Chapter 15

Against "Partnership": Toward a Local Challenge to Global Neoliberalism

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Introduction

The purported shift from "government" to "governance" is a dominant theme in the urban politics literature. For Rhodes, "governance" refers to "self-organising, inter-organisational networks" (1996, p. 660). Networks are characterized, he says, by interdependence between organizations, continuing interactions between network members, and game-like interactions rooted in reciprocity and trust and subject to rules negotiated by network participants. This conception of governance has gained a "semblance of orthodoxy" in the past decade (Marinetto 2003, p. 593) with a considerable body of scholarship sharing its core assumptions. According to Pierre and Stoker:

> Today, the role of the *government* in the process of *governance* is much more contingent. Local, regional, and national political elites alike seek to forge coalitions with private businesses, voluntary associations and other societal actors to mobilize resources across the public-private border in order to enhance their chances of guiding society towards politically defined goals.
>
> (2002, p. 29)

Local governance, then, refers to the ways in which a variety of public, private, community, and voluntary sector organizations collaborate at different levels to produce valued governing outcomes (see Hambleton, Chapter 12). Thus understood, local governance could be seen as an umbrella concept, encompassing approaches such as urban regime theory (Stone 1989) and neoinstitutionalism (Lowndes 2001).

> This interpretation of local governance underpins the case for partnership building. In 2002, the report of the second World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg declared (UN 2002, p. 4):

> We recognize sustainable development requires a long-term perspective and broad-based participation in policy formulation, decision-making and implementation at all levels. As social partners we will continue to work for stable partnerships with all major groups respecting the independent, important roles of each of these.

The word "partnership" occurs 137 times in the report, "local" 119 times. The rhetoric suggests that partnership is the dominant organizing principle in global-local politics, the key to social inclusion. Urban partnerships are found everywhere. From London to Manila, Atlanta to Mexico City, collaborative governance is the favored governmental strategy for goals as diverse as development, public service coordination, and democratic participation (Geddes 2005).

But does partnership work? This chapter builds on Judd and Smith's critique of special authorities in Chapter 11 and presents a critique of the global fashion for partnership. Collaborative structures may be judged against two main criteria—the achievement of joined up governance and democratic inclusion. These ends become the means to achieving policy goals, such as development, social regeneration, or better educational attainment in a complex polity. In the New Labour outlook in the United Kingdom, community engagement is instrumental to coordination. For example, community activists sitting on partnership boards are able to send messages to public agencies and other providers of public services about whether they are delivering their commitments: Is the refuse collection service working as effectively in neighborhood "A" as in neighborhood "B" (Davies 2005a)? Without democratic inclusion, coordination and public service responsiveness are very difficult. Hence, democratic inclusion is the main criterion against which partnership is evaluated in this chapter, and it is found wanting.

Regime Politics and Democratic Inclusion

There are two basic partnership models: the semiformal or formal governing network promoted by New Labour in the United Kingdom and the bottom-up informal governing regime, of which Stone's (1989) urban regime in Atlanta is emblematic. The latter type is fundamentally undemocratic in virtue of its informality. Stone's study of Atlanta explained how the city-business coalition excluded interests concerned with poverty and lower-class opportunities. He went on (Stone 1993) to argue that lower-class opportunity regimes are the hardest of all to build. But recently, he has discovered opportunity regimes such as the school-based human capital regime in the U.S.-Mexico border city of El Paso. Stone (2004) explains how this coalition generated better educational opportunities for poor African American and Hispanic children. He has since moved further, arguing that the original regime concept did not sufficiently take account of the role of citizens in local politics (Stone, forthcoming). He uses the El Paso example to support his valid contention that local politics matters. But he provides no indication that the El Paso coalition is democratically accountable, or that it gives voice to the aspirations of the urban poor. Thus, even where informal local regimes pursue what they see as lower-class interests, they are still fundamentally undemocratic, out of the public realm, if not clandestine.

But what of the "visible" partnership institutions, occupying the boundary between the public and private domains? The remainder of the chapter explores recent partnership initiatives in the United Kingdom. It is argued that these partnerships represent a top-down, technocratic mode of public service coordination, supporting neoliberalism. While Britain

is a good example of the partnership technocracy, it is far from unique (Jessop 2002; Geddes 2005). The partnership model found in the United Kingdom may not be pervasive, but it has global reach. Where it exists, it conflicts with democratic values.

The Partnership "Narrative": A Neoliberal Consensus

Jessop's (2002) discussion of the World Commission's *World Report on the Urban Future 21* explains the global context in which the partnership paradigm is situated. Key principles of global governance are the centrality of cities to economic growth, prosperity, and innovation, cutting welfare state provision and partnership. Partnership is intended to draw together state, market, and civil society in pursuit of entrepreneurial goals. As Betancur argues in Chapter 9, the rhetoric of governance and partnership also shifts responsibility from states onto communities. According to the *World Report*, partnerships should work with the grain of market forces. They require a retreat of the state, which takes a back seat, steering, not rowing (Jessop 2002: pp. 465–6). Hence, "urban poverty results not so much from capitalism as from ineffective local administration—which a judicious combination of mobilization from below and capacity-building from above can correct" (Jessop 2002, p. 468).

This global narrative is reflected at the national scale. For New Labour, partnership is the institutional mechanism through which a social consensus is mobilized in pursuit of neoliberal socioeconomic goals. Said Tony Blair:

> The creation of an economy where we are inventing and producing goods and services of quality needs the engagement of the whole country. It must be a matter of national purpose and national pride.
>
> (cited in Fairclough 2000, p. 87)

And, "competing on quality can't be done by government alone. The whole nation must put its shoulder to the wheel" (Blair, cited in Fairclough 2000, p. 28). Competitiveness requires partnership, and neoliberalism is the "seemingly natural, almost self-evident economic, political and social imaginary" of the global capitalist renaissance (Jessop 2002, 455). The neoliberal common sense is inscribed in the rules of the partnership game.

These values underpin the government's approach to community engagement and democratic renewal. David Blunkett, former U.K. Home Secretary (2003, p. 11), explained that "only by engaging and developing citizens . . . will there be hope of achieving ambitions for a robust, knowledge-driven economy, for vibrant, self-sustaining communities and for a universal culture of lifelong learning." The government has introduced a wide range of methods to promote community engagement. Participation in partnership is at once constitutive of political freedom and social inclusion and functional for equity in service delivery, as statutory partners respond to the local needs and demands expressed by community activists (Davies 2005a). Partnership is an important element in the local institutional apparatus needed for community to thrive within the parameters of a global market economy.

To what extent are these assumptions borne out in local partnerships? In the following sections, I argue that community participation is being subverted to managerial and technocratic ends. I then venture an explanation for the congruence of neoliberalism with managerialism before finally suggesting that exit from partnership may be a more effective strategy for democratic empowerment than participation (see Davies 2006).

The Partnership Technocracy

In this section, I draw on evidence from a study of the local politics of social inclusion in Dundee and Hull. Dundee and Hull are coastal cities, the former in Scotland, the latter in England. Both cities have suffered major economic and social crises with the decline of the jute industry in Dundee and the fishing industry in Hull. Both continue to feature prominently in government deprivation indices. The study, undertaken during 2004 and 2005 (see Davies 2006), sought to surface the political controversies that remain disguised beneath the superficial consensus projected by partnerships. The intention was to draw respondents into a space for dialogue about the politics underpinning the "social exclusion" debate and the efficacy of partnership for "social inclusion."

The research suggested that the rhetoric of democratic inclusion was trumped by the practice of managerialism. Skelcher et al. (2005, p. 586) argue that in partnerships and governing networks, "technical expertise is privileged and decisions proceed through a rational process little impacted by the political world." Political debate is eschewed for performance management. The managerialist approach eschews democratic deliberation for the pursuit of goods deemed self-evident and beyond deliberation. It is undemocratic, antipolitical, paternalistic, and instrumental. Managerialism, thus understood, was a major barrier to democratic inclusion in the partnerships studied. Interestingly, public managers and community activists in Dundee and Hull had contrasting commonsense views about the function of collaboration, framed respectively as "coordinating" and "democracy" purposes. These contrasting perspectives were a root cause of disagreement, but inhabiting the subconscious common sense, they were closed to deliberation.

In both England and Scotland, local authorities are required (in Scotland by statute) to establish city strategic partnerships. In Scotland, these are called Community Planning Partnerships (CPPs), in England Local Strategic Partnerships (LSPs). Both CPPs and LSPs are charged with producing strategic plans reflecting a "holistic" approach to the socioeconomic needs of the city. The goal of the strategic partnership is to mobilize governing resources and secure the delivery of this plan. Local communities are supposed to be involved as the "main partner in the process" (Scotland) (Scottish Executive 2002, p. 14) or as "one of the most important aspects of LSPs' work" (England) (Johnson and Osborne 2003, p. 148). However, the development of strategic partnership working in both cases appeared to have reenforced managerialism.

In Dundee, there was a controversy over the absorption by the CPP (known as the Dundee Partnership) of a small government regeneration fund, the Social Inclusion Partnership (SIP), which had previously been controlled by local community activists. The goal of community planning is to improve the strategic coordination of public services and to increase community influence over strategic decisions. As a "stakeholder" group, community activist members of the Dundee Partnership are in theory able to influence local public spending but, conceded a senior city council manager, at the cost of community "sovereignty over decisions of a smaller nature." This senior manager also conceded that public agencies under fiscal pressures will want to "realign SIP funding" against priorities governed by the Scottish Executive. In other words, community planning gives communities a smaller say in bigger decisions. The risk was that the community voice would be lost in an environment where governmental and local agency imperatives to deliver dominate (Fairweather 2005).

This is certainly what many community activists in Dundee thought was happening. Scottish communities had been given no say at the outset about whether they wanted a

CPP. But partnership activists in Dundee were now concerned about how this imposed framework would function. One activist, already concerned about a "them and us" relationship between activists and public managers, feared that community planning would lead to "an even higher them and us." A second said, "I'm frightened of community planning. I really am, 'cause I get a feeling that Council officials will say, 'I'm no' gonna let go what's mine.'" For a third activist, "I don't think there's going to be any community involvement. As a matter of fact, they shouldn't have put 'community' in there at all, like, they should have just made it 'The Partnership.'"

This rhetoric of marginalization reflected a genuine democratic deficit. If misgivings were expressed in a forum where all parties had an equal voice in decisions, the sceptics might hold sway through force of reason; not possible in this context. One senior council manager conceded that community concerns were valid. But, like other colleagues, he considered community planning to be instrumental for better strategic coordination and therefore more responsive public services. In this context, the opportunity structures for community influence over partnership decisions were severely constrained, managerial priorities coming into conflict with those of activists demanding a democratic voice. The move to community planning can therefore be interpreted as part of a managerialist trend in the local politics of Dundee, placing functional efficiency over democratic inclusion.

In Hull, this trend was even more pronounced. In England, as in Scotland, strategic partnerships are charged with involving communities and creating joined up governance. LSPs were created in the late 1990s as part of the U.K. government's strategy for joined up governance. Localities are tasked with creating inclusive partnerships and mobilizing a coordinated cross-sector effort to deliver (sustainable community strategies).

Collaboration in Hull was defined by the difficult relationship between public managers and the government-funded Hull Community Network (HCN) on the LSP, Hull CityVision. The government's Neighbourhood Renewal Fund (NRF), allocated to deprived areas in England, had been a source of conflict. A partnership manager in Hull commented that the Hull City Council had "a particularly unpleasant relationship with our community network," which used the partnership as an opportunity to "bash the council." However, the community activist perspective was that the city council was trying to control the funds for its own ends. Said one, "The city council has decided what's going to happen to that money. They've kept the bulk in the city centre to support the local services."

Thus, the community activists saw the NRF as a vehicle for community projects, in contrast with the official purpose, to stimulate public service innovation in deprived neighborhoods and thereby narrow the gap with prosperous areas (ODPM 2005a). The city council perspective was explained by a senior councillor:

> The community and voluntary sector have seen it as their own bank account, which it isn't. There's been endless wars about how much of NRF is spent in local government. There's this constant row about what schemes have got it and who's going to get it next year and who didn't get it this year.

According to a partnership manager, the partnership structure was a contributory factor in these difficulties. S/he explained that it was designed on a slate model, where each constituency—business, local authority, public agencies, and community activists— had a fixed number of seats on the board. S/he commented that this was "just a disaster" because it gave a block vote to dissidents:

And I mean LSPs aren't about voting. They are about consensus politics, but unfortunately, with our Community Empowerment Network there is a real desire to, you know, dictate the agenda and to behave in ways that aren't conducive to partnership working.

The managerialist response to these difficulties undermined the prospects for a deliberated solution to these problems. When the study in Dundee and Hull concluded in June 2005, the partnership was engaged in a restructuring exercise designed to improve strategic focus and produce network structures more functional for effective decision making, coordination, and performance management. One proposal for achieving this was to reduce the size of the board and curtail community representation on it. Said a leading city councillor on CityVision:

I mean, putting it bluntly, there's too many of them. We have three members of the private sector around the table and something like eight members of the community and voluntary sector, so they can dominate things.

This proposed course of action was at odds with what the HCN wanted—a more substantial voice and greater influence on CityVision. A partnership manager anticipated trouble over the restructuring, warning that a forceful approach would be taken:

I think what we will have to say is, 'Look, you know, this is some work. It's based on best practice. NRU [Neighbourhood Renewal Unit] wants this to happen and it's going to happen'. And I think, you know, then just be prepared for all sorts of you know, awful sort of repercussions. But I think that that's the only way we're going to, you know, succeed'.

Asked whether the partnership reflected on the meaning of terms such as "social inclusion," s/he commented that government had given CityVision "a set of indicators to monitor our progress against . . . and we've just got to get on and do it." To this end, s/he found the authority of a government-appointed advisor helpful, someone able to say: " . . . [L]ook. You're not doing this. It's not appropriate and this is why. I'm here . . . to make sure that this LSP is turned around."

This "reform" strategy is a form of agenda gate-keeping (Bachrach and Baratz 1962), where organizational principles are removed from the democratic realm. In Hull, the managerialist culture was being rolled forward by public managers under pressure from central government to deliver, but also with a better feel for the game of coordination than for democratic deliberation. Their approach was based on a tacit appeal to the public good over the heads of recalcitrant activists: if strong managerial control leads to better public services, quality of life will improve and the people of Hull are thereby served. This approach might also be defended on the grounds, almost certainly true, that members of the activist group lacked representative legitimacy. The point, however, is that as a government-funded "stakeholder" group, the HCN was excluded from decisions about the purpose and future structure of CityVision to which it would have been party, given equal access to agenda setting and decision making. Moreover, if it is accepted that democracy is functional to coordinative efficiency, this exclusionary strategy is likely to be self-defeating.

But perhaps the most important point emerging from the study of Hull was that the public managers and the community activists interpreted partnership in radically different ways, each appealing to a distinct commonsense view of the world: coordination and delivery on the one hand, democratic inclusion on the other. Effective deliberation was precluded by mutual incomprehension. Terms such as "engagement" and "empowerment'" were contested, but the protagonists lacked a common discursive repertoire sufficient to

recognize why they differed, let alone achieve agreement. With more governing resources at their disposal, Hull's public managers were, with the best of intentions, sidelining the group of activists who participated in this study. For them, as for their colleagues in Dundee, it was self-evident that the top priority had to be the creation of strategic governing capacity in pursuit of government targets.

Hull may be an unusual example in that it was the only English city council labelled "poor" under the U.K. government's Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA) inspection regime for local government. A poor CPA score results in local authorities being subject to special measures up to and including a wholesale takeover by government-appointed officials. As such, Hull may be an extreme example of the democratic deficit in partnerships. Nevertheless, this democratic deficit is widely reported in the U.K. literature (Jones 2003; Davies 2004; Diamond 2004; Skelcher et al. 2005). Where the governance of towns and cities is contested, the solution seems to be not democratic debate but control by public managers acting as agents of the centre.

But is Britain's "partnership technocracy" typical of patterns globally? Jessop's (2002) analysis of the *World Report* suggests that it may be (see also Jayasuriya 2003). The instrumental and nondemocratic character of U.S. regime politics has already been discussed. Flores (2005), examining community participation initiatives in Mexico, argues that they are ineffective and that community leaders organizing outside participative structures have more influence than those inside. Forde (2005), examining local government reform in Ireland, argues that top-down and managerialist tendencies undermine the democratic and participative ethos proclaimed by the Irish government. Townsend et al. (2002), in a powerful critique of the "donor culture" in the developing world, argue that nongovernmental development organizations have acted as a powerful transmission belt for the culture of managerialism. For Thake (cited in Townsend et al. 2002, p. 831):

Community capacity building has become the mantra of those who don't want to give up power. The language used by professionals (in the UK) sounds horribly similar to that used around the time of the break-up of the British Empire.

This perspective resonates with de Beer's review of development studies in Southern Africa. He fears that the rhetoric of empowerment disguises the practice of managerialism—"a technical process of social engineering based on Western models for the transformation of traditional societies" (De Beer 2003, p. 487). These perspectives cast major doubt on the efficacy of partnership for democratic empowerment and suggest that governmental rhetoric of "participation" and "empowerment" cannot be taken at face value.

However, it would be wrong to infer that the diffusion of neoliberal partnership and empowerment strategies is completely pervasive. Geddes' wide-ranging review of "regimes of local governance in a neoliberalising world" highlights regional variance. Beyond Europe and North America, he finds that the transformation to local governance in Japan has been "very slow and limited," while Morocco, under pressure from the European Union and the World Bank, is developing neoliberal partnership modes of governance. Geddes concludes that there are "shifting patterns of accommodation and resistance to neoliberalism, producing overlapping clusterings around variations on a theme" (2005, p. 372–3). Nevertheless, where it develops, local partnership tends to go hand in hand with neoliberal goals, as Jessop (2002, p. 469) puts it, rallying "the good and the great, the movers and shakers, the rich and poor, shanty dwellers and property capital, men and women, to the banner of "good governance."' Leading Blairite and former government minister Alan Milburn (2006) seemed to give the game away when he argued that the

government must " . . . redistribute *power* so that *responsibility* for meeting the challenge of economic, demographic, environmental, social and cultural change is shared between citizens, states and communities" (emphasis added). If "empowerment" means the capacity to engage in critical debate and decision making about politics and policy, then partnership is found wanting. But what explains these trends?

The Conjunction of Markets and Hierarchies

The basic goal of neoliberalism is an open market society governed by entrepreneurial, minimal states. Jessop (2002, p. 454), however, notes that it has resulted in a "paradoxical" increase in state intervention. Apologists, he says, argue that this is legitimate and temporary. After a short transitional period, the state can retreat to its proper light-touch supervisory role. Jessop concludes that this argument is spurious, and I concur, arguing (Davies 2005b) that a strong state is the condition for a "free" economy (Gamble 1994). Polanyi (1957) argued that a free market was a "utopian chimera." He identified an irreconcilable contradiction in market capitalism (cited in Marquand 2004, p. 42):

> Thus even those who wished most ardently to free the state from all unnecessary duties, and whose whole philosophy demanded the restriction of state activities, could not but entrust the self-same state with the new powers, organs, and instruments required for the establishment of laissez-faire.

But what explains this unholy dependence of market on state? Mrs. Thatcher's governments were relatively successful in suppressing direct political resistance to market reform; but quiescence is not sufficient, activism is required. Analyzing conflict in British partnerships (Davies 2005b), I argue that neoliberalism requires enthusiastic compliance—active, entrepreneurial citizenship commensurate with Blair's one-nation aspirations. The problem is that citizens active in the partnerships discussed above drew on different values. While they were not engaged in open resistance, they did interpret the function of partnership rather differently from public managers: as vehicles for democratic inclusion rather than as vehicles for coordination and delivery of public services. Disagreements of this nature can undermine collaborative structures, rendering them dysfunctional. The case of New Deal for Communities (NDC), further illustrates this argument.

The NDC is a flagship neighborhood regeneration programme established in 1999. Some £50 million was allocated to each of 39 English neighborhoods over a ten-year period. Funding was conditional on the establishment of a local multiagency partnership to deliver the program, in which local residents were to play a leading role (DETR 1999). The NDC was therefore emblematic of the U.K. government's commitment to put communities at the centre of the local regeneration process. In some ways, it has been very effective. Local residents are elected onto partnership boards, often constituting a numerical majority. Partnerships have experimented with democratic reforms, some lowering the voting age from 18 to 16, others attracting a voter turnout double that in local authority elections (Shaw and Davidson 2002). However, despite this, the NDC partnerships seem to have been subjected to ever-greater managerial constraints, undermining the original aspiration for community leadership. Resident voting majorities have not translated into effective political control. One reason for this is that in many cases community activists did not conform to the New Labour model of regeneration "good practice."

From 2001 to 2005, I was part of a consortium undertaking the government-funded national evaluation of the NDC program. I was responsible for evaluating the program

in the city of Wolverhampton. In the early years of the Wolverhampton program, influenced by governmental rhetoric about community leadership, resident activists behaved as if they could spend NDC funds as they pleased. They put forward certain project proposals, which were rejected by the local and regional regeneration managers responsible for delivering and auditing the program. The managers felt that these proposals were economically unsustainable and that they had little relevance to the "strategic" regeneration needs of the area. Residents felt cheated when such proposals were vetoed by public managers citing "value for money" regulations designed to ensure that NDC money was spent responsibly.

NDC managers were charged with managing a closely audited programme and at the same time with mobilizing residents in deeply deprived areas. This mix had conflict, not consensus, built into it from the outset. The residents wanted goods such as subsidized community facilities, while the managers, backed by government officials, wanted "leverage," supporting developments only if they were deemed sustainable in the market place. While this conflict had no evident ideological character, it derived from different political and economic values—a politics of entitlement on one side, a politics of entrepreneurialism on the other. These competing values remained largely unspoken, but nevertheless lay at the heart of the problem. The moral of the tale is that the representatives of deprived communities—market losers—cannot be relied on simply to defer to the philosophies of governing elites (Davies 2005b, p. 322).

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Conflicts over program strategy undermined the functional capacity of some NDC partnerships. As a consequence, program delivery was very slow, and central government, frantic to ensure that NDC partnerships delivered, quickly reneged on its commitment to community leadership. In his valedictory on four years as chair of the local NDC Board in Liverpool, the then Bishop, a renowned partnership activist, urged Tony Blair to keep faith with his promise to empower communities. He feared that the government was backtracking and bypassing residents in favour of managerial solutions (Jenkins 2004). Perrons and Skyer's study of the Shoreditch (London) NDC partnership found that centrally imposed performance management regimes rendered "the task of adequately representing the community difficult—'virtually impossible'" (2003, p. 278). Describing the programme as a potentially "volatile political cauldron" (Perrons and Skyer 2004, p. 399), the director of the government-commissioned national evaluation of the NDC program argued that "the original assumption that partnerships should be given a strong degree of local flexibility and freedoms has been steadily eroded" (Lawless 2004, p. 383).

It is arguable, then, that noncompliant community activists provoked government to intervene and roll back local autonomy in ways it would not have in an ideal world of active and entrepreneurial citizens. In this interpretation, the partnership technocracy is a necessary flanking measure to neoliberalism. It is a mechanism, deployed perhaps reluctantly, to manage uncooperative "stakeholders." This, then, may help explain the conundrum of why, contrary to philosophical tradition, liberalism cannot do without authoritarianism. Loser compliance cannot be secured solely by ideological manipulation; it requires coercion. And, if liberalization cannot proceed without centralization, this points toward an irreconcilable contradiction in the neoliberal project. This contradiction plays out in partnerships where the rhetoric of community empowerment is accompanied by the practice of managerialism. It is hard to see how neoliberal partnerships can be made functional for democratic empowerment, if this entails the freedom to advocate an alternative political agenda. In the final section, therefore, I consider an alternative to the partnership model.

Partnership Exit as a Strategy for Democratic Inclusion

There has been an interesting debate recently among a group of scholars whom I call "network egalitarians" about how partnerships might be democratized. This debate takes the current hegemony of managerialism as its problematic (Skelcher et al. 2005, p. 586). The potential of network egalitarianism depends on the feasibility of deliberative democracy. Sorensen and Torfing (2005), for example, argue that all affected actors should be included in the construction of an open-ended policy discourse. However, oppositionists may still be excluded by nondecisions or manipulation of their wants and needs. Therefore, the political agenda must be "so broadly and vaguely defined" that it is accessible to all relevant actors. Second, protagonists must show respect for other opinions and be committed to transparent, responsible decision making. They may engage in robust, confrontational debate, but should be committed to reaching a "rough consensus," for which all share responsibility (Sorensen and Torfing 2005, p. 213). These procedures depend on integrity, reflexivity, and mutual respect among democratically minded protagonists prepared to engage in relatively unconstrained debate.

Network egalitarians also suggest institutional reforms—nondeliberative mechanisms to level the deliberative playing field. For example, Klijn and Koppenjan (1999) recommend the appointment of neutral arbiters to guarantee open debate and arbitrate disputes between network actors. Skelcher (2005) advocates a more radical solution, where disadvantaged groups are given a veto over partnership decisions. He believes that this "consociational" approach could underpin a democratic "polity forming" model of governance, where subordinate groups have an equal voice in networks.

Such proposals are radical in that, if implemented, they would be incompatible with the partnership technocracy. However, they may be impractical for two reasons. First, a reform movement, unlike a revolutionary movement, requires a reformist government. The continuing geographical advance of neoliberalism suggests that in many parts of the world we will wait in vain for governments prepared to devolve sufficient power for such measures to be implemented. Within the dominant global governing paradigm, network egalitarianism appears utopian.

But, second, even if they were implemented, it is possible that these measures would merely reproduce the power inequalities they were designed to counter. Pierre Bourdieu pointed to the subtle ways by which class domination is secured and maintained: through speech, body language, culture, and taste, as well as the more transparent forms of domination apparent in Dundee and Hull (see Bourdieu 1984). As noted, network reforms rely on the possibility of deliberative equality. But, as Crossley (2004, p. 108) argues, communication or deliberation is always "systematically distorted" by the commonsense assumptions, habits, and dispositions embedded in the structured personality.

Interpreted in Bourdieusian terms, network reforms such as the neutral arbiter or the consociational veto would fail to insulate partnerships from culturally embedded structures of power. How might the neutral arbiter recognize and enter into a struggle with the structural capacities that s/he embodies? If s/he could, how would s/he recognize and overcome the subtle exercise of power by others in what might appear to be an open debate? Even if governments conceded a veto over partnership decisions to community representatives, cultural power would govern the interpretation and exercise of that veto. The meaning and appropriateness of "veto" would be produced by convention and common sense, the symbolic capital accrued by dominant groups in past struggles (see Davies 2007 for a detailed account). Consequently, in a world

characterized by vast social inequalities, the prospect of equitable deliberation appears very limited, particularly when the rules of the game are set by governmental actors who appear to be part of the problem. In Dundee and Hull, the problem was not that public managers did not want to engage in partnership with communities, but that they were unable to grasp perspectives that conflicted with their commonsense under-standing of good governance.

If not partnership, then what? One answer lies in the traditions of resistance reflected in the social movement and community-organizing literatures. Kohn (2000, p. 425) argues that critical distance permits the creation of protected space where social movements can "explore and test genuinely alternative ways of framing collective problems." If governing institutions reproduce power inequalities, then disempowered groups have to build new institutions, incubating alternative approaches and gaining strength. But creating a separate space is not sufficient. Says Kohn (2000, p. 426) " . . . realizing abstractions such as reci-procity, equality and opportunity is usually a process of historical struggle rather than the-oretical consensus." This struggle takes place not through deliberation, but at "concrete sites of resistance, the . . . barricades, forums, and fortresses where the people mount challenges to currently hegemonic visions of collective life." Separation can be an act of resistance, but it must be complemented by coercive action to overcome dominant interests.

Medearis (2005, p. 55) develops this theme in a critique of deliberative democracy. He argues that where hierarchical power is pervasive, "marginal groups must often act coercively in order to achieve democratic aims." Commitment to collaborative values requires activists to concede the positional legitimacy of local elites and give up the right to act coercively against them in favour of persuasion. The freedom to act coercively therefore requires that they reject the politics of collaboration. With this freedom secured, argues Medearis, coer-cive action is capable of restructuring the dominant discourse and altering "the social rela-tions in which discourse is situated." Coercion threatens dominant interests, disrupts alliances, and creates crises (Medearis 2005, p. 55). Medearis argues that coercive strategies have often been used very effectively by social movements seeking to "regenerate democracy," notably the U.S. civil rights movement (2005, p. 75). The community-based anti-poll-tax movement is a fairly recent example of a coercive strategy in the United Kingdom. The vic-torious movement in 2006 against the deregulation of youth employment law in France is another. If this analysis is right, community activists may achieve greater governing influence by organizing against elites than by collaborating with them (Davies 2007).

This does not mean that community activists ought never to cooperate with state actors. Saegert's overview of the U.S. community-organizing and development litera-tures examines the effectiveness of collaborative and confrontational strategies. Each approach can, depending on circumstance, "partially succeed and partially fail" (Saegert 2006, p. 292; see also Stoecker 2003). But where neoliberalism dominates local politics, it is unlikely that partnership will be empowering in the sense of offering communities a democratic voice or allowing those with critical perspectives to challenge the domi-nant understanding of "good governance." Participation then depends on a judgment call about whether partnership enhances the political power of poor and oppressed com-munities or not. In New Labour Britain, the prognosis is negative.

Conclusions

Judd and Smith's contribution (see Chapter 11) demonstrates that statutory development partnerships, such as special authorities, are designed specifically to avoid democratic

scrutiny. This chapter argues that partnerships that are nominally open to local communities are also becoming increasingly undemocratic and authoritarian. The rise of neoliberal partnerships as "an elite form of local governance" (Geddes 2005, p. 363) seems inimical to the ideal-typical model of collaborative democracy, where local state actors engage communities and other "stakeholders" in open, relatively unconstrained deliberation.

Unfortunately, the fashion for partnership in local governance shows no sign of passing. Partnership is considered by many left-of-centre scholars to be, if not a panacea, then an important part of the solution to growing pubic alienation from official politics and public bureaucracies. The challenge they face is to demonstrate that reform is feasible and, if so, that reformed partnerships will not reproduce the power inequalities they seek to counter. In the mean time, "exit" is a practical alternative. Where democracy is undermined by the partnership technocracy, community activists should eschew participation for organized resistance.

Acknowledgement

Disclaimer

I was a member of the national consortium undertaking the 2002–2005 evaluation of New Deal for Communities funded by the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM). The views expressed here are not those of the ODPM, now renamed Department of Communities and Local Government.