

# **What Rationales are Driving Neighbourhood Governance Initiatives? An Investigation in the UK and US**

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## **ABSTRACT**

In the UK and US, policy and academic communities regard the neighbourhood as an important unit of identity and action. “Neighbourhood governance” is used here to refer to formally established neighbourhood-based structures that guide participation, decision-making, co-ordination, and implementation of activities in the neighbourhood.

The policy case stated for neighbourhood governance tends to be based on a twin rationale of democracy (“local rights”) to increase the level of decision-making vested in the neighbourhood; and competence (“local knowledge”) to improve and tailor service provision to neighbourhood needs and priorities. In the academic literature, different political motivations are attributed to such initiatives. Do they reflect a devolutionary, empowerment strategy on the part of government, providing a means for government to be responsive to communities (of place) and encourage development of their own capacities? Or do they reflect a new form of centralisation, with government controlling what powers are devolved and seeking to realise its political priorities by “steering” the actions of governance entities? Or are such initiatives a palliative measure that pass responsibility from government to communities while distracting from the structural causes of deprivation?

The aim of this ESRC-funded PhD research is to consider the rationale for neighbourhood governance initiatives according to the form they take and the functions they perform, rather than taking any stated rationale at face value. This paper sets out the findings of a literature review about why neighbourhood governance has come to prominence and the different drivers for this in different contexts. It then sets out a proposed international case study methodology for the next stage of the research, providing a set of propositions to be methodically tested in the field.

**Key Words:** neighbourhood, governance, rationale, comparative