decision-makers and champions for their local communities. Local government in parts of Northern Europe and the Nordic countries would appear to have respected and trusted local representatives. At times and in some cases the politics of identity can develop a clientelistic form. In these circumstances 'local political leaders were expected (and themselves expected) to deliver favours (jobs and/or other benefits) to their supporters in return for votes' (Goldsmith 1992, p.395) This 'bringing home the bacon' patronage-based style of politics is according to Goldsmith prominent in Southern and Central Europe and may be characteristic of local politics in local government systems in parts of Africa and the Americas.

The second form of civic culture –the subject culture– is most appropriate to and would appear to fit best with partisan and formally organised collective politics. Politics is communicated between citizens and parties and constructed in an organised manner. The formal party politics that dominates local government in large parts of northern Europe provides one form of this type of politics. But another can be observed in the local politics of Latin America developed around the emergence of participatory budgeting and other forms of more participatory democracy. A new politics of engagement is developed to underwrite and support the older politics of representation through parties (Selee and Peruzzotti, 2009).

Participatory Budgeting (PB) started its existence as a form of engagement in Porto Alegre, Brazil in the late 1980s but by 2004 it is estimated that over 250 cities or municipalities practiced some version of it. (Cabannes, 2004 ; Sintomer et al ,2007) The essence of PB rests on an annual opportunity for citizens to engage in the process of about public spending decision making in their neighbourhoods and more broadly

their locality. Formal elected representatives work alongside citizens in making decisions and in a way that tends to reinforce the collective support for the ruling party. Citizens are drawn into a process of agenda and priority setting. Allocating monies and budgets is plainly an area where engagement is possible to build even among relatively disadvantaged or disengaged citizens. Being involved in decisions that make a difference is an offer that many citizens can be attracted by (Smith, 2009 ; Wampler, 2008).

That sense of involvement is even more prominent in the participant civic culture where citizens are not waiting for an invitation to engage but are driving the agenda and organizing their own politics in a loose, pluralistic and episodic manner. Networked community governance at best can see the formal elected representative and local officials take on some form of steering function but the dynamic in the system comes from the everyday makers of politics among citizens themselves(Bang, 2003; Sorensen, 2006). These everyday makers provide the driving force for local politics. They are 'strong, self-reliant and capable' (Bang 2003, pp.20-1) and embrace the role of community in managing complex problems and the challenges of diversity. These citizens are not easily controlled or directed but they do not see themselves as simply in opposition to the system but rather the key to making it both fair and effective in solving community problems.

THE SURVIVAL OF LOCAL GOVERNANCE

At one stage you might have argued in the era of city-states or medieval fortresses in Europe that local government had a core function around security and defence. That role has been usurped by national and international level organisations in most parts of the world. We can see pressure emerging to challenge the functional claims of local government in terms of expressing identity, encouraging economic development and social welfare redistribution. Some of these pressures have been noted in early sections of the paper. Local identity is threatened by the emergence of a global civil society argue some. Economic

development at the local level is affected by the more globalized and changing nature of market forces and industrial organisation. The social welfare function is under pressure in some countries from fiscal demands. In those systems where these roles are prominent in the activities of local government it is possible to predict some tensions and some realignment of responsibilities. Some go further and argue that local government may be moving more towards the community governance function (Denters and Rose, 2005; John, 2001). Although suitably cautious and tentative in their remarks these authors suggest a trend towards a growing pertinence for this role of governance over government. If there is a drift towards community governance we should be concerned about the sustainability of local government in those systems that are heading in that direction.

One issue with community governance as a societal role for local government is that it has far less support from citizens or organised interests within society. Moreover it could be suggested that local government systems that have had a sustained relationship with "big ticket" items and functional responsibilities around identity, economic development and welfare may be well be better placed to hold on to a substantial governing role. For those systems in the throes of development, equally, grabbing responsibility for one of these big ticket items will be a major step on the way to becoming a vital part of the governing arrangements of that country. It is in those states where there is a trend towards local government basing its role on its claims as a lifestyle co-ordinator of community governance that the system would appear to have the bleakest prospects as this role is vulnerable because its lacks the local strong social base and ties more easily generated by the other functions offered by local government. Local government's community governance function has a grip on society as a whole but does not provide for either the material interests of citizens or capture a sense of value or ethos. Local government to be embedded needs to appeal as it were to either the body or the soul. There is a danger that the community governance role can end delivering neither appeal.

A local government system that bases itself on expressing a sense identify may in many

countries find itself with a social base that can sustain it into the future, it orients itself towards the souls of citizens. It may lack hard powers of coercion, regulation or economic incentives – it may be able to do little directly for its citizens to save them from harm or promote their development- but it will be able to engage through soft power, to adapt a term from international relations (Nye, 1990,2004). It will cement legitimacy to itself through its ability to get support, through the attractiveness of its values, ideologies and ethos. The economic development role involves, as described earlier, the process of building a regime of partners between local governments, key sections of the business community and other stakeholders who are offered small incentives to go along with the growth project. Here the prime power is the hard power of economic incentives reaching to a substantial range of interests combined with the agenda setting capacity of soft power to create a vision of the "new" and "vibrant" village, town or city that economic development will deliver. The social welfare role has also the capacity for local government to attract a substantial social base of both service receivers and providers. Tough fiscal challenges may limit the hard power of direct incentives but again a soft power to set the governing agenda would seem to be still feasible while taking on the welfare societal role.

The difficulty of the community governance role is that the use of hard power is limited by the sheer scale and complexity of the tasks at hand and soft power is the only option for local government. It is not a role that ensures that local government is embedded in either the body or soul of citizens or particular stakeholders. Being a ring-holder, a place shaper or community governor places local government on a slippery slope to the sidelines of governing arrangements. Moreover in the face of diverse, pluralistic set of demands from citizens it is difficult to see local government as community governor as anything other than bounced along on a fluctuating wave of popular politics, seemingly relevant at some points and seemingly irrelevant at others. The role may leave local government as a bystander in the effective governance of a country with other tiers of government, public agencies, partnership organizations and third

sector trusts having a bigger and more substantial role. The United Kingdom, and most particularly England, could be seen as an exemplar of this trend (Stoker, 2004). There is an increasingly desperate rhetoric about a community governance role but limited substantive functional capacity in relation to welfare provision and economic development and little in the way of identity politics to rest on after multiple reorganisations have created a local government system of a scale and coverage that has in large parts of the country little to do with citizens' felt sense of community (Stoker, 2004).

If relying on community governance is the weakest position for a local government system then having no effective claim over any of the four functions outlined in this article gives a clear-cut way of defining those countries that have no de facto local government system. There are several countries in the developing world where such a position could be seen as obtaining including, for example, Pakistan (Taj, 2010) . You could have make the case that Australian local government has never made the grade of being a substantial part of the countries' governing arrangements (Aulich, 2005).

There are grounds for judging the strength and sustainability of a local government system provided by the four-fold typology on offer in this article. I have argued that the community governance role may be particularly vulnerable because it lacks depth in its social embedding. But the tide of history may also be turning against other local government roles in political identity, economic development and social welfare in some systems. In this light being able to combine some of the roles to a substantial degree could be the hallmark of a strong and sustainable system of local government. In the Nordic countries a strong base in the politics of identity, combined with a significant role in welfare development matched by a skilful development of community governance role has left the system as likely to remain one the strongest throughout the world (Rose and Stahlberg, 2005). The position in other countries where local government has historically been strong might not be so positive. The challenge in developing systems of local government to achieve a sustainable degree of social rootedness will be considerable.

CONCLUDING NOTE

The value of the comparative framework outlined in this article has been hinted at but its true worth will only be demonstrated if it supports a conversation between scholars on an international scale. Can we find a way of talking to each other about our local government systems that does not get bogged down in the minutiae of services provided, institutional arrangements and constitutional standing? We need a broad framework to avoid that trap and asking what are the societal roles of local government in different countries provides one avenue towards a global comparative study of local government. It is perhaps likely that the roles identified- of identity expression, economic development, social welfare and lifestyle co-ordination- will not stand on their own if the debate is widened as other roles might be recognized and elaborated. The point is that we would still be in a position to have a comparative debate because we had the typological and theoretical resources to facilitate an exchange.

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