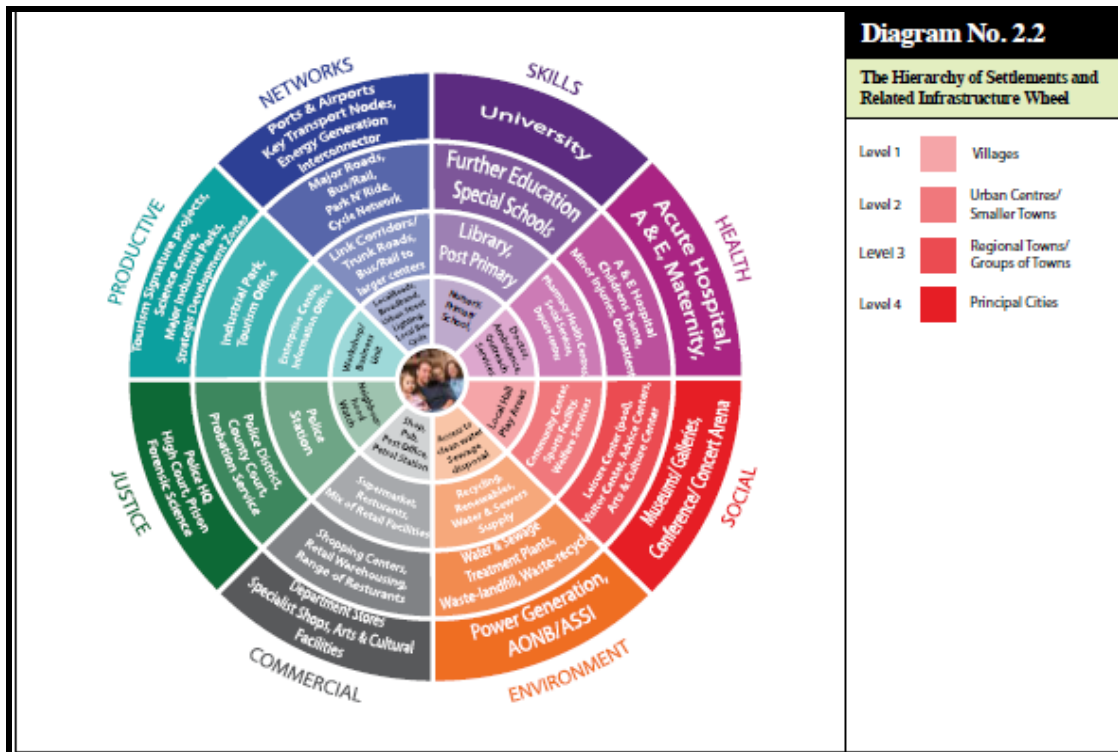


Executive Training Programme

CroSPlaN II - An INTERREG IVA Funded Programme

Module Three
Steering a Course: Leadership and Decision-Making
in Spaces of Transition

Post Module Report



17th October 2013

Glencarn Hotel, Castleblayney



International Centre for Local and Regional Development

BACKGROUND TO MODULE 3

Recognising that natural hinterlands – or “functional territories” – do not adhere to man-made boundaries and thus neither do the functions of local government, there is a growing awareness among the councils in the Irish border region that enhanced collaboration and joint work on common priorities must move up their agendas. Public sector collaboration in the Irish border region can be significantly enhanced through strengthened leadership skills, access to innovative practices and opportunities to build knowledge networks among colleagues. The ICLRD’s experience is that high-level training and animation can help both senior officials and elected representatives in local authorities to have a better understanding of how their development opportunities are linked and fit into a larger strategic context.

The Executive Training and Animation Programme for cross-border region councils, using the successful ICLRD model linking training and animation developed under CroSPlaN I, targets the 22 Councils involved in the three local authority-led cross-border networks, namely:

- Irish Central Border Area Network (ICBAN);
- North West Region Cross Border Group; and
- East Border Region Ltd.

The programme will be delivered through a programme of plenary sessions, seminars, discussion forums and working groups.

As demonstrated in CroSPlaN I, this programme will improve the quality of cross-border cooperation and provide a critical forum to bring together cross-border councils, selected cross-border bodies and central government departments to support joint solutions supported by collaborative agreements.

The programme will consist of 10 modules; with post module reports to be prepared for the initial five plenary sessions.

Please see the training website for information on upcoming modules and readings
<http://iclrd.org/training-crosplan/>

INTRODUCTION

This module considers the skills-set required to make strategic decisions in local government - how we look beyond the town, village and even county in favour of the wider sub-region and / or border region as a whole. It also considers the skills-set required to provide leadership in times of transition, and how change can be effectively managed. The module will discuss the merits of both informal ('soft spaces') and formal spaces for decision-making and creating synergies and opportunities between different stakeholders and indeed, neighbouring councils.

In addition, the module will consider what the delegates – as leaders and facilitators of change – can do to help their respective Council, communities, region, and the Irish border region as a whole, progress and meet its full potential.

SESSION 1: Decision-Making and Innovation in Spaces of Transition

Prof. Robin Hambleton, Professor of City Leadership, University of the West of England

Civic leadership has a long history. In Victorian times, civic leaders transformed local government through their work in the areas of public health, education and libraries. Place-based leadership has history...the work of Joseph Chamberlain between 1873-76 in Birmingham. Research by JRF in 1996 spoke of the erosion of local democracy, and concluded that local government needs the freedom to do things differently. As part of the argument put forward for greater local autonomy was the associated need for local councils to be in a position to raise their own taxes - and thus, revenue streams. Local government needs financial independence.

Recent reports by Lord Heseltine (2013) and Minister Greg Clarke (2003) spoke critically of the centralised nature of local government; arguing that local places will never be sufficiently empowered to drive growth they require unless they get more funding.

The debate of local-central relations is ongoing. The *Localism Bill/Act 2011* contained 142 centralising measures ...it was a centralism act! Local voter turnout is falling; in the UK it is flatlining at 31% - compared to 70% in Sweden and 72% in Denmark. The reason for this....a disempowered local government system ...the local government patient "is very sick indeed".

Yet central government cannot manage the State on its own...it needs local government; as evidenced by the switch from government to governance. Does local government need to be more imaginative in terms of how it works and increases its power / resource base?

The book, *Leading the Inclusive City*, argues that place-less power (globalisation) is gaining influence. At the same time, there are lots of good examples of places taking place-less power. Such place-based leaders are in this room today. Such leaders come from a diversity of backgrounds...political leadership (elected representatives), managerial / professional leaders

(Directors of Service), community/business leaders (private sector, third sector, academics, etc.). Such leaders are facilitators of change; demonstrate a keenness and willingness to work with other players. They "shape emotions and behaviour to achieve common goals". Good leaders understand feelings; how they feel about something happening...they are tuned into the emotional sense of what is happening and the implications of this. A key question for all those involved in local government is how can the three realms of civic leadership be united?

- Political leadership
- Managerial and professional leadership
- Community and business leadership.

On the island of Ireland, it is clear that local government on both sides of the border is going to be strengthened. As local government embraces these changes, it is important to focus on enhancing place-based leadership – go beyond leading local government. It must be recognised that every community has many strengths – these need to be acknowledged and built upon.

Across local government, there is a need to enhance place-based leadership...we must go beyond merely leading local government! But there are constraints to this:

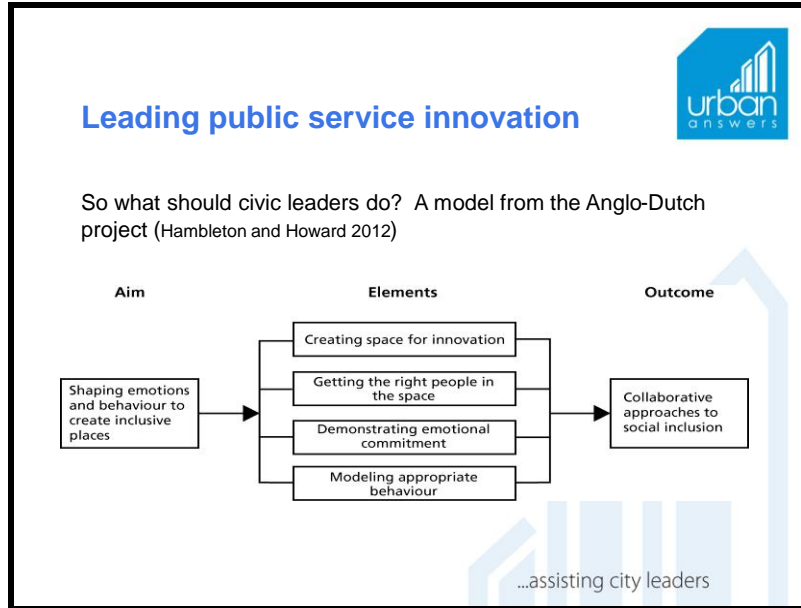
- Environmental limits: these are solid and non-negotiable (climate change, etc.)
- Socio-cultural pressures: including social movements, etc.
- Economic drivers
- Governmental framing: including central government setting the ground rules.

These later three bullets are not solid; they are a space you can negotiate.

In an example drawn from an Anglo-Dutch project, there are four key steps identified in terms of what civic leaders should do to bring about place-based innovation.

- 1) Creates spaces of innovation; for example a digital green initiative linked to social inclusion (which could be housed in a digital media centre rather than within local government)...Digital + Green in Bristol
- 2) Getting the right people into the space
- 3) Demonstrate emotional commitment; "walking the talk"
- 4) Modelling appropriate behaviour.

Through this model, innovation zones can be created, a culture of innovation can be fostered (this entails giving permission to fail!), and catalysts for innovation are supported. The Mayor of Bristol, for example, is a big supporter of integrated working. In his office, there are fewer desks than people - and executive officers and councillors work out of the same space...thus encouraging collaborative working.



Q&A with Prof. Hambleton

In addition to personal statements and reflections, participants also posed a number of questions. These are paraphrased below along with the speakers' responses in *italics*

Prof. Hambleton was asked to comment on the role of regulation, and indeed political advisers, in hampering innovation. Place-based leadership seems to require consensual government but audit procedures prevent this...there is no culture of risk-taking; indeed everything works against this!

Prof. Hambleton noted the challenge of dealing with the vested interests of senior civil servants. He noted that the private sector in many ways succeeds by investing in failure - its how they improve on prototypes. This of course is more difficult within the public sector. Nevertheless, the public sector needs to find a way to become a laboratory of innovation....some councils are doing this; others need to follow.

Prof. Hambleton was asked to comment on whether he felt local representatives needed to be specialised.

Prof. Hambleton referenced international experience where elected representatives are given a portfolio and over time they develop the skills and leadership required to be progressive in that role. This is an effective model in building up the core skills of elected representatives and their staff.

The question was raised around how to get more young people involved in local politics - esp. given the poor pay structures for elected representatives.

Prof. Hambleton simply noted that the reason to enter local government / local politics was not money!

One local elected representative noted that many councillors crave more power and autonomy at the local level around such issues as waste management. There is a sense of frustration with powers being taken off them and handed to the county manager.

Prof. Hambleton pointed out that if you're not upsetting someone then you are not leading effectively! He emphasised the importance of collective power and the need for councillors to support each other in the choices that are made.

Mr. Tom Reid, Director - Transport Policy, Strategy and Legislation Division, Department for Regional Development and Mr. Niall Cussen, Senior Adviser - Planning Inspectorate, Department of Environment, Community & Local Government

Marking the launch of the *Framework for Cooperation: Spatial Strategies of Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland*, it was noted that while the island of Ireland is divided by a national border, life goes on across that border. At the level of central government, there is ongoing contact between Government Departments - representing a departure from the tradition of 'back-to-back planning'.

The reform of local government in both jurisdictions, together with the recent publication of the "Framework for Cooperation: Spatial Strategies of Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland" (jointly published by DRD and DoECLG) and the emerging clarity around the focus of the new EU funding programmes, creates new opportunities for cross-council and cross-border working in local government. The Framework arises out of the EU Territorial Cohesion agenda and the work by both jurisdictions on strategic spatial planning frameworks - such as the NSS and RDS.

There are many similarities between the NSS and RDS in terms of their respective commitment to sustainable development, balanced regional development, recognising the critical role of metropolitan centres as drivers of economic growth, placing an emphasis on place-making and promoting stronger rural communities.

Building on this, four priority areas of cooperation are identified in the Framework document:

- Enhancing Competitiveness
- Competitive Places
- Environmental Quality
- Spatial Analysis

For example, infrastructure does not stop at the border - we need to better understand this relationship and the need for enhanced cooperation in not only the delivery of same but also its maintenance and the spill-out developments that emerge from its provision in the first instance.



The Framework document in turn also promotes two levels of engagement; recognising the need to build working relationships between both these tiers:

- Level 1- The Northern Ireland Executive and the Irish Government
- Level 2 – Local Authorities in both jurisdictions

Central government acknowledges that it can do the policies and plans but there is an inherent weakness when it comes to local delivery!

Today also coincides with the publication of the Local Government Bill in the South; this places an increased emphasis on economic development, community development and social engagement across local government. To progress this new working arrangement, greater emphasis needs to be placed on consultation and discussion. This requires a new skills set in terms of community engagement, policy analysis, economic appraisal, etc. The hierarchical wheel will come into play in terms of the relationship between the size of settlement and the type of services a community can sustain...this will not be to everyone's liking!.

Cooperation around service delivery is an emerging agenda. In Northern Ireland, the population densities are completely out of sync with the rest of Europe. This makes it difficult and expensive to provide services - hence why a greater emphasis is being placed on 'hubs'.

There are many benefits to cooperation - the sharing of services, the sharing of expertise and learning, considering the purpose and vision of plans that touch upon the border. The island of Ireland needs to remember that it operates within a global economy - that we are not isolated. We must increasingly work together to increase the attractiveness of the island and influence decision-makers (recognising there is only so much that any of us - irrespective of what level of government we work for - have influence over).

The *Framework for Cooperation* provides some ideas around new ways of working together; while acknowledging that we are working with diminishing resources at the public level.

Q&A with Mr. Reid & Mr. Cussen

Participants largely commented on the reform of local government and the positives - and negatives - emanating from this. The alignment of functions, north and south, is seen as a very positive development that will facilitate greater cooperation and a willingness to work on a cross-border basis.

Both Mr. Reid and Mr. Cussen noted that connectivity lies at the heart of everything they have said this afternoon - not also in transport terms but also in terms of job creation, economic growth and social engagement. Strong connectivity is a precursor for wider investment. Community planning in both jurisdictions is a huge opportunity for building and nurturing local leadership and communities reasserting themselves.

The example of MOUS between councils are exemplars of how cross-border working can take on a new focus to the benefit of the sub-region as a whole. It represents the extension of a working relationship beyond merely funding / chasing the money.

SESSION 2: My Council, My Community, My Region - My Role

A Panel Discussion with:

- Mr. John Fitzgerald, Chairman of An Post and the National Transport Authority, former Chairman of the Limerick Regeneration and former Dublin City Manager
- Cllr. Connie Hanniffy, Elected Representative, Offaly County Council
- Ms. Kat Healy, Policy, Research and Evaluation Officer, The Community Foundation for Northern Ireland

Mr John Fitzgerald opened his intervention by commenting on the fact that Ireland is the most centralised state in the EU. While he has always been struck by the lack of functions carried out by local government in Northern Ireland, he has been over the years - as a former City Manager - frustrated by the lip service paid by Ireland to the principle of subsidiarity. And still the range of functions being carried out by local government in the South is being depleted - a number of road/transport functions are moving to the NRA while water functions are being taken over by Irish Water.

Twenty years ago local government would have been involved in a number of strategic infrastructure initiatives - often not thinking of the impact on communities - while today local government is much more people-friendly and sympathetic to the needs of local communities. From a leadership perspective, the current model was largely devised in the 1920s to prevent corruption. The Manager has traditionally been very powerful. Many would argue that because the Manager is not elected that the role has become very autocratic. Mr. Fitzgerald disagrees - believing the position to be very democratic. Local government plays a significant coordination role across a number of functions - some of which it does well, others not so well. Falling into this latter category is the regeneration of Limerick - and there are many reasons for this.

In terms of the current local government reform agenda, Mr. Fitzgerald is not real reform but rather a range of issues being undertaken in response to the Troika's austerity programme. In terms of leadership, there shouldn't be a 'big boss' - preference is for a devolved system like the Scandinavian model....but would be very surprised if this happened in his lifetime.

Mr. Fitzgerald concluded his intervention by noting the importance of soft/informal spaces where learning and exchange of experiences can take place; emphasising that we need to work together more and more on the basis of consensus.

Cllr. Connie Hannify opened her remarks by stating that we need to embrace the manage the reform of local government currently being rolled out; despite the fact that this agenda is being driven by central government and current economic circumstances of 'doing more with less'. The reform programme is largely being driven by efficiencies - mainly of the financial kind.

Nevertheless, local government is an important element of our governing structure. It is most difficult to achieve when working cross border / across jurisdictions. Models of local government cannot be exported; they must respect local circumstances. Yet, throughout Europe there are vast experiences of local government in terms of structures, scales - with 'local' having a very flexible interpretation. As such, we must take a cautionary approach to importing models from elsewhere.

And despite these difference, there are common strands running throughout the various models of local government.

While *Putting People First* proposes the abolishment of town councils, it is not 'doing away' with the town concept; the municipal district approach involves the town and its hinterland - with the district fully incorporated into the county council. The county structure remains very important - it provides us with a 'sense of place', a strong identity - none of which can be prescribed in public policy.

A core new role for local government - that of economic driver - requires the development of action plans for jobs and a greater emphasis being placed on sectoral strategies. Councillors can play a greater role in this through the SPC for Economic Development.

Local government will have a greater role to play in rural transport; one area in which local government will be working more closely with citizens - but there is a growing emphasis now on citizens to interact with their elected officials and use their local authorities.

Devolution of functions is slow - it is not a welcome policy by central government; yet in terms of the principle of subsidiarity and the model of local governance, it is a must. 70% of EU Directives are administered at the local level - thus demonstrating the importance of this tier of government.

Ms. Kat Healey was clear from the outset that there are four ways in which change needs to happen:

- 1) political and administrative change
- 2) economic climate
- 3) community tensions
- 4) nature and demography of NI community.

The Causeway Communities Programme for example, funded by IFI and Atlantic Philanthropies, considered what was meant by the review of public administration (RPA) and the emerging local government power of community planning. This initiative demonstrated the degree of uncertainty that lay around the reform programme - indeed, it was questioned if it would ever happen. To answer some of the questions emerging, the initiative resulted in the publication of six 'ladybird guides' to the reform process.

Communities have, not many years, had to deliver their own services - and so, applying for grants was a core function. A shift in how communities think is now required - away from 'pound signs' to recognising the wider benefits of local government reform and developing close working relationships with councils - esp. around the new community planning function.

Diminished resources - for both communities and councils - means that creative ways need to be devised to carry out priority actions; the needs of communities must also be re-evaluated.

In support of this, it is worth acknowledging that community tensions have changed - largely as a result of good relations policies. There is still a long road to follow - but positive steps are being made and community planning is regarded as a valuable tool already in progressing this agenda further.

MODULE CLOSE

Ms. Creamer closed the module by thanking the attendees for their participation and looked forward in anticipation to their active participation in Module 4 on 7th November 2013.

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