



Engendrer la cohésion sociale Fostering Social Cohesion

Working Paper # 6

After Neo-liberalism?
Local Partnerships and Social Governance
in Aotearoa New Zealand

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Introduction¹

It is a clear fact of contemporary geo-politics that not all communities are equally well connected into the new globalising economy. As inequalities have become more pronounced, poverty has manifested itself most conspicuously in pockets of exclusion, where links into broader structures of opportunity are not easily made or sustained (Dreier et al 2001). In Aotearoa New Zealand poverty is also strongly racialised, disproportionately affecting Maori and Pacific communities (Larner 1996). International studies of government responses to these conspicuous exclusions often point to the increased importance of the 'local' as a site for effective policies and programmes (Eisenschitz and Gough 1993, Jewson and McGregor 1997). In Aotearoa New Zealand, as internationally, local partnerships aimed at promoting collaborative relationships between central government agencies, local institutions and community organizations are emerging as a significant example of such localized initiatives.

But what actually are local partnerships? We begin by observing that in New Zealand the discourse of partnership is both ubiquitous and extremely diverse. It is currently being used by those on the right to mask moves towards privatisation of municipal utilities, and on the left by those seeking to strengthen downwards accountabilities into representative community structures. 'Partnerships' apparently include an extraordinary range of community, commercial, political, strategic, sovereignty and environmental relationships: a kind of 'everything-and-nothing' polysemy that raises critical suspicions. And while critics and partisans alike have claimed privileged insight into 'what partnership really means', others seem more than happy with the slippage and the ideological possibilities it offers.

If 'partnership' was simply a linguistic ploy, we would not be so concerned to analyse this new political landscape. However, it is apparent that the rise of partnership involves more than just rhetoric and/or ideology. There are now sustained efforts to formalise partnership arrangements, manifest in the recent *Statement of Government Intentions for an Improved Community – Government Relationship* (New Zealand Government 2001). Macro-level policy discourses are being accompanied by the reconfiguration of political and technical processes in which governmental sectors (particularly health, welfare, education, justice) are being rescaled and pulled into new shapes by horizontal linkages, knowledge bases and techniques. That said, the slippage apparent at the rhetorical/ideological level is also rife at the policy and technical level. Indeed, the whole domain of partnership appears to be characterised by plurality and slippery movement between multiple scales, mandates, techniques, accountabilities and participants.

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Working Paper # 6

At this stage it is quite unclear whether longer term the new emphasis on partnerships will underpin a utopian vision of ‘joined-up’ government in Aotearoa New Zealand, or whether the political landscape will remain messy. Moreover, the recent Review of the Centre suggested that partnership approaches may be more relevant to some areas of the public sector than others (The Advisory Group on the Review of the Centre 2001). In any event, however, the question remains as to how the recent discursive, policy and technical shifts emphasizing local partnerships should be understood. In this paper we examine the rise of local partnerships in detail in order to consider how they differ from governmental forms of the immediate past, and what they might represent in the current economic, political and social setting. Our analysis draws on preliminary findings from a large New Zealand government funded research project on local partnerships and governance, itself a symptom of the broader movements through which local partnerships are being codified and made material in this context.²

Our argument is that in Aotearoa New Zealand local partnerships are usefully understood as a post-welfarist, post-neoliberal form of social governance. We substantiate this claim by situating local partnerships against the background of earlier forms of social governance – those associated with keynesian welfarism and neo-liberalism respectively. This allows us to show that local partnerships are interwoven with particular forms of professional and local agency, and – perhaps surprisingly – can be partly understood as a legacy of the explicitly focused service contracts and disciplinary approaches to activating those on welfare that have so troubled the social sector over the last two decades. In this regard, local partnerships have a much longer genealogy than is usually recognised. We then examine the context in which local partnerships have come to the fore. We conclude that in Aotearoa New Zealand local partnerships represent neither a return to social democracy or nor a simple continuation of market oriented forms of neoliberalism. Rather they are an integral part of a new form of social governance that attempts to send legible signals about social stability and inclusivity to global markets, while urging active orientation to and participation in these fields on local subjects.

Local Partnerships, Neoliberalism and Social Governance

While they have only recently come to public and political attention in Aotearoa New Zealand, local partnerships have received considerable attention in the international social policy and decentralisation literatures (for recent contributions see, amongst others, Balloch and Taylor 2001, Edwards, Goodwin, Pemberton and Woods 2002, Geddes and Benington 2001, Greer 2001, Phillips 2002). These international studies suggest that the reliance on local partnerships is typically higher in countries where the state has historically had structurally weaker engagements with issues of social equity and where neo-liberal reforms have been most forcibly enacted. Moreover, many authors claim local partnerships are only one of a series of new institutional forms found mid-way in a continuum that stretches from contracts to networks. Geddes and Benington 2001: 2), for example, note ‘(P)artnership is not a phenomenon that can be wholly differentiated, conceptually or empirically, from other forms of policy collaboration and inter-organisational working’. These commentators also stress the need for country specific

² The co-authors are amongst the seven researchers affiliated to this project. The paper is based on ethnographic research conducted during 2001-2.

Working Paper # 6

studies of the place of partnerships in restructured institutions, organisations and social relations (Jewson and MacGregor 1997:10), suggesting that local partnerships may have different implications in different places.

To date, much of the discussion about local partnerships has focused on their political implications, with the consequence that their theoretical implications are less well understood. The intellectual imperative has been to understand the value and effectiveness of local partnerships in addressing the complex and cross-cutting problems currently facing communities and citizens (Geddes and Bennington 2001:3). A range of important political issues associated with local partnerships have been identified, including those of poor coordination and organisational proliferation (Peck and Tickell 1995), uneven development and short termism (Greer 2001), undemocratic structures (Stewart 1994) and political fragility (Woodburn 1985). However, despite these concerns, there remains considerable optimism about the potential of local partnerships to transform both policy development and programme delivery, and increasingly they are understood to represent a fundamental paradigm shift in governmental form (see, for example, Rhodes 1997).

In this context, we find it useful to locate analysis of local partnerships in broader theoretical debates about neoliberalism. We would argue that local partnerships are usefully understood as an integral part of the ‘purposive *construction and consolidation* of neo-liberalized state forms, modes of governance, and regulatory relations’ (Peck and Tickell 2002: 384, emphasis in the original). That said, the rise of local partnerships also challenges conventional understandings of neoliberalism as either simply a policy response to the exigencies of the global economy, or the capturing of the policy agenda by the ‘New Right’. In particular, the rise of ‘third way’ (Giddens 1999) or ‘social democratic neoliberals’ (Tickell and Peck 2003) is generating a rigorous debate about theoretical status of neoliberalism, and a reworking of earlier understandings. Whereas once academic and political commentaries, both supportive and critical, tended to portray neoliberalism as a monolithic political project and associate it with the preference for a minimalist state, recently it has become clear that adequate conceptualizations of neoliberalism must be more attentive to historical contingency and political complexity.

In a recent contribution to this discussion, Tickell and Peck (2003) distinguish between ‘roll-back neoliberalism’ and ‘roll-out neo-liberalism’. Whereas the former involved an emphasis on marketisation and individualization, the later continues the task of making markets in the economic domain, but involves a more authoritarian, paternalist approach to social policy (see also Larner 2000a, MacGregor 1999). In this paper, we extend their argument in two ways. First, we identify a third formulation in the New Zealand context that is less authoritarian and more activist. This further underlines the need for more nuanced accounts of different neoliberal projects, and their institutionally, historically and geographically variable outcomes (Tickell and Peck 2003: 22). Second, we show that theoretical accounts of neo-liberalism need to recognise the sheer hard work and the long-standing efforts of social movements, community groups and other grass-roots organisations to make their voices heard in governmental processes (Brodie 1996, Brodie 1996a, Larner 2000). By implication many accounts of neo-liberalism are prone to

overstating governmental reach, and downplaying the contestations, struggles and compromises that inevitably characterise the development of new governmental forms.

The New 'New Zealand Experiment'

Aotearoa/New Zealand is an ideal research site from which to engage theoretical debates about local partnerships, neoliberalism and social governance. As an international commentator observed in the late 1990s: 'The neoliberal experiment in New Zealand is the most ambitious attempt at constructing the free market as a social institution to be implemented anywhere this century. It is a clearer case of the costs and limits of reinventing the free market than the Thatcherite experiment in Britain' (Gray 1998: 39). However, whereas during the 1980s and 1990s the policy emphasis was on marketisation, the 'level playing field' and a minimal state, recently a new set of issues has emerged as a consequence of efforts to reinvent social democracy in a context characterised by globalising economic processes, social polarisation and racialised poverty. Indeed, we would argue New Zealand's restructuring project has now been through three distinct 'phases': 1) during the 1980s the state withdrew from many areas of economic production, while at the same time attempting to preserve – and even extend – the welfarist and social justice aspirations associated with social democracy; 2) the more punitive phase of the early 1990s which saw an extension of the marketisation programme accompanied by the introduction of neo-conservative and/or authoritarian policies and programmes in the area of social policy; 3) a third phase in the late 1990s characterised by a 'partnering' ethos in both economic and social policy.

It is in the context of this third phase of restructuring that local partnerships have come to the centre stage politically. Many politicians and policy makers now distance themselves from the 'more market' and individualised approaches of the earlier phases of neoliberalism of the 1980s and 1990s, and advocate local partnerships as initiatives that embrace pluralism and inclusivity. The 'joining up' of different levels of government with communities, and the formalising of these relationships around shared values and place based goals is represented as a new mode of 'modern', 'third way' governance 'without enemies', a broad project in which every organisation ought to be involved, and which will benefit all. Our observation is that many of those involved may not always know quite what a partnership is, or how it might work, but they do know that partnerships are good things.

Empirically, local partnerships in Aotearoa/New Zealand take a wide variety of forms, from short-term one off projects to long-term institutional arrangements. In general, however, they tend to be inter-sectoral, multi-cultural and multi-level. Some examples include: community health plans; interagency well-being strategies; iwi-based and urban Maori service delivery; full service schools; health and education action zones; healthy cities partnerships; safer communities programmes; 'strengthening communities' and 'strengthening families' projects; local peak bodies (e.g. principals groups, cultural advisory boards); information networks; youth councils; area based employment and training projects; and 'one stop shops' for government services. Seen together, these apparently diverse initiatives share a number of common features. They represent innovative strategies on the part of local communities AND the cutting edge of

Working Paper # 6

decentralized, locally responsive government. As such, they present important challenges to more traditional centralized, vertically integrated, sectoral approaches to policy development, service provision and community support.

Our task in this paper is not to present a detailed descriptive analysis of local partnerships in Aotearoa New Zealand (see www.lpg.org.nz for more details on the project as a whole). Nor are we trying to develop a straightforward historical account of their origins. We are aware that there are both continuities and ruptures between past and present, and that it is quite likely that a full account of the rise of local partnerships would take us back to at least the pre-welfare state period (McClure 1998, Thomson 1998). Rather, our concern is to identify how local partnerships differ from governmental forms of the immediate past. We aim to show that different forms of social governance are associated with particular political-economic contexts, are informed by specific governmental rationalities, embody particular forms of expertise and ethics, and take distinctive institutional forms. This puts us in a better position to appreciate the emergence of local partnerships as a distinctive form of social governance, and allows us to be more specific about the current status of local partnerships in Aotearoa New Zealand. In particular we aim to highlight how political contestation has integrally shaped the character of local partnerships in this particular case.

Keynesian Welfarism and Social Governance

It is well established that keynesian welfarism was attuned to a series of imperatives emerging from wider patterns of economic activity, and was sustained by an economic and social consensus that linked the state closely to both production and welfare (Roper and Rudd 1993). Political contestations over economic policies were framed in terms of left-right polarities based on contestations between capital and labour, but were bolstered within a rubric of state sheltered and mediated industrialism (Walsh 1993). Similarly, social policies were framed by a general acceptance of the central role of the state in ensuring the welfare of its citizenry (Cheyne, O'Brien and Belgrave 1997). What we focus on here is how the discursive, technical and ethical characteristics of keynesian welfarism gave rise to a distinctive form of social governance institutionalised in the state apparatus and organised on a 'siloed' sectoral and disciplinary basis. None of this, we suggest, was conducive to the kinds of partnerships we now see emerging.

The discursive characteristics of keynesian welfarism are also familiar. This particular governmental form was premised on the assumption of a bounded national economy, government by official agencies rather than a broader based understanding of 'governance', a singular notion of society and the male breadwinner model of citizenship. Dean (1999: 127-130), has described in more general terms how this understanding of the welfare state developed out of particular formulations of social 'problems' and how the relatively discrete disciplinary knowledges of medicine and public health, education, welfare economics, sociology, social administration, social work and social policy, provided the 'intellectual machinery' for understanding the social in particular forms. Within these kinds of singularity, diverse economic and social domains were brought within state ambits, but remained clearly delineated from each other.

Working Paper # 6

From our point of view, what is important about keynesian welfarism is that it came to be associated with 'intermediate' institutional and governmental forms that were firmly located in the state apparatus. These 'intermediate' forms were initially predominantly economic (for example, the infrastructural initiatives associated with Vogelism), then became more common in the social domain (hospitals, schools). In time, these economic and social domains became integral parts of the public sector (Hawke 1985). Of course this was not a straightforward process; each of these formulations emerged as governmental only after extensive political, institutional and disciplinary developments, marked by both successes and failures. Official histories of relevant government departments have recently illustrated this point in some detail (see, for example, Dalley 1998 and McClure 1998). For our purposes, the key point is that the formal inclusion of these domains in the public sector significantly reduced the overall role and influence of non-governmental agencies – understood as 'voluntary organisations' – in policy formulation and service provision (Conradson 2002).

These 'intermediate' public sector institutions were understood to mediate the relationship between citizen and market. In contrast to later modes of public sector management, their day to day administration was marked by the dominance of sectoral specialists (for example, head teachers, school inspectors, medical superintendents), whose command of specific, content based, knowledge was the basis for professional, institutional and departmental direction. They were structured in strongly hierarchical ways, with advancement taking place up through the ranks. Also integral to the 'public service' ethos, was the emphasis on the 'greater good' embedded within understandings about the importance of bureaucracy, egalitarianism and universalism. Finally, because of both their intellectual and organisational forms, these institutions tended to operate in what is now called 'silos', firewalled from each other, and, by institutional budget control and exclusive staff hiring policy, from professional and organisational players outside the public service.

There were, of course, different versions of the welfare state. Comparative welfare state theorists, for example, distinguish between corporatist, liberal and social democratic welfare states (eg. Esping Anderson 1996). And, as we will subsequently see, the liberal nature of the New Zealand post-war welfare state facilitated both the encroachment of neo-liberalism (Rudd 1993) as well as the subsequent rise of local partnerships. Our point here is a different one. We are suggesting that the post-war welfare state was framed by particular discourses of the 'social' and 'social problems'. It was organised – in disciplinary, institutional and service delivery terms – in discrete segmented ways, rather than in the pluralized and contested forms of today. This functional segmentation facilitated and strengthened technocratic aspects of social policies and programmes. Consequently, there was very little political engagement between the institutions of public service and the society it served. Particular social groups (women, Maori, non-European migrants) were largely marginalized. It was in this way that manifold differences could be subordinated to an overarching national framework - the welfare state 'consensus' - which was politicised primarily through left/right party politics.

Working Paper # 6

Nor are we suggesting that forms of community and oppositional politics were not significant during this period. Community development, networks and partnerships were actively promoted, sometimes from within offices of the Department of Social Welfare, and in umbrella forums (McClure 1998: 148). Important and longstanding critiques of welfarism could be found in the discourses of Maori, unions, social movements (particularly feminists) and community development practitioners. These critiques involved contestations about the apparently 'consensual' framework of welfarism, and highlighted the particular bases from which social differences (gender, ethnicity, sexuality, poverty) should be recognised and addressed (see, amongst others, Awatere 1984, Bedggood 1980, Easton 1980). Importantly, however, while these contestations from below evinced strong network characteristics internally, they were rarely attuned to widespread networking and partnerships *with* government. Apart from pockets within departments like Social Welfare, neither local nor national governments (or even their officers) appeared as obvious allies. On the contrary, in many cases they were understood as the 'enemy'.

Neo-liberalism and Social Governance

The demise of this governmental form (the 'restructuring' of the public sector) is widely attributed to the rise of neo-liberalism, particularly after the election of the fourth Labour government in 1984, although it is also important to acknowledge the changing international context. The dramatic displacement of socialised consensus approaches with market contestation models in Aotearoa New Zealand has been extensively discussed (see, amongst many others, Boston et al 1991, James 1992, Kelsey 1995, Shirley 1999). Whereas keynesian welfarism had been premised on protecting the national economy through state mediated industrialism, neo-liberalism opened up the domestic economy to the flows and networks of global capitalism (Briton, Le Heron and Pawson 1992). Social policies were similarly reformed, with a new emphasis on paid work as the primary means of ensuring the welfare of both men and women (Boston, Dalziel and St John 1999). Again, our emphasis herein is not so much on the political economy of these economic and social transformations, but rather on the implications of these shifts for political and institutional forms. In this section we suggest that while neo-liberalism did profound damage, this period also contained the seeds of current partnerships, and, surprisingly, provided highly conducive - indeed essential - conditions for their propagation. In particular, we focus on the role of neo-liberalism in reshaping the relationships between policy makers, professionals and activists.

Most immediately, neo-liberalism promulgated important shifts in the dominant forms of governmental expertise (Boston, Martin, Pallot and Walsh 1996). Indeed, the 'New Zealand model' of public sector restructuring attracted widespread interest internationally (see, for example, Osborne and Gaebler 1993). This model followed closely the principles and practices of 'New Public Management', which emphasised central steering functions, while devolving closely monitored accountabilities to subordinated and localised functionaries. As has been observed in other accounts of New Public Management, this gave rise to the growing power of Treasury and Finance departments, the rising importance of audit (Power 1997) and the new significance of contractualism (Yeatman 1995). In turn, the forms of expertise associated with the welfare state, such as

Working Paper # 6

social scientists, professionals and state bureaucrats, were increasingly governed by the rationales of competition, accountability and consumer demand (Rose 1993). Many of these social experts were transformed into 'calculating selves', with a corresponding decline in public service aspects of government. This new ethos was manifest in the terminology of consumers, clients and customers, and in the importation of private sector human resource principles and practices that gave rise to the widespread use of performance criteria and individual contracts for senior public servants.

Our emphasis is on how this new ethos radically reconfigured accountabilities, expressing them in objectified output terms that encouraged public servants to define and delimit their 'core business'. New departmental demarcations and sharply focussed job descriptions, developed in a context that expressly valorised competition, greatly impinged on the ability of public servants to work across departmental boundaries. The new distinction between policymaking and service provision, that arose out of the discourse of 'provider capture', led to the 'disembedding' of the content-based knowledge previously integral to the public sector. In management positions, actors such as medical directors and school inspectors were increasingly displaced and subordinated by managers, accountants and auditors with more generic forms of knowledge. One consequence was that many of those in the public sector with a political commitment to more collective modes of working found official agencies increasingly alien environments, and exited, frustrated, even bitterly disappointed.

At the same time, and somewhat paradoxically, the new emphasis on generic knowledge made it easier for professionals, policy makers and technocrats to move across departments, and also in and out of the private sector. One obvious manifestation of these new trends was Treasury's much noted capture of policy initiatives, abetted by a cabal of international consultants (Goldfinch 2000, Oliver 1988). Arguably, however, more significant was the rise of a wider domain of international policy borrowing that placed a premium on being connected into avant-garde academic and institutional sites. Movement was further facilitated by the growing ease of communications and travel, and a rise in conferences, workshops and networking, with the consequence that policymakers and analysts began to share knowledge and techniques internationally, nationally and locally. The emergence of stronger horizontal networks amongst these actors was perhaps a predictable follow on. At the same time, the actual affairs of the state continued to be organised in the strongly 'siloed' ways inherited from welfarism.

Contractualism, community organisations and strategic brokers

Increasingly the specialist practical knowledge, once integral to the core public service, was supplied by sub-contracting organisations. The contracts were largely top down, and involved a strong emphasis on vertical accountabilities, measured in the new language of outputs and outcomes. Social service organisations, including notable church based not-for-profit entities, found themselves re-cast as 'little arms of the state' and, to a certain extent, forced into competition with each other. Repositioned as accredited service delivery agencies for government, they were forced to represent their capabilities within the parameters of the new public management discourse; a discourse that often stood in

Working Paper # 6

stark contrast to core values and accepted modes of working. Much debated at the time was also the extent to which these groups were required to become less political.

It is well recognised that the initial impact of competitive contractualism on collaborative modes of working was devastating. Explicit competition undercut trust, and contractual obligations narrowed operational focus to individual clients and specific objectives. Community workers found themselves compelled to devote disproportionate time representing their work through reporting frameworks they found objectionable and alien. Client focus, teamed with a new emphasis on confidentiality, served to undermine day-to-day interagency practice. New providers entering the market profoundly and continually fractionated existing fields of working. Relationships with central government funding agencies were characterised by bruising and repetitive negotiations, and the emphasis on narrowly specified outputs submerged issues widely understood as needing more broad-based and longer-term interventions.

Less well recognised is that, as a consequence of this process, community organisations became a key site for new forms of de-centralised professional and technical capacity. Increasing numbers of people in the sub-contracting organisations, including many with years of practical and political engagement, began (or were forced) to ‘professionalise’ and/or gain formal qualifications, as new skills were required of them. The Women’s Refuge, for example, ran workshops on contractualism based on a handbook produced for them by a legal academic (Seuffert and McGovern 2000). In many cases, the gaining of professional and technical expertise was complemented by hearty political engagement, powerfully motivated by anger over the impact of neoliberalism. It is important not to under-estimate the significance of identity politics to this process. Feminists and Maori (sometimes embodied in the same person) played central roles, as did locality-based solidarities. Although these ‘social movements’ had often begun from grassroots struggles defined in opposition to mainstream institutions, during this period activists were increasingly likely to engage from within these institutions. Nor is it coincidence that this was the period of mass participation in tertiary education. The increasing numbers of people entering into formal study, particularly in education, health and social sciences, fostered both the development of new professional capacities in social sector organisations and further ‘professionalisation’ of community activists.

Significant local collaborations also have their origins in this period. For many in the social services, in part because of their ‘client’ focus and shared professional aims, the high cost and destructiveness of competition between local service providers was obvious. Because contractualism didn’t fund coordination, it created a vacuum (or a series of fragmented domains) into which certain actors moved in their efforts to contest neo-liberalism. For example, in Waitakere mental health providers developed a ‘Shared Vision for Mental Health’, rather than compete with each other. Among these actors, there was both an expressed preference to work in more collaborative ways, and a sense of the kinds of programmes that might frame this action. Indeed, it can be argued that the strong values and sense of common imperatives amongst some activists were actually sharpened by the lack of funding, and by the seeming intransigence of central authorities in the face of local needs. Local collaboration thus became a rallying issue for local

Working Paper # 6

organisations and actors, an issue that further sharpened their position against the prevailing, socially divisive, policy and practice.

Central government initiatives created new forums in which these new skills could be further developed. The fourth Labour government established locality based social programme funding and regulatory committees, including Regional Employment and Access Councils (REACS), Social Welfare District Executive Committees (DECs), and the Community Organisation Grants Scheme (COGS). Later, though initially short-lived, area health boards offered local actors opportunities to engage in debates around health and well-being. The 'Tomorrow's Schools' reforms, which moved control of education closer to local communities through the establishment of Boards of Trustees, saw schools emerge as sites for local social service and community based initiatives. Finally, local government reform created territorial authorities with comparatively large resource bases and planning responsibilities encompassing environment and infrastructure, and some local councils began to adopt advocacy and coordinative roles around social issues. Together, these localised initiatives further fostered an increasingly professionalized cadre of local actors, many of whom had links to central government, other local professionals, and to community and voluntary sector networks.

Finally, these institutional developments had a symbiotic relationship with the rise of a new cohort of activists. In the context of growing inequality, and with funding and professionalisation imperatives described above, some community groups and voluntary organisations began to reframe their activities. Often these struggles involved efforts to embed policies and programmes in particular places by emphasising the importance of local knowledges and local accountabilities. While the so-called 'Maori renaissance' was a leading case in the politicisation of local knowledge, longstanding community development discourses were also central to these efforts. The consequence was that new types of community entrepreneurs thus began to play an important role in articulating the claims of a transformed flaxroots/grass-roots that more fully understood the political significance of strategic community networks. In highlighting the role of these new networked activists, we have found the term 'strategic brokerage' (Reich 2001) useful. As we propose it, this refers to the active and purposive forging of links between more traditional interveners (eg. government agencies) and organizations such as schools, health services and community-based organisations. To achieve this, strategic brokers required a combination of institutional and local knowledge, along with problem solving skills, in order to put people and organisations together in new ways.

Overall, therefore, our argument is that the changes associated with neo-liberalism involved an enormous shifting upwards of gears for policy makers, service providers and community agencies. In our opinion, this provides a crucial context for understanding the rise of local partnerships. Many community groups struggled for nearly two decades to maintain stable organisational bases in the context of contractualism. Not only did they survive the thin promises of the neoliberal engagement with 'civil society', they also learned new ways of contesting policy agendas and how to position themselves in relation to their competitors, diverse communities and local needs. Thus a crucial consequence of neo-liberalism was the emergence of community activists both as highly

Working Paper # 6

skilled and articulate organisational leaders and lobbyists. The key question for these actors became: How might contractualism be turned into more collaborative forms of social governance?

Neo-liberal or Post-neoliberal?: The New Form of Social Governance

Under the earlier forms of neo-liberalism 'globalisation' became the primary economic rationale, and marketisation the means by which both organisations and individuals were to be harnessed to the new pursuit for international competitiveness (Larner 1998). Yet, the more 'pure' market versions of neo-liberalism were not able to cohere as a long-term mode of social regulation, not least because of the threats to social cohesion and political legitimacy. As it became more apparent that social problems could not simply be solved by economic means nor by authoritarian measures, a new formulation marked by the language of the 'third way' (Chatterjee et al. 1999) and manifest in the rise of government promoted strategies such as 'Closing the Gaps' and 'Social Development' began to cohere. It is this new formulation that marks a third moment in the neo-liberal project in New Zealand, and the context in which local partnerships have come to the fore.

While this new formulation is represented by proponents as being quite different to that associated with neo-liberalism, and as involving a return to the more inclusive aspirations of social democracy, we would argue this remains a subordinated re-linking of the economic and the social in that 'inclusion' is understood as yet another means of enhancing international competitiveness (see, amongst others, New Zealand Government 2001a, Treasury 2001). This is a social vision that emphasises the collective benefits that accrue from having a highly skilled workforce, framed in terms of human capital arguments about the increasing returns from education, the lower 'transaction costs' associated with social cohesion, and the long term economic effects of early childhood influences. It is also concerned to generate social policy that will ameliorate the impacts on women participating in workforce and associated declines in fertility.

At the same time, and of equal significance, it is characterised by the pastoral ambit of public health, which is encroaching steadily on social policy (Schram 2001). Health and well-being strategies now crosscut areas as diverse as housing, income deprivation, local safety and security, transport, communication, children, transitions, old people, training, employment and refugees, as these areas are increasingly referenced in through the language and techniques of social epidemiology and social mapping (see, for recent examples, Waitakere City 2000, Six Cities Project 2001, Tobias and Howden-Chapman 2000). The two central orientations of this governmental programme (international competitiveness and social well-being) are embodied in the new model citizen: the child (Jenson 1999, Ministry of Social Policy 2001). If social policies and programmes do their jobs properly, the child will fulfil his/her potential and become a lifelong learning-active labour market person - the mobile, networked embodiment of human capital.

It is in this broader context that local partnerships have begun to draw together central government, local institutions and community organisations. This new form of social governance is markedly different from those that preceded it. Whereas Keynesian

Working Paper # 6

welfarist strategies were premised on universalist nation-state conceptions of the social, and earlier neo-liberal strategies focused primarily on the individual, the new form of social governance recognises multiple and fragmented social groups. Most immediately, this is because one of the most obvious outcomes of two decades of neo-liberal restructuring in Aotearoa New Zealand has been marked socio-economic polarisation, cross cut by new patterns of territorialized, gendered and racialised inequality. This has given rise to the increased visibility of geographically marked placed based 'pockets' of poverty and ill health (Craig 2002). In turn, increased spatial differentiation and geographical visibility of poverty is generating new middle class spatialities based on the 'new prudentialism' (O'Malley 1996), the privatisation of risk, and 'cocooning', accompanied by a growing likelihood that poor communities will slip into local crisis.

However, the rise of local partnerships, with their responsiveness to the needs of specific communities, can not simply be attributed to the new patterns of social inequality. It will appear from the earlier discussion how in Aotearoa New Zealand identity politics has played a central role in the reconfiguration of governmental forms. A particularly powerful impetus has been the growing recognition of the politics of tino rangatiratanga and widespread acknowledgement of the claims of Maori as tangata whenua in both political and institutional contexts (Durie 1998, Walker 1990). The fact that New Zealanders are no longer treated as if they were culturally and ethnically homogeneous marks a qualitative shift away from the assimilationist and integrationist assumptions of earlier policy formulations (Larner 2001).

Further, this is not simply about the two 'communities' of biculturalism. A recent influential report on the community and voluntary sector, for example, uses the term community to convey both the notion of a network of relationships (based on common identity, interest or purpose) and/or a sense of locality, a territory or place in which people meet (CVSWP 2001: 10). The 'inclusive' community is now understood as intrinsically pluralist, the parts of which cannot be summed into total sets of interests such as class, ethnicity or gender. A further indication of this non-universalist conception of the social, found in this report and reiterated in subsequent discussions, is that it is widely accepted that a single body will not be able to act as the voice of the community and voluntary sector, hence an ongoing need to work with diversity and pluralism.

Finally, the new form of social governance is explicitly multi-sectoral, thereby challenging the conventional 'silo' model premised on vertical functionality that underpinned both keynesian welfarism and neo-liberalism. The policy/operations split is now widely recognised as problematic, and there are sustained calls for more collaborative approaches based on the co-determination of both needs and solutions. The recent Review of the Centre (2002), for example, places considerable emphasis on a 'whole of government approach' and the need for co-ordinated responses involving multiple agencies and 'circuit breaker teams' to develop solutions to apparently intractable social problems. The need for increased interaction with local institutions and community organisations, by adapting and building on successful models of local coordination, is also emphasised. All of these developments have strengthened the ambit

of those who would develop locally based initiatives to address social issues, and underpin the sustained move towards local partnerships.

Local Partnerships and the Rise of Strategic Brokers

The strategic brokers, who emerged as advocates for more collaborative approaches during the neo-liberal period, are playing a key role in the formation of local partnerships. Most immediately, the visibility of these professional activists has increased because no policy or strategy is now complete or legitimate without a full round of ‘consultations’ that access local stakeholders on an identity or interest group basis. The recent increase in interagency and multi-sectoral strategies has further enhanced their role. In order to provide a legitimating local basis, these strategies usually attempt to link policy and professional practice to wider constituencies, arguing there are mutual gains from sharing locality specific knowledge, and learning the dense *metis* of local politics.

Of course, this is precisely the domain of brokers’ expertise. They are explicitly oriented to process issues; they can facilitate, mediate, negotiate and nurture networks. It is they who can deploy cultural and local knowledge in ways that allow traditionally ‘silent’ voices to be heard along with the articulate, persistent and powerful (CVSWP 2001: 70). These are not simply technical or even political tasks. These skills are both embodied and deeply personalised, and rely on well-developed abilities to network and build relationships. We note with interest, for example, that knowledge of particular networks and communities is now regularly written into job descriptions. Further, while the new emphasis on relationships often involves the strategic brokers riding on the back of existing knowledge of local politics, more recently their activities have been further facilitated by electronic means of consultation such as web pages.

As local partnerships have begun to formalise and to be scaled up into wider arenas, so too have they provided a more general platform for strategic brokers. In new efforts to establish collaborative relationships between government departments, local institutions and community organisations the value of shared information has typically been high. The strategic brokers are likely to have information not only about the rapidly changing policy and organisational contexts, but also sharp accounts of actual professional practice and positioning vis-à-vis others. The formation of local partnerships is providing both a context for the display of this knowledge, and also collegiate action in relation to common areas of concern. In some cases, of course, this sharing of information involves a kind of ‘collaborative competition’. However, even between competitors, there is something to be gained from ‘coming to the table’ in these new collaborative forums. Moreover, in the broader strategic context it is important to avoid overlaps, sort out niches, and create wider platforms legitimating the work of individual organisations.

In turn, the skills of the strategic brokers are being extended. Local partnerships require not just knowledge *of* communities but also knowledge *about* communities. Technical knowledge, including developments in population information (surveys, social mapping, area referenced social deprivation indices) and public health information based on social epidemiology, are becoming vital to both policy development and professional practice in

Working Paper # 6

the social domain. While initially harnessed to neo-liberal attempts to better target government resources, these tools are now used to provide ‘hard evidence’ of the misdistribution of services and resources, and perhaps more importantly of *cross cutting issues* and aspects of social deprivation, health, well-being, safety, employment and education.

In sum, we are arguing that the new form of social governance represents a marked shift away from both the earlier phases of neo-liberalism. But nor does it represent a return to the nation-state based models that underpinned social democracy. Rather, the ambition is to build social connectedness in a context where the primary emphasis remains on linking New Zealand based activities and organisations into the flows and networks of global capitalism. In this context, the horizontal and vertical networks that arose during the neo-liberal period have proved a crucial basis for the development of the new collaborative relationships between government departments, local institutions and community organisations captured under the term ‘local partnerships’.

Conclusion

While the role and function of local partnerships, and the work of the strategic brokers that underpins them, is gaining increasing formal recognition there remain tough issues. It is already clear that developing and finessing the new collaborative forms of governance will involve major challenges. In particular, the broad political context of the work of strategic brokers remains fraught. While their expertise is being used to build local partnerships and to assist in their political positioning, the wider contexts of organisational pluralism and identity politics, as well as the rapidly developing technologies of information, consultation and surveillance often stretch these professional activists in their day to day practice. Finally, the challenge of local partnerships to the silo model is by no means an equal contest, and it is not at all clear what powers will ultimately be held where in the emerging governmental configuration.

Thus the new form of social governance remains emergent, and looks quite fragile around the edges. Indeed, to use Foucauldian terminology, it might be argued that it is an ‘assemblage’ that is still being put together. Certainly the political contestations remain, and these are not only vertical and left-right political, they are also between increasingly plural organisational and identity bases. However, as the move towards local partnerships gains momentum, they are challenging accepted understandings of the policy making process and transforming institutional cultures. Moreover, the new form of social governance, in whatever institutional shape it ultimately takes, will continue to create a demand for, and place a premium on the technical skills, personal goodwill and political activism of the locally oriented professional activists.

It is clear that further examination is needed to scope in much more detail the specific forms, character and effects of local partnerships, particularly in a context where they are often seen as competing with enterprise oriented modes of social entrepreneurship (Gibson and Cameron 2001). Moreover, as was recently observed by one of New Zealand’s leading political commentators ‘(P)artnerships may be essentially a technique that aims to pacify, more than deliver. Yet partnerships create expectations and demands

Working Paper # 6

that may lead to backlash if people are engaged with no visible returns' (Kelsey 2002: 84). Certainly, insofar as partnerships are located within a wider program of globalisation, they constantly risk being steamrollered, undercut and appropriated by larger forces of political economy. The challenge for the partnerships, and the activists on whose activities they are centred, is to upscale their political contest, while maintaining their professional and technical legitimacy in a context where larger scales may remain powerfully determinant.

Herein, however, our task is much more modest. First, we have highlighted the point local partnerships have a longer genealogy than is often understood. This allows us to substantiate a claim that local partnerships involve neither a return to the aspirations of post-war social democracy, nor a continued emphasis on the marketisation and individualisation processes that characterised both 'roll-back' or 'roll-out' neoliberalism. Local partnerships are an integral part of a new form of social governance that involves efforts to send signals about social stability and inclusivity to global markets through attempts to 'suture' different levels of government and community organisations, both vertically and horizontally. Second, our aim has been to make visible the professional, technical and community based networks, that developed during the neoliberal period, and provide the organisational basis for the new governmental form. As such, our analysis emphasises the need for analytical accounts that highlight both the specificity of particular political projects, and the multiple and contested nature of new forms of social governance.

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