

## **Review: Local Economic Leadership - OECD Report 2015:**

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The report examines the value of local economic leadership recognising the distinctive leadership arrangements across multiple contexts. 'Local' is defined by the cases used, which focus on city regions of varying size within Europe. Innovation and ability to change are reported as critical in local economies to avoid locked-in to previous cycles of production and to make sure they are 'geared-up' for the future. Equally, it recognises the multifaceted and diverse nature of leadership in local economic development or place based leadership.

A 'new era of globalisation' is referred to in the report, calling for leadership to include multiple agents, develop common strategy, partnerships and co-ordination, coalition building and wider reform to be effective at the local level. Four cases are presented in the report from across Europe, these are Stockholm, Hamburg, Amsterdam and Manchester. In all cases there is a repeated call for collaboration and partnership building within and beyond the city regions. The report gives a well summarise table of leadership imperatives, skills and dividends on page 10. The skills outlined appear as a wish list for city regions with limited reference to the cases, evidence base or ways in which they can be implemented. These do follow through into the report's recommendations with a recurring theme of collaboration, local autonomy and power, avoiding failure, institutional development and private sector engagement. Throughout the report, there is reference to many theoretical concepts but they are explored to varying depths. Hence, there is a wide range of theoretical concepts to consider and take away from the report and look into further.

One of the notable issues with this report is the lack of a methodology. The reader is left wondering how the data was collected and how the participants where identified as local leaders beyond their political status. Page 14 does outline why the four cities have been identified as successful; due to higher than Euro area average employment rates of 20-64 year olds for NUTS2 regions. It is extrapolated that these regions have been actively engaged in rebuilding their economies. The measure of success can be questioned in terms of real value depending on the viewpoint of the reader. For example, Greater Manchester has one of the highest income inequality gaps in the UK with poverty still growing despite success (Lupton and Hughes, 2016). On top of this the report does not represent any gender equality, focusing predominantly on male political leadership. Generally, there is a lack of consideration for sustainability and inclusivity in local economic success.

A strength of this report is its comparative study across four regions of Europe. There are key insights and lesson learned on how to be successful but also from being too successful, like in Hamburg's case. Economic success in Hamburg has brought about different problems regarding quality of live and the provisions of education and health for city region. This is also a weakness of the report as these cases studies are learning from being successful and the challenges they now face but also retrospectively looking back at what ingredients came together to demonstrate effective local economic leadership. There is little to no evidence on the struggles and possible wrong turns taken in the decision-making processes.

The report also highlights strong long term strategy as a bedrock to effective local economic leadership. However, there is little mention of the strategy formation processes that took place or the aims and objectives of these city regions. This is a report that has again looked at success stories with 'high quality' elected officials and institutional leaders. Overcoming deficits in the local economy such as short termist institutions, fragmented jurisdictions, limited access to capital and subordinate power. These cities have successfully navigated through those issues but what about cities that have already taken a wrong turn and are in far worse situations with weak leadership and poor institutional infrastructures. The threat of managed decline and how we cope with weaker leadership are not addressed.

In summary, this report would appeal to policy makers and politicians at all scales along with community leaders and academics. It does add value to the understanding of local economic leadership in varying contexts yet focusing on key themes of collaboration and innovative thinking throughout the case studies. The scope of literature underpinning the concept and theoretical lenses could have been referenced more for readers to conduct further study. Hence, politicians and policy makers would have to make some assumptions when applying any recommendations in their city regions. For policy makers and academic this is a valued comparative study that bring together common best practices based on successful city regions in Europe but does require a critical lens when taking on-board recommendations.

References:

Lupton, R. and Hughes, C. 2016. Achieving Inclusive Growth in Greater Manchester, Available: <http://hummedia.manchester.ac.uk/institutes/mui/igau/IGAU-Consultation-Report.pdf> accessed 14/03/17