What rationales are driving neighbourhood governance initiatives in the US and UK?

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Abstract

Forms of neighbourhood governance have become increasingly prevalent in the US and UK, here defined as formal neighbourhood-based structures developed to guide participation, decision-making, co-ordination, and implementation of activities in the neighbourhood. While the policy case for neighbourhood governance tends to be based on a twin rationale of democracy and competence, different political motivations are attributed to such initiatives in the academic literature.

The aim of this ongoing PhD research is to determine 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 will aid in understanding and theorising contemporary sub-local governance, and in considering the *political* choices it reflects, to establish "who may be seeking to govern neighbourhood space" (Fraser, 2004: 439). This is timely given the spread of such governance forms, questions about the motivations and theories driving their establishment, and their role in attempts to co-ordinate not only policy and service delivery but also political co-ordination.

This paper sets out the rationales for neighbourhood governance that have been identified in the US and UK literatures, and outlines a methodology to research these. The aim here is to work up the research questions and typologies to take into the field and feedback is welcomed.

Key words: neighbourhood, governance, rationale

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Introduction

The Rise of Neighbourhood Governance

Neighbourhoods and neighbourhood governance have been features of urban policy and academic discourse in the US and UK since the 1960s and the literature reveals broad acceptance of their perceived intrinsic social value. The prominence of neighbourhood governance can be related to the fact that it fulfils many of what Cochrane (2007: 24) identifies as the main features of urban policy developed in the US in the 1960s (and subsequently adopted in the UK). These include a commitment to co-ordination; a belief that communities should take on responsibility for their own well being; a conviction that existing public service structures are bureaucratic and self-serving; and a belief that current (local) electoral structures are unrepresentative and exclusionary.

Neighbourhood governance is underpinned by the assumption that the relative proximity of interaction between citizens, service providers and decision makers possible at the neighbourhood level enables improved participation, greater responsiveness, and enhanced democracy (as identified by Dahl and Tufte, 1973). The overall aim of neighbourhood governance initiatives is generally stated as being to enhance the well-being of neighbourhood residents, via improved public services which are more tailored to their needs and priorities, and increasing participation and engagement in the local political process.

Such approaches are often, though not always, associated with "place and people-based" regeneration initiatives in deprived neighbourhoods. These have been instituted by government in the UK and US, as well as by philanthropic foundations in the US. Such efforts tend to share some common characteristics, including an attempt to comprehensively address the needs and circumstances of residents, and a focus on citizen participation in planning and implementation (Chaskin, 2005: 408). Pertinently, such initiatives have led to the creation of initiative governance structures that incorporate a diverse range of cross-sectoral stakeholders, including residents and representatives of community-based organisations, members of public sector agencies, and members of the private and non-profit sectors. Different stakeholders have different interests in "what neighbourhood means for a variety of purposes" (Fraser, 2004: 438). This research is focused on unpicking the motivations lying behind the establishment of neighbourhood governance structures, particularly from the point of view of the "sponsor" of such initiatives.

Why this research?

The formation and activities of neighbourhood governance structures, and their relation to state and market forces, have become increasingly important areas of enquiry. There is general agreement among commentators that significant gaps in

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research and understanding in the field of neighbourhood governance remain. Critical approaches are diluted in much of the literature, which often draws on the normative conceptions used by the sponsors of neighbourhood governance initiatives – such as the twin rationale explored below – to justify neighbourhood governance approaches. While some academic literature discusses the *political* rationales lying behind such initiatives there is a "paucity of well-designed, sceptical investigations" (Klijn & Skelcher, 2007) and a lack of rigorous and systematic research.

Consideration and critical review of the rationales attributed to neighbourhood governance is needed. Addressing this will aid in understanding and theorising contemporary sub-local governance, and assist in framing discussions not in technical or managerial terms, or in a simplistic "best practice" approach, but in terms of the *political* choices they reflect. When the reality of how entities are structured is examined, rather than the rhetoric of their existence, this will aid in establishing "who may be seeking to govern neighbourhood space" (Fraser, 2004: 439). This will enable consideration of the vertical relationships of neighbourhood governance structures back to citizens or up to higher levels of government and governance. It will also assist consideration of the role of neighbourhood governance structures in relation to state and market forces, such as government co-ordination (fleshing out theoretical conceptions of metagovernance); and adaptation to economic restructuring (exploring neo-liberal approaches to neighbourhoods, such as the ideology of self-help).

In the UK, neighbourhood governance tends to be largely a (central) government policy-led concept subject to much rhetoric. As Foley and Martin (2000: 484) explain with regard to community involvement, "the theoretical underpinnings of politicians' commitment… remain somewhat ambiguous". In the US, the field is now more driven by state and (especially) city government and philanthropic foundations, levering some federal funds. While caution is needed when comparing countries with centralised governments with those where there is greater local autonomy (as is the case with the UK and US), there is validity in conducting cross-national research on this topic. Policies have developed in an (albeit intermittently) intertwined rather than separate way in the UK and US, with the US proving to be a source of policy lessons for the UK (Cochrane, 2007: 14). Here the UK actually refers to England, rather than including the devolved administrations of Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland, given the difficulty of incorporating the variety of different policy approaches pursued since devolution.

The overall aim of this research is to determine 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. Where previous research has hypothesised the underlying political rationale for the initiative, this has tended to be done following case study investigation. Here it is proposed to develop a set of typologies for neighbourhood governance by rationale, against which case studies can subsequently be assessed. This paper sets out the rationales for neighbourhood governance that have been identified in the US and UK literatures, and outlines the subsequent methodology to research these. The aim here is to work up the research questions and inform the neighbourhood governance typologies to take into the field and feedback is welcomed.

What is neighbourhood governance?

Neighbourhood governance can be defined as a *structure* that enhances the degree of decision-making authority vested in the neighbourhood. It can also be defined as a *process* by which neighbourhood residents are involved in making decisions about what is to be done in their neighbourhood (Somerville, 2005b: 2). Taken together, neighbourhood governance comprises the neighbourhood-level structures and processes used to "guide civic participation, planning, decision-making, co-ordination, and implementation of activities within the neighbourhood, to represent neighbourhood interests to actors beyond it, and to identify and organise accountability and responsibility for action undertaken" (Chaskin, 2003: 162).

This research is going to focus on the *structures* [entities] of neighbourhood (sub-local) governance in deprived urban areas. "Structures" refer to formally constituted neighbourhood-based governance entities able to undertake formal and accountable decision-making (Chaskin and Abunimah, 1999: 59) and perform neighbourhood governance functions and processes. This focus does not include neighbourhood governance processes that may be undertaken by other bodies that function or deliver services within the neighbourhood that lack a neighbourhood-based decision-making remit. This focus on structure encompasses both the entity's form and functions. Form means their organisational structure, legal status and types of membership used. Function encompasses the entity's mission, roles and responsibilities. These structures are likely to have arisen out of neighbourhood-based initiatives and programmes, instigated by government or philanthropic foundations. Though some initiatives have arisen out of community efforts, such as community development trusts in the UK, or the US's "community-based organisations" (as described by Halpern, 1994) this research is focused on the motivations of the sponsor organisation in establishing neighbourhood governance initiatives and the initiative governance structures which result.

The relationship of neighbourhood governance structures to government is an important consideration. In the US and UK, the autonomy of neighbourhood structures is supervised and checked by government, described by Fung (2004) as "accountable autonomy" (to local government) in the US, which chimes with the UK notion of "constrained discretion" (as explained by Stoker, 2004 to describe what is allowed by central government). In the US, Chaskin and Garg's (1997: 642) case study selection reveals a spectrum of (local) government involvement with neighbourhood governance entities in the US, from those that are government sponsored, to government having no form of involvement at all. However, in the absence of government, foundations do tend to be instigator and funder, as explored below. In the UK, government is a more consistent presence in the processes and structures of neighbourhood governance.

The rationales for neighbourhood governance

Generally the rationale for neighbourhood governance is *stated* as being to improve the quality of democracy (increase the level of decision-making vested in neighbourhood) and to improve the quality of services (tailor service provision to neighbourhood needs and priorities), with a notion that the overall aim is to improve the "well-being" or quality of life of the community. Chaskin and Garg (1997: 633)

describe the "twin rationale" of democracy ("local rights") and competence ("local knowledge and power"). Other commentators have used the terms "managerialist and democratic agendas" (Sullivan, 2001: 35), or "co-ordination of local services, and their co-governance with the local community" (Johnson and Osborne, 2003: 147). Combined, these rationales reflect the perceived importance of neighbourhoods as "units of identity and action" (Chaskin and Abunimah, 1999: 60).

In this research, the dual elements of the twin rationale will be considered separately. They are conflated due to the conception that democracy is a means as well as an end. Meaningful and sustainable community involvement is sought not only due to its normative value but to enable more responsive service delivery. Considering the elements separately will enable investigation of how much the focus for neighbourhood governance is on aspirations of democracy rather than on improving services, ideally revealing any imbalance in emphasis between the two that has been masked by their conflation.

The "twin rationale" is based upon both practical and normative arguments. In the academic literature, these arguments are either echoed uncritically, reinforcing the normative basis of policymaking; or form the basis of a critique. Some commentators reiterate the rhetoric of the "twin rationale", viewing the establishment of neighbourhood governance entities as an attempt to build on neighbourhood strengths and participation while simultaneously attempting to make government more responsive to these entities (such as Chaskin and Garg, 1997: 641). Others who critique the "twin rationale" go on to attribute one of what can be termed the "political rationales" to neighbourhood governance initiatives. Though much of this work is theoretical rather than based on empirical research, it highlights that neighbourhood governance initiatives are inherently political as well as practical exercises.

Some, especially in the UK, see this apparent decentralisation of power to neighbourhoods as a new form of centralisation (such as Hoggett, 1996 and Taylor, 2003). Skelcher (2004: 40) cautions about the "new centralism of targeted delivery", albeit with an ostensible emphasis on consultation with citizens, and in a way that bypasses local authorities. This fits with the conception of governance as "steering". As Pierre and Peters (2000: 30) state, "governments have developed new ways of engaging with society while seeking to strengthen their role through alternative modes of governance and attempts to co-ordinate action".

Others see the rationale as a "strategy of containment" (Lepine et al, 2007) where deprivation is dealt with separately from the mainstream. This can be regarded as tokenism that obscures the need for structural reform, or as an ideological response founded in the notion of self-help where communities should take responsibility for their problems. Overall, the notion of containment suggests that neighbourhood governance efforts may not be linked to broader processes, leaving neighbourhoods to sink or swim based on their capacity to help themselves.

In sum, a review of the literature has identified the following possible rationales for neighbourhood governance initiatives (from the point of view of the instigating or "sponsor" body, which is likely to be government or perhaps foundations in the US): democratisation and devolution; competence and co-ordination; steering (by

government or other dominant interests); and containment (founded in tokenism or in the ideology of self-help).

In reality, arrangements are likely to comprise elements of these different rationales and the literature cited cannot always be discretely allocated to a single rationale. The attribution of these different rationales in the academic literature reflects differences in how the empirical state of affairs is interpreted, and in the normative criteria used to make judgements about it. An explanation and review of the relevant literature for each rationale is set out below. These will be tested in the field when undertaking case studies in the US and UK (England).

1. Democratisation and devolution

Democracy and devolution are regarded in the literature as essential ingredients for neighbourhood governance as well as an outcome that provides a rationale for its inception. This rationale is founded on the normative value of the devolution of authority to the local level (known in the US as 'home rule') which in theory should include financial, managerial and political powers. It is also founded on the ethical view of the fundamental right and responsibilities of citizens to have some control over policies that will affect them (regarded in the US as a basic tenet of democracy). This rationale is informed by the communitarian view that the development of governance arrangements requires consideration of citizens' rights and responsibilities, with the state's role conceptualised as developing devolved and responsive governing and service delivery structures and processes (Lepine et al, 2007: 10).

The normative view is that governance contributes to democracy (Fung and Wright, 2001). Klijn and Skelcher (2007: 587) term this perceived relationship the "complementarity conjecture", where governance enables greater participation in the policy process and sensitivity in programme implementation, with participatory democracy complementing representative democracy. The neighbourhood is perceived as the foundation for other levels of governance (Docherty et al., 2001). It is seen as the level at which more accessible, responsive and accountable decision-making is possible as it is the level at which citizens can most easily access governance and understand the issues at stake (what Jessop, 2005b, would term the "lifeworld" of civic society). In the US, Berry et al (1993) describe the level of the neighbourhood as that at which residents encounter the most tangible consequences of public decisions and have the motivation and knowledge to get engaged. It is assumed that participatory governance structures will operate as de Tocquevillian "schools of democracy", developing greater awareness of and interest in policymaking and increasing turnout in local elections.

Kathi and Cooper (2005: 559) add an instrumental argument for the US, viewing some level of participation as necessary to "maintain stability in a political community". Neighbourhood governance entities are perceived as a counterbalance to power at the local (in the US, generally municipal) level (Somerville, 2005a: 127). In the absence of such governance structures, what Somerville (2005a: 126-27) terms the UK's "steering centralism" is posited as perhaps being reproduced at the local level as "steering municipalism" (along the lines of the "urban regimes" identified in the US, such as by Stone, 1989).

A review of the empirical research does not confirm the theoretical advantages of neighbourhood governance structures often touted in policy. It indicates that mechanisms and actions tend to be focused on joined-up service-based managerial arrangements. This suggests a managerialist rather than democratic emphasis to governance where communities can "become substitute managers rather than empowered citizens" (Sullivan, 2001: 34), implying an emphasis on the competence rather than democracy aspects of the twin rationale.

For example, Geddes (2006) assessed the democratic legitimacy of New Deal for Communities (NDC) partnerships. He found that partnerships can "*appear* to open up new approaches to legitimacy" (2006: 76) [emphasis added]. For example, in many partnerships local residents constituted a majority of the board, which enabled them to challenge the legitimacy of local councillors by claiming to represent people more effectively, for example by being elected via a higher turnout. But Geddes (2006: 87) describes a "naïve localism" with a narrow focus on public service reform, which he attributed to the lack of experience of many resident board members in the context of the powerful control exercised by government. His arguments validate the line of enquiry being proposed as to whether the ostensible rationale of democratic renewal and empowerment ascribed to many neighbourhood initiatives plays out in reality.

Research, often into regeneration partnerships in the UK, also points to the problems faced by structures in delivering democratic outcomes, in particular given the difficulties of establishing legitimate and accountable community representation (Skelcher, 2007; Chaskin, 2003). Taylor (2003) has drawn on a case study of a neighbourhood renewal partnership to explain the potential for community representatives to run the risk of being accused of being unrepresentative by their partnership colleagues, or of having been "captured by the state" (Foley and Martin, 2000: 486) by their community. Research also points to fears that area-based initiatives will shift power to self-appointed community representatives (Foley and Martin, 2000: 487) or that leaders may adopt parochial viewpoints (Lowndes and Sullivan, 2006: 19).

In turn, Skelcher (2000: 13) explains broader problems of accountability, which may be direct to partners in the initiative but remote from citizens. His research indicates the frequent concentration of power with one agency (often the local authority) and a variability in the "downwards accountability relationships" (Skelcher, 2000: 13) to the local community. This implies a paradox that politicians may institute citizen engagement in policy development via governance structures but are reluctant for it to inform their own decision-making (Klijn and Skelcher, 2007: 597). And even if other forms of "downwards" accountability are developed, these may be negated by the development of performance-orientated "upwards" accountability to central government (explored in the "steering" rationale below). Therefore governance structures can be understood as being some way down the policy hierarchy, concerned with management rather than politics (Klijn and Skelcher, 2007: 596).

But there is a developing theoretical and empirical literature on new forms of democratic practice. Fung and Wright (2001) detail an "empowered participatory governance" approach (as used in Chicago), which is a framework for citizen participation in policy-making based on the notion of deliberative democracy, or "reaching collective decisions through a process of reason giving" (Fagotto and Fung,

2006: 646). It is presented as an approach which aids in preventing parochialism and encourages consideration of the needs of the broader community beyond the neighbourhood, or what Fagotto and Fung (2006: 653) term issues of "social justice". Such approaches have less to do with the form the structure takes and much more to do with the way it operates. Indeed, research in the US implies that the success of neighbourhood governance mechanisms is dependent on the "structuring of relationships and the ongoing negotiation of connections, responsibilities, expectations and lines of accountability, rather than on a particular organisational structure or a particular, formally acknowledged set of roles and relationships" (Chaskin and Abunimah ,1999: 77). So in the absence of an assessment of an initiative's "democratic software" (its informal relationships and practices) as well as its "hardware" (the entity, its roles, accountabilities and mandates) (as suggested by Mathur and Skelcher, 2007) it is hard to assess the extent to which it is designed to deliver the democracy rationale. This is acknowledged in the fieldwork proposals (set out in the "next steps" section at the end of the paper).

Alternatively, while there is a normative conception that devolution and empowerment are sought by communities, Entwistle et al (2007), in their case studies of ten partnerships in Wales, found a lack of appetite among interviewees for the "loosening of vertical linkages consistent with the deepening of devolved partnership practices". They found that many respondents wanted "better hierarchy, not less" (2007: 15), fitting with what Healey (2006: 315) termed people's expectations of "the Council".

It should be made clear here that as Pratchett (2004: 362) explains, local self-government to whatever degree occurs only because a higher-level authority delegates some of its sovereign powers and responsibilities, which can be withdrawn. In comparing the British unitary system with the American federal system, the UK has no intermediate, state, level of government, so here local government is a "creature of central government" (Wolman and Goldsmith, 1990: 23). In the federal US, "local" (in this context generally municipal) governments have no constitutional relationship to national government. Local government is a creature of state government, although many states grant their local governments varying degrees of general competencies through "home rule" provisions ("home rule" being the principle or practice of self-government by localities). The extent of local government's power, however, is also subject to limitations prescribed by state constitutions and statutes. Thus the degree of autonomy at the sub-local, neighbourhood, level will not only be a function of the level of delegation of powers from the local (in the US case, municipal) level, but the level of delegation to that level from higher levels such as the state or central government.

Even if higher-level authorities were keen, the most extreme conceptual form of neighbourhood governance - community independence or self-determination (as depicted in the Ealing comedy *Passport to Pimlico*) – cannot be expected to occur in actuality, and the normative value of community self-determination does need to be questioned. This is because neighbourhood governance has to be integrated vertically into wider economic, social and political governance structures to enable delivery of community priorities, to whatever extent, while also taking responsibilities to the wider community into account. Small geographical areas cannot simply secede from their broader context. Overly powerful decentralised structures lead to problems of

fragmentation (Sullivan, 2001: 38). And neighbourhood governance structures cannot be the single decision-making authority for that particular territory, given that some decisions, for example about certain forms of public good provision such as public transport provision, do need to be taken at a higher geographical scale, albeit ideally informed by the priorities set at the lower level. Neighbourhoods could conceivably have considerable power, but in a limited range of core areas dictated by subsidiarity (the principle which states that matters ought to be handled by the lowest competent authority), focused on issues where there are likely to be few negative externalities for the broader population.

2. Competence and Co-ordination

"Competence" refers to the notion that residents' knowledge can inform and improve service delivery. This rationale takes an instrumental line, seeing neighbourhoods as an effective and efficient level for service delivery and as a level at which citizens can hold services to account. Service users are not conceptualised as "the clamourous public" or "demanding consumers" but as experts whose knowledge and experience can make an important contribution to policy and practice (Newman et al, 2004: 221). The focus on local knowledge stems from the belief that local people understand the needs, opportunities, priorities and dynamics at work in their neighbourhood in ways that professional non-residents may not (Chaskin and Garg, 1997: 634). Involving citizens in planning and implementing practices that affect them is seen as promoting better (as in more connected, co-ordinated and responsive) policies and programmes tailored to their needs and priorities. This rationale also has an ethical basis, that if public policies are set to satisfy societal values, then service deliverers should involve citizens in the planning and delivery of services (Kathi and Cooper, 2005: 562).

In the US and UK such involvement is seen as instrumental at the neighbourhood level as it is the level that is the point of provision for many goods and services. The neighbourhood is seen, as Berger and Neuhaus (1977) suggest, as a "mediating institution" operating between individuals and the larger society, with neighbourhood governance structures providing mechanisms to guide planning and promote the co-ordination and delivery of services (Chaskin and Garg, 1997: 635).

In the US, several cities have attempted to establish city-wide neighbourhood governance initiatives (as documented in Berry, Portney, and Thompson, 1993). These initiatives are based on the assumption that the creation of collaborative institutions will enable neighbourhoods to define their priorities and needs, leading to more responsive services (Kathi and Cooper, 2005). These approaches draw on the notion of deliberative democracy, or Fung and Wright's (2001) framework for citizen participation in policy making, empowered participatory governance. Similar city-wide attempts founded on the competence rationale in the UK are less common (some are detailed in Burns et al., 1994) as the focus tends to be on disadvantaged neighbourhoods.

A commitment to co-ordination in policy and practice has remained a key feature of urban policy in the US and UK since the 1960s (Cochrane, 2007). Neighbourhood governance is perceived as offering the best opportunity for "joining up" action, linking residents and service decisions (Lowndes and Sullivan, 2006), as the neighbourhood is regarded as the "unit of action" (Chaskin and Garg, 1997: 636) and

the right locus for programmes and funding streams. In the UK, the rhetoric of urban policy has combined the identification of areas for targeted attention with the search for co-ordination (Cochrane, 2007: 32). Here the co-ordination rationale draws from the pragmatic view that centralised approaches to service provision have failed and that engaging core mainstream service providers within neighbourhood governance structures is the preferred mechanism for getting resources to disadvantaged neighbourhoods and tailoring service delivery to their needs. Exceptional (or programmatic) funding is not seen as enough to tackle area-based disadvantage. In the US, attempts at comprehensive area-based strategies with local governance mechanisms date from the 1960s when they served to counter the perceived shortcomings of centralised responses to poverty, and to devolve decision-making and strategic action to the local level (Chaskin and Garg, 1997: 637). Such approaches have been reinforced by the "federal retrenchment" of the 1980s, while in the UK central government remains a, if not the key, driver of urban policy even as it pursues policies to encourage neighbourhood governance.

Government policy has presented neighbourhoods as sites of innovation in service design and of opportunity for greater resident involvement in decisions about services (Lowndes and Sullivan, 2006: 2). Neighbourhood governance is also presented as offering an opportunity to "join up" or co-ordinate action among service providers and the private and voluntary sectors to address local priorities (Foley and Martin, 2000: 482). The normative argument is that a range of stakeholders enables access to a range of expertise, experience and resources within and outside the neighbourhood, helps "break down categorical thinking" and combines professional approaches with "grassroots intent" (Chaskin and Garg, 1997: 648).

However, empirical research does not unequivocally confirm these theoretical advantages often touted in policy. For example, in his research on NDCs, Geddes (2006) considered their capacity and effectiveness to identify communities' priorities and needs and work to provide them. He explains that the incentives vary for different sectoral actors. For some, such as a local authority, or PCT, an NDC neighbourhood "is but one among many such areas" (Geddes, 2006: 89) and service providers face the conflict between national objectives and targets and local priorities, as well as "bureaucratic resistance to organisational change and resource constraints" (2006: 90). For neighbourhood-based third sector actors, "the apparent opportunities to exercise real influence via NDCs over public service provision *appear* very substantial" [emphasis added]. However, Geddes explains, the structures and processes of the partnerships "incorporate [local residents] within the apparatus of the state at least as much… as they open up the state to citizens" (2006: 89). He concludes that partnerships "lack the power and capacity to exercise serious influence within the state apparatus" (2006: 92). This fits with the notion that accountability in the UK remains largely functional and upwards to central government (Sullivan, 2004: 198) (to be explored in the "steering" rationale below).

The competence element of the rationale relates to the notion that communities have tacit local knowledge that representatives may bring to policy debates (Foley and Martin, 2000: 485). Service users may be conceptualised as "experts" whose knowledge and experience can contribute to the development of new policies and practices (Newman and Ashton, 2004:220). But such expectations of community may assume that communities are more willing to engage than they actually are. Residents

may become frustrated as neighbourhood structures may not be able to exert influence over all the issues over which they may desire influence (Lowndes and Sullivan, 2006: 17). Even where ostensibly the structure does have influence, Purdue (2001) found in the regeneration partnerships he studied that community leaders found it difficult to create a collaborative relationship with their statutory partners. He found that community leaders were expected to "trust their powerful partners without reciprocation" (2001: 2222). This is reflected by Rich et al's (2001) national survey of collaboration between community-based organisations and municipal governments in the US, in which a "thin" version of collaboration was reported, thought unlikely to produce the beneficial outcomes suggested by collaboration's proponents.

The perceived benefits of neighbourhood working cited in a report for the Department of Communities and Local Government in the UK emphasise the competence rather than democracy rationale (which gets a mention at the end): "increased awareness amongst service providers of neighbourhood and residents' needs… the joined-up nature of the problems and the potential for joined-up solutions… innovation in service delivery… pooling of resources and budgets…increased ease of access to services and improvement in the responsiveness and flexibility of services; and the encouragement of participation in the local political process" (White et al, 2006: 5). But this does require not only the capacity building of residents to get involved, but also fundamental changes on the part of service providers to engage with residents effectively and to put in place the processes that will make services responsive to residents' priorities and needs.

3. Steering

Steering by central government (especially in the UK)

While the political rhetoric of neighbourhood governance may concern the "twin rationale", the political rationales attributed to neighbourhood governance in the academic literature include the possibility that it is a new form of centralism to achieve the priorities of central government or provide a check on the power of local government. Devolution is seen as occurring within the bounds set by centrally-driven policies and priorities (Hoggett, 1996). This is what Klijn and Skelcher term the "instrumental conjecture" which views governance networks as "a powerful means through which dominant interests can achieve their goals" (2007: 587). This position critiques the pluralist position cited by those who see governance as a way of increasing participation in deliberation, and emphasises governance's strong managerial character.

Theoretically this approach relates to wider debates about changing forms of social regulation in a neo-liberal context. It starts from the premise that the interests of government actors exist prior to any wider engagement with stakeholders (Klijn and Sklecher, 2007: 599). Governance forms provide a means of reinforcing these dominant interests. This rationale sees governance as a political tool, where government shapes governance to advance its ends. Jessop's (2005a) concept of metagovernance is a regulation theory of particular relevance. This describes the process whereby governments seek to control both what powers or competencies go to what "institutionalised scale" and to enhance their capacity to realise political priorities or provide "direction to society" (Pierre and Peters, 2000: 4) by "steering"

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an array of actors and organisations (Somerville, 2005a: 118). As a response to the possible problems of fragmentation and obfuscation of political aims, government has moved to metagovernance to keep governance operating "in the shadow of hierarchical authority" (Scharpf, 1994: 41). Metagovernance is concerned with how political and economic co-ordination is achieved despite the apparent limits of both hierarchical power and horizontal co-ordination. The neighbourhood as a space for governance is seen in this rationale not as a site for devolution but as a new mechanism for central control.

Regulation theory can be seen to draw from the social reproduction approach, taking a neo-Weberian perspective that highlights what is seen as the "inevitable conflict" (Duncan and Goodwin, 1988) between locally-based pluralist politics focused on "social consumption" issues, and the "corporatist centre" largely concerned with issues of economy and production (Saunders' "dual state" thesis, 1984). However, in these approaches a relative autonomy is attributed to local politics, rather than taking the existence and effect of central government policy initiatives, as is the case with metagovernance, or the broader economic context, as would be the case with a neo-liberal perspective, into account.

From a practical perspective, governance can be said to require government to ensure that self-regulation does not serve the private interests of a few powerful players or become too parochial, not taking into account the needs of the broader community (Hohn and Neuer, 2006: 297). For example, devolution to neighbourhoods implies increased differentiation in public service delivery, which may not be politically acceptable in terms of equity, an issue particularly pertinent in the UK context, with concerns about "postcode lotteries". Therefore government may require that national targets or commitments to minimum service standards take priority over the service differentiation requested by governance structures. But it can also be said that those who do not agree with the "official" view of problems or solutions run the risk of being excluded from the governance structure and not gaining access to the resources or discretion associated with it.

An alternative manifestation of "steering centralism" is the notion that the political rationale for neighbourhood governance is to provide a check on the power of local government, enabling central government to bypass local government structures. For example, Jones and Ward (2002: 485) chart a "process of centrally orchestrated localism" of functions in the UK to bypass the existing structures of local government and the professions associated with them, albeit that central government also "imposes new controls and measures against which the newly "empowered" must be evaluated" (Cochrane, 2007: 39). Stoker (1990: 167) described challenge partnerships in the UK as "a new tool in the government's hegemonic project for the control of local politics", following Thatcher's defeat of "municipal socialism" (Boddy and Fudge, 1984). Partnership was viewed as a "means by which to inject a private sector dynamism into… overly bureaucratic and inefficient (often Labour-controlled) local authorities" (Gibbs et al., 2001: 107). Davies (2002: 319) posits that central government holds local government in "elite contempt" despite the rhetoric of decentralisation, and encourages "collaborative tokenism" by seeking to ensure that partnerships fulfil central objectives.

It is empirically clear that in the UK there has been increasing central government focus on the sub-local, neighbourhood level. However, local government remains very important not least because of its ability, albeit limited, to facilitate or hamper central government direction. Local government continues to have a crucial role in neighbourhood governance, not least due to the power it gains from its functions, authority and legitimacy, reinforced by the expectations that residents still have of "the Council" (Healey, 2006), and the duty of well being placed on it by central government.

In the US, Cochrane (2007: 57) describes the rise of "municipal federalism" in the 1990s, with the devolution of local government authority to non-governmental organisations like Community Development Corporations, seen as "alternatives to government" by Reaganite conservatives. They were seen as being able to "respond quickly to the development opportunities offered by a changing marketplace" (Cochrane, op cit). This "federal retrenchment" was seen as a factor in the shift towards a neo-liberal policy orientation to try and ensure that a local area can compete effectively in the wider global economy (Martin et al., 2003:115).

The political objectives of government are relevant to how they perform their "metagovernor" role in relation to neighbourhood governance. Neo-liberalism seemingly provides a useful lens for considering governance in terms of government's hand in the process. However, ascribing a purely neo-liberal content to these objectives would restrict the analysis and make it overly prescriptive, ascribing a deterministic logic. While Jessop (2002) points out that the state retains the right to open, close, and change governance arrangements in terms of political advantage, it is not clear where this lies on the continuum between the extremes of a neo-liberal, pro-capital position, or a new localist ideal of local determination. This is why the broader research introduced here will investigate the political motivations behind the use of neighbourhood governance through attempting to diagnose what is implied by the structure's characteristics rather than by taking the rationales attributed to it at face value.

While much of the work underpinning the steering rationale is theoretical and pitched at an abstract level, the empirical research into partnerships already cited does provide some, albeit limited, evidence for neighbourhood governance being a form of central government steering.

While the rhetoric of devolution in the UK seemingly posits that direct control from the centre can be reduced, regulation regimes – in the form, for example, of targets – can be interpreted as providing evidence of metagovernance. Indeed, Somerville (2005a: 124) identifies an effect of cross-sectoral governance structures as spreading "responsibility for meeting the government's strategic targets as widely as possible among citizens and communities". Newman (2004: 31), in discussions with public service managers in the UK, found that while accountability to the local public is an increasingly significant set of norms in policy discourse and managerial accounts, performance accountability to the centre is prioritised over public accountability to the locality. Skelcher et al (2005) found that governance forms arose directly as a result of central government policy, largely in compliance with the measures necessary to obtain additional funding. Klijn and Skelcher's (2007: 600) research found that the majority of governance structures studied were integrated into "vertical

performance management systems that connected them to regulation by national government". Healey (2006), in her study of different forms of urban governance in Newcastle, also found that the development of such processes is "strongly dependent on the central-local government power dynamic" (2006: 316), with power at the local level constrained by the "regulatory and resource allocation power" of national government (2006: 315). Whitehead (2003), in assessing the governance structures within which six SRB partnerships in the West Midlands were embedded, identifies a metagovernance relationship in the mechanisms for Government Office control and management of the partnerships. Drawing on a case study of a neighbourhood renewal partnership, Taylor (2003) describes the perhaps extreme and sceptical view that government encouragement of neighbourhood governance is a "new arena for social control", one in which "the rules of the game [are] still very much dictated by government" (2003: 190).

These examples emphasise the tension between "national prescription and local flexibility", and question the actual extent of discretion and involvement on offer to local communities (Foley and Martin, 2000: 487). As Cochrane (2007: 36) describes it, "'joined up' approaches are translated into centralised targets, even as responsibility is delegated downwards". However, as Skelcher (2000) explains in the case of partnerships, though their development has been stimulated by central government, and there are "accountability and regulatory relationships back to the centre" (2000: 16), some discretion is available as detailed supervision is not possible. This chimes with Hohn and Neuer's (2006: 296) notion that the building of governance capacities makes it more difficult for government to subsequently continue to "hold all the strings".

Steering by other dominant interests (especially in the US)

The "dominant interests" seeking to achieve their goals through "steering" neighbourhood governance initiatives do not have to be central government. Though the notion of metagovernance has not been used in the US literature, there is recognition that "even the most local of participatory programs… involves many layers of supra-local and centralised institutional machinery" (Fagotto and Fung, 2006:641).

The absence of a federal "firm hand" in the US means that the most recent developments in the realm of neighbourhood governance contrast with the largely, to date, central government-determined developments in the UK. Municipal government-led initiatives have established city-wide neighbourhood governance structures to link to local government in the US. The specific targeting of deprived neighbourhoods via "community building" or "comprehensive community" initiatives is generally funded by philanthropic foundations rather than government.

The US version of "steering" can therefore be regarded as not by federal government, but on the part of lower levels of government and the philanthropic foundations that sponsor initiatives. In a case study of a four city-wide programme sponsored by the Ford Foundation, Chaskin (2005: 416) found that there was tension between the ideology of collective, consensual decision making and the need and pressure for efficient progress toward particular outcomes. He stresses that bureaucracy dominates the "organisational landscape", due to the difficulties of establishing and

maintaining participation and orchestrating participants' activities, as well as organisations shaping their activities to meet the demands of their funders (Chaskin, 2005: 410). He found that "power dynamics are pervasive", with more effective action arising from efforts led by professionals (planners, government officials, foundations) rather than the "grassroots" (Chaskin, 2005: 418).

Philanthropic foundations (such as the Ford Foundation and the Annie E. Casey Foundation) are perceived as significant players in policy-setting in the US. Martin (2004: 394) describes such foundations as an important player in urban governance, shaping a "neighbourhood policy regime" comprising foundations, community organisations and the local state. Chaskin (2003:185) describes a "loosely coupled" system of neighbourhood governance comprising organisations, local government and "outsider" foundations interacting in "highly improvised ways". Martin (2004) feels this is symptomatic of the increasing privatism of US urban governance, as community-based development has shifted from a local state responsibility to one supported by national and local non-profit foundations, which are subject to little community or government oversight. Koppell (2003, cited in Mathur and Skelcher, 2007) finds that the design characteristics of foundations enable them to take advantage of their public-private status, for example by being able to exert considerable political leverage, while being relatively immune from the constraints that normally apply in each sector, such as accountability.

While the role of foundations in UK neighbourhood governance is much less significant, the Joseph Rowntree Foundation is an example of one which has become engaged not just in commissioning research in the field but in establishing its four-year Neighbourhood Programme in 2002 which supported community groups and organisations in twenty UK neighbourhoods. Davies (2004: 275) examined the role of the Joseph Rowntree Charitable Trust in supporting non-governmental organisations (that were campaigning for democratic reform). He concluded that the Trust was an important political actor and that the political influence of charitable foundations should be more widely recognised.

4. Containment

While the political rhetoric for neighbourhood governance tends to make use of variations on the "twin rationale", the political rationales attributed to its development in the academic literature include the possibility that it reflects what Lepine et al (2007: 13) refer to as a "strategy of containment". This is defined as managing poverty and inequality through programmes that are separate and distinct from the mainstream. This can be interpreted in two ways.

The first is that this reflects the concern found in the UK and US literature, that neighbourhood governance structures, especially given their focus on deprived areas, may be "expressions of the parallel lives of different communities" (Lowndes and Sullivan, 2006: 21). Initiatives are seen as focusing on palliative measures rather than on the underlying structural causes of deprivation (Foley and Martin, 2000: 486). Cochrane (2007: 3) cautions that it is easier to develop policies to define problems in terms of areas rather than as a consequence of structural inequalities. Some regard neighbourhood governance as obscuring the need for systemic reform (White et al, 2006: 247), or "absolving the wider community of its responsibilities" (Taylor, 2003:

192), while Stoker (1998: 39) describes governance as "the acceptable face of spending cuts". In the US, Fraser et al (2003: 421) point to the fact that focusing on neighbourhoods may be a "convenient alternative to increased intervention by the state" and posit that "community building" should be subject to greater criticism regarding its reliance on normative assumptions about the resultant benefits. Hohn and Neuer (2006: 296) take an extreme position, suggesting that efforts are "initiated at the government level within the framework of a discharge strategy *[the rationale]* and declared as an empowerment strategy *[the rhetoric]*". This implies a symbolic or tokenistic use of neighbourhood governance with little intention of actually enabling democracy and competence, whereby initiatives are seen as being implemented out of political expediency.

The second interpretation of this rationale is founded in the ideological notion of self help – of neighbourhoods tackling their own problems. Though presented in terms of empowerment, Cochrane (2007: 52) perceives the discourse of community (of place, or neighbourhood) as implying a "process of self-management and responsibilisation". Jessop (2002: 465) terms the call for "arrangements to be instituted to encourage … neighbourhood… solutions to the problems of social reproduction" and "revalorise neighbourhood support mechanisms as a means of tackling social exclusion" as "neo-communitarianism".

This differs from the democratisation and devolution rationale as devolution is founded on the notion of powers being devolved to the right level (the subsidiarity principle). Here, there is a clear handing down the line of responsibility, without the links back up to higher levels of government and governance that would be seen in a "steering" context. Adaptation to external pressures (such as the neo-liberal restructuring of the economy) is seen as the task of communities (of place, or neighbourhoods) themselves, and not as a responsibility for broader society. In their review of US urban policy, Barnekov et al (1989: 114) provide an example of the use of this rhetoric. An espoused outcome of the withdrawal of federal funds in the 1980s was to "stimulate community-self reliance and unleash a massive increase in voluntarism and private philanthropy".

The academic work underpinning the containment rationale is slim and largely theoretical, drawing on a neo-liberal critique. In neo-liberalism, the state is seen as agent of the market rather than regulator of the market (Smith, 2002). The empirically evident rise of the "competitive city" is seen as proof of the rise of the neo-liberal regime, where the explicit focus of policy is on capitalist production rather than social reproduction (Cochrane, 2007: 13). Jessop (2002: 454-55) explains that neo-liberalism "tends to promote 'community' as a compensatory mechanism for the inadequacies of the market mechanism". Fraser (2004: 454) posits that "civil society is expected to play a larger role in neighbourhood governance and the provision of social welfare", given the retrenchment of the state. Levitas (2000: 194) goes further, seeing the role of community as being "to mop up the ill-effects of the market and to provide the conditions for its continued operation". Mayer (2003: 126) sees the rhetoric as suggesting that "a judicious combination of mobilisation from below and capacity building from above can solve the problems of uneven development and marginalisation".

Others, especially in the US, such as Katz (2004: 26) take what could be seen as a neo-liberal stance, stating that neighbourhood change should be market-driven rather than community-controlled. Indeed, Community Development Corporations are described as being able to "make neighbourhoods better in ways that are recognised by the market" (Walker, 2002: 8-9), reflecting the predominant (neo-liberal) economic rationale for such approaches.

Some cite the continued significance of political engagement around collective provision (Ward and Jonas, 2004) to argue that social reproduction remains important (Gough, 2002). The (neo-liberal) argument that deprivation (social exclusion in the UK) undermines economic competitiveness can also be interpreted as justification for social policy interventions in a neo-liberal context, such as area-based initiatives, rather than as a dismissal of these areas. Jessop (2002: 464) suggests that different approaches may be adopted at different scales. Neo-liberal strategies are likely to dominate at the national and city-wide level, with emphasis on the restructuring of the urban economy. Other strategies such as neo-communitarianism are likely to be used at the neighbourhood level to manage issues of social exclusion "even in the most neo-liberal cases" (Jessop, op cit). However, the notion of containment suggests that such efforts are not linked to broader political, economic and social processes, and in the extreme form can be seen as leaving neighbourhoods to sink or swim based on their capacity to help themselves.

Hohn and Neuer (2006:296) posit that even if new governance structures in deprived neighbourhoods are initiated by government within the framework of a "strategy of containment", albeit declared as an empowerment strategy, the resultant building of governance capacities makes it more difficult for the government to subsequently continue to "hold all the strings". Therefore, though neighbourhood governance in deprived areas may not be tackling the sources of structural inequality (which some would see as driven by the neo-liberal, pro-capital, regime) there are arguments for such approaches to develop the "change resources" (Sen, 1999) of communities, which can contribute to building their resilience and capability for self-help. This reinforces the self-help element of the containment rationale.

Next Steps - Fieldwork

This paper has considered the four principal rationales for neighbourhood governance in the US and UK that have been revealed by a review of the literature. The next phase of the research is to develop a typology of characteristics for each theoretical type of neighbourhood governance according to these rationales. This will provide a set of testable propositions for use in six case studies (three in the US and three in England). Case studies will comprise documentary review and interviews, and will be supplemented by elite interviews with "sponsors" of neighbourhood governance initiatives.

As cited previously, neighbourhood governance structures rely on the "structuring of relationships" as well as on "organisational structure" (Chaskin and Abunimah ,1999: 77). As Mathur and Skelcher (2007) explain, assessing a structure's "hardware" (such as the formal structure, its roles, accountabilities and mandates) does not reveal how it operates (its "software" - informal relationships and practices).

The approach proposed here enables a form of "revealed preference", whereby conclusions about the rationale for the initiative will be derived from the extent to which the expected attributes (as set out in the typologies) are evident in the actual structures and practices of case study structures. The typologies should enable assessment of the extent to which the expected attributes are evident in both the design of the governance structure and the day-to-day practices of its stakeholders such as board members. The typologies will be used as an instrument to assess the structures' formal form and functions, for example drawn from documentary evidence about the entity. The typologies can also be applied in a way that exposes the structures' informal practices, by being used as an interview guide for respondents engaged in the entities to gather data about actors' practices. The combination of these approaches enables a more systematic assessment of the operation of these entities, rather than taking any formal statements (for example, the terms of reference for the structure) or informal opinion (for example, of a board member) at face value. This should enable greater insight into the driving rationale behind the structures studied.

Similar work has been undertaken by Mathur and Skelcher (2007), who developed a semi-structured interview topic guide (the "Governance Assessment Tool"), the questions in which were based on the criteria used in an assessment of "hardware". They used this to investigate with respondents how the structures worked in practice and what their informal procedures were. Overall, the methodology proposed combines the use of interviews with documentary review (as has been used in several previous studies on neighbourhood governance, for example Fagotto and Fung, 2006: 639; and Chaskin and Abunimah, 1999: 59).

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