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The Contribution of Gerry Stoker to the Theory and Practice of Local Government Reform: A Critical Overview

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Abstract: Gerry Stoker has been at the centre of the local government reform debate in Britain for almost thirty years. Perhaps his most significant contribution has been the theory of 'Networked Community Governance' (Stoker, 2003) which has shaped policy development. These ideas have *inter alia* received significant attention in Australian local government reform processes. However, on the eve of the introduction of the British Coalition Government's Localism Bill (2010), Stoker (2010, 28) claimed that his 'community governance vision' was 'fatally flawed'. After providing a synoptic account of Stoker's work and how these ideas have resonated in Australia, this paper explores this volte face and its implications for Australian local government.

Keywords: Comparative local government; Gerry Stoker; Localism Bill (2010); networked community governance.

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1 Introduction

The role of local government in Australia has broadened considerably over the past two decades from being anchored in 'services to property' to incorporate a broader range of 'services to people', such as housing and aged care (see, for example, CGC, 2001; Hawker Report, 2006; Dollery, Wallis and Allan, 2006). Further, with the introduction of new local government acts in all state and territory jurisdictions between 1989 and 2008, Australian local government has, to a greater or lesser extent, been granted powers of general competence such that it now plays a role in defining its own role, subject to varying degrees of state government oversight (see, for instance, Grant and Dollery, 2011a). Moreover, all new local government acts incorporate a role for the local community in setting the strategic parameters of municipal activities (see, for example, Aulich, 2009).

However, despite these changes in function and status (which have varied considerably between jurisdictions – see Aulich 1999; 2005; Marshall, 2008), the role of Australian local government is still far less expansive than in many other jurisdictions across the globe, including the United States, the European Community (EU) and the Nordic zone (see, for instance Borraz and John, 2004), as well as in many developing economies (see, for example, Shah, 2006). For example, as the second tier of government in a unitary sovereign state, the ambit of English local government has traditionally included primary and secondary education, health care and policing, as well as incorporating the functions of local government in Australia (see, for example, Dollery, Grant and O'Keefe, 489). Further, as only one of two tiers of government in England (albeit a multifarious tier – see, for example, Grant, Dollery and Crase, 2009), it is difficult to overstate the extent to which English local government has been the subject of both vigorous policy debate and reform processes in the Thatcher and post-Thatcher eras (for a general account, see Cole, 2008; for a detailed history, see Chandler, 2007). The intensity of these debates has been reflected in the fact that local government has been the subject of no less than three White Papers and four major reviews of legislation, in the form of new local government acts, since 1998 (see, for example, DETR, 1998;

DTLGR, 2001; DCLG; 2006; HM Government, 2010). It can be argued that the most comprehensive of these reviews was contained in the work of the Lyons Inquiry, which released three reports between 2005 and 2007 and developed a specific vision of local government – place-shaping – which reasserted the importance of the municipal sphere in terms of political theory, political economy and as a political ideology (Lyons, 2007; for a concise account, see Grant and Dollery, 2011c). Moreover, these contestations have been all the more heart-felt due to the tradition of English political pluralism stretching from the work of J. S. Mill through to Harold Laski (1938) and later Paul Hirst (1997) for which local government became a battlefield (see, for example, Young, 1984; Jones and Stewart, 1883; Stoker, 2003), wherein New Labour, and more recently the Conservative Party, have in succession sought to reform vigorously (see, for example, Blair, 1998; Cameron, 2009).

By way of comparison, reforms to Australian local government have been largely contained within the political orbits of state jurisdictions, while nevertheless receiving peaks of heightened attention from the federal sphere, both historically and contemporaneously (see, for example, Kelly, Dollery and Grant, 2009; Grant and Dollery, 2011b). Yet these differences between Australian and British local government do not entail that reform processes in both countries are hermeneutically sealed from one another. On the contrary, as Stoker (2004, 1) has suggested: 'the British reform process is a focus for international lesson-drawing, admittedly as much as for what not to follow, as to what to emulate'. In particular, both systems of local government have experienced significant municipal consolidation, as well as a move away from multi-function, unitary municipal authorities towards the incorporation of a larger range of actors as part of decision-making and governing processes, wherein the concepts of both multi-nodal networks and of enhanced leadership roles have assumed greater importance (see, for example, Dollery and Grant, 2011; Aulich 2009; Prior and Herriman, 2010). More recently, the introduction of the *Localism Bill (2010)* in England contains measures to devolve specific elements of decision-making and authority more generally, alongside less central government oversight (see, for instance, HM Government, 2010).

Perhaps the most striking element of these legislative changes has been the rhetorical flourish which surrounded them. Prior to the 2010 General Election, Cameron (2009) spoke of the 'redistribution of power', and the 'devolution of power', endorsing the principle of subsidiarity ('we should start by pushing political power down as far as possible, whenever possible') and an increase in both individual power and local power as exemplified by the idea of 'double dissolution' as put forward in the Lyons Inquiry's *Final Report* (for a critical overview, see Davies, 2008). These policy prescriptions are now reflected in the 2010 Coalition Government's stance on local government, with the Departmental website adopting a mantra-like approach to an ideology of localism:

> "Localism, localism, localism"
>
> The Government is overseeing a fundamental shift of power away from Westminster to councils, communities and homes across the nation. A radical localist vision is turning Whitehall on its head by decentralizing central government and giving power to the people (Communities and Local Government, 2010).

Also remarkable from an Australian perspective is the degree of policy continuity between the two major political parties in England with respect to local government reform. Whereas previously New Labour had firmly sided with the local government sector against successive Conservative administrations such that Stoker, (2004, 23) could claim that local government was 'eviscerated' under the Conservatives, the promotion of devolution of authority to local governments, together with a heightened role for leadership, now enjoy relatively uniform bipartisan support in Britain. This is contrary to the Australian context, primarily due to the federal nature of Australian democracy.

Many elements of this broad, bipartisan approach to local government, particularly in terms of its ideal-type role in English democracy, are reflected in the work of Gerry Stoker. Far from being a detached observer, Stoker (2004, xiv) has *inter alia* asserted

that ‘I cannot claim the sole authorship of any of New Labour’s policies (which is some relief) but I cannot deny that I was involved in discussions about them (Stoker, 2004, xiv); and that: ‘the study of local government has in some ways become wrapped up in the reform process as academics try to make sense of the case for change and the virtues of the emerging system’. It can be argued that much of the content of this bipartisan approach to the ideal functioning of local government Stoker (2004) set down in his concept of ‘Networked Community Governance’. As we shall see, this idea involves important normative claims about the role of leadership and devolution, the role of multi-nodal networked governance, as well as foundational claims with respect to the state (see, for example, Dollery and Grant, 2011c, 12).

However, in a recent tribute to the work of Rod Rhodes, drawing on Nye’s (1990; 2008) distinction between “hard power” on the one hand (‘... the power of command and incentives...’ associated with economic development and welfare provision) and “soft power” on the other hand (‘the power to get other people to share your ideas and vision...’), Stoker (2010, 27-29) has argued that the ideal type (our phrase) of Networked Community Governance is ‘fatally flawed’ and that local government systems that are left primarily with the role of ‘network co-ordinator’ are ‘in trouble’ (Stoker, 2010, 29). While in the Australian context we have not seen the development of what might be described as a state-sponsored ideology of devolution as has occurred in England, many elements of reforms processes apart from this have much in common. Important questions thus arise from this *volte face* by someone who has been intimately involved with both theory and policy formulation as it has pertained to local government in England. What are the specific, *post facto* objections that Stoker (2010) has now raised with respect to the idea of community networked] governance? What is the cogency of this critique? Most importantly, what are the implications for critically assessing reform processes in Australian local government and how does this assessment affect our view of reform trajectories of Australian local government?

With these questions in mind this paper is divided into five main parts. Section two provides a synoptic account of the main contours of the policy debate surrounding the

role of English local government in the post-Conservative policy environment, demonstrating that 'Third Way' thinking on local government, while being a 'broad church' has been reflected in the nuances of policy development in England, as well as being echoed in the Australian context. Section three then presents Stoker's (2004) theory of 'Networked Community Governance' and links its main features to elements in Australian local government policy, as well as setting out Stoker's (2006) use of Mark Moore's (1995) theory of public value in the cause of local government. Section four critically examines Stoker's recent (2011) objections to Stoker's (2004; 2006) concept of community governance and 'fatal flaw[s]' therein. Section five considers the implications of this for reform processes in Australian local government, arguing that reform process in Australia have been dominated by 'hard power' priorities, such that many of Stoker's (2004) recommendations with respect to 'soft power' are still relevant in this context. Secondly – and paradoxically – we argue that the Australian local government sector needs to be aware of attempts to hive off so-called 'hard power', for example, responsibility for infrastructure renewal and planning, to structures other than itself, in particular regional structures imposed by federal government. Third, this does not entail that local governments ought not, following Stoker (2004 and Lyons (2007), actively pursue a place-shaping role as a mode of fostering legitimacy and as a contribution to economic development.

2. Setting the Scene: Local Government Reform in England

Gerry Stoker's (2004) idea of 'Networked Community Governance' forms part of a substantial debate on local government generated in the English and British context which can be dated from what the Lyons Inquiry (2007, 40) referred to as 'the economic difficulties of the early 1970s'. Since this time, local government in England has been locked in to what we will refer to as a logic of necessary reform, wherein the costs of providing services that constituents were accustomed to in the post-war period were deemed to be too high. This tension – between service delivery on the one hand and the financial basis for these services on the other, formed the basis of the 1976 Layfield Inquiry into central-local financial relationships (Stoker, 2003, 21) and importantly, the

ensuing debate – a fact that the Lyons Inquiry (2007, 40) recognised some thirty years later.

The impact of the Conservative governments on local government, and the reactions that it provoked, are difficult to overstate. What Stoker (2004, 24) labelled as 'local governance by default' was brought about by a combination of successive policies, the principle goal of which was ostensibly financial austerity, but which nevertheless had far-reaching consequences. While the specific details of these policies are of background concern in this context[1], Stoker (2004, 41-43) drew three general conclusions about the effect of these reforms. First, the fundamental *legitimacy* of local government was seriously eroded (primarily due to the complexity of arrangements put in to place); second, the *probity* of these new arrangements was highly questionable, particularly with the rise of quangos, or what Skelcher (2004, 29) has called the 'agencification' of services away from a sovereign local authority. Third, the political *accountability* of the system was significantly compromised. Even if assessed by the criteria of its own model, or what Haus and Sweeting (2006) labelled 'user-preference democracy', the reforms were extremely damaging, with a significantly smaller proportion of people voting in local council elections[2].

[1] These policies included structural reform toward a unitary system of local government, such that 'in 1974 there were 1,855 local councils with an average population of 29,000. By the 1990s this had been cut back to 521 with an average of 106,000 inhabitants, and by 2002 there were only 442 local authorities ... with an average population per council of some 128,000 – 4.4 times larger than the position in the early 1970s. As a result the UK now has significantly bigger local authorities and far more inhabitants per elected member than all other European countries' (Wilson, D., 2005, 161-2). Further, own-source funding was reduced from approximately one half to one quarter of municipalities' budgets (principally with the removal of the Business Tax rate from local to central government control in the 1990-91 financial year), the subsequent monitoring of expenditure that this then allowed through the creation of several new regulatory bodies, the explosion in the number of appointed bodies to administer basic services such as education and water, fire services, police and housing, and the wholesale introduction of New Public Management (NPM) to what was left (Stoker, 1999; Stewart, 2000; Stoker, 2004). These latter techniques, inclusive of the introduction of Compulsory Competitive Tendering (CCT), performance targets, a stronger role for municipal managers and the crucial introduction of the purchaser/provider split, all formed benchmarks by which municipalities could be assessed (see Wilson, 2005, 164-165).

[2] Perhaps more important is the fact that the *theory* was betrayed in implementation, as Stoker (2004, 39) pointed out: 'Users were not the key choosers. Rather, externally imposed demands from central government via regulation, and the extensive internalisation of mechanisms of the new managerialism among the officials running public services, appear to have driven the search for change.'

Reaching to defend their subject matter, the counterattack by scholars of local government was sustained, and proceeded with arguments based in political theory as well as the economic efficiency of local service provision. Thus Jones and Stewart (1983) held that local government made a contribution to liberal democracy by (i) diffusing and decentralising power; (ii) providing policy diversity such that competing solutions to problems are trialled and (iii) acting as a guard against centralised bureaucracy (Chandler, 2008, 367). Nevertheless, the task of developing a fundamental justification of the continued existence of unitary, multi-purpose municipal authorities was undertaken by relatively few (see, in particular, Young's (1986) impassioned essay). Rather, scholars of local government moved toward an increasing engagement with New Labour's agenda of what Newman (2001) labelled 'Modernising Governance'.

Over time the defence of local government moved from discussions based principally in normative considerations to those based on the design of local government as a technique of New Labour (see, for example, Stoker, 1999; Stoker, 2000; Chandler, 2007, 282-3). While New Labour took issue with many elements of the reform process introduced by the Conservatives, there was broad recognition that there was no going back. As Tony Blair (1998, 1) stated: 'the days of the all-purpose authority that planned and delivered everything are gone. They are finished'; and as Blears (2003, 4) reiterated some years later, 'winding back the clock, to 1979, as though that era were some socialist utopia, is hardly an ambition worthy of our party'[3]. New Labour's ideas were still based in the neo-liberal critique of the (local) state – committee-centred municipalities were still viewed as bias toward being self-serving and paternalistic rather than customer orientated, and New Labour embraced the approach that the most efficient way to achieve change was through the market (as opposed to the ballot box) (Stoker, 2004, 54-57; Chandler, 2007, 317-8).

[3] Harvey (2002, 457) makes this observation: 'If, for example, urban entrepreneurialism (in the broadest sense) is imbedded in a framework of zero-sum inter-urban competition for resources, jobs, and capital, then even the most resolute and avant-garde municipal socialists will find themselves, in the end, playing the capitalist game and performing as agents of discipline for the very process they are trying to resist'. John Gray (1993, 44) is more reserved, but reaches the same conclusion: '[T]he debacles of Thatcherism and Reaganism suggest that, for us, the enterprise association state is an historical fate, which we may indeed strive to temper, but which we cannot hope to overcome'.

The approach to the economic dilemma of service provision pursued by Labour from 1998 onwards recast these techniques of management and financial accountability within a service provision framework. While some of these new techniques – for example, the replacement of compulsory competitive tendering with New Labour's Best Value regime – proved initially to be deeply unsatisfactory (Wilson, 2005, 166), the broad thrust of policy had several key features, including a shift away from the redistribution of income to the redistribution of 'life chances' within a more inclusive (moral) framework; an emphasis on civic responsibility ('There is no assumption that the state will pay but rather that the state will use its legal authority to ensure that someone takes responsibility for meeting welfare needs') and an emphasis on restoring state capacity and flexibility to create 'joined-up' service provision (Stoker, 2004, 52). In effect, the problem of service provision was dealt with by pushing aside what some – post-Thatcher – had labelled a 'democracy versus efficiency' argument (Goldsmith, 1990) to fold participation, and in particular the idea of community empowerment, into decision-making about service delivery via mechanisms adjacent to as well as inside elected authorities. Local government was thus significantly augmented, yet the principle values residing in its existence – that it was inherently more responsive than central government and as such it could provide an appropriate level of service provision (Jones and Stewart, 1985, 5-10) – were preserved.

The political reforms centred on the themes of devolution and leadership were initiated with the 1998 White Paper *Modern Local Government: In Touch with the People* (DETR, 1998). In this document, leadership was significantly elevated with the publication of a three-option model of executive leadership: Communities could choose between a directly elected executive mayor with a cabinet, a cabinet with a leader, and a directly elected mayor with a council manager (DETR, 1998, Chapter 3)[4]. In terms of devolution, the ensuing *Local Government Act (2000)* saw the introduction of a Power of Wellbeing (Section 2) which broadened the scope for local government action beyond the doctrine of *ultra vires* to include a form of general competency powers, enabling

[4] These options were only slightly broadened in the subsequent Local Government Act 2000 to allow small local authorities of less than 85,000 inhabitants (not voters) or less than 21 per cent of councils, to maintain a variation of the old Committee system (Wilson, 2005, 168).

authorities ‘to do anything which promotes or improves the economic, social or environmental well-being of their area’ (Lyons, 2007, 146). Thus, the ideas of devolution, leadership and civic responsibility in Third Way politics were injected into the (traditional) idea of ‘community’. PM Blair’s emphasis was indicative of this:

> The heart of the problem is that local government needs recognised leaders if it is to fulfil the community leadership role. People and outside organisations need to know who is running the council. The shifting sands of committee membership and chairs fails to foster leaders and leadership (Blair, quoted in Stoker, 2004, 59).

Nevertheless, specific reforms continued to create controversy. Thus, the reforms away from centralisation of power signified by the advocacy of the New Deal for Communities Programme (NDC) in the second Labour White Paper of 2001 were over-shadowed by criticisms of the Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPAs) regime. Wright, for example, stated that ‘if NDC is a communities led programme, it is community led in the sense that Government decides how the community will be involved, why they will be involved, what they will do and how they will do it (Wright, cited in Davies, 2008, 4). The schism between those in favour of greater devolution from the centre and what New Labour was delivering, up to and including the variations in policy detail between Lyons’ own work, the 2006 White Paper and the ensuing *Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007*, is captured by Kelly (2008, 546):

> [T]he enduring memory of New Labour’s reform of local government is of a bossy administration obsessed with overly complicated bureaucratic performance measurements, and seemingly incapable of trusting localities to manage their own affairs...’.

The rift between government on the one hand, and advocates of local government on the other hand, has thus largely been in terms of the degree of perceived genuine devolution of authority, with the debate centring on competing conceptions of autonomy (see, for example, Gurr and King, 1987; Goldsmith, 1990; Pratchett, 2004).

Nevertheless, the game had fundamentally changed, and a new model of local government, with altered justifications and an altered political economy had been both inscribed an enacted. It is local governance, but more specifically 'Networked Community Governance' that for Stoker (2004, 26) is 'the end goal' of New Labour's reform process, and as such it is important that its contents are made explicit.

3. 'Networked Community Governance' and 'Public Value Management'

3.1. Networked Community Governance

Stoker's (2004) 'Networked Community Governance' is characterised by several key ingredients. First, it is distinctly 'beyond' elected local government in the sense that a range of actors, including those controlled by central government, the private sector and most importantly partnerships, have a role in both service delivery and decision-making (Stoker, 2004, 16-17). Second, it is also 'beyond' local representative democracy by including local pressure groups, and accountability to these pressure groups and service users through panels and boards (Stoker 2004, 18). Third, Stoker (2004, 18) noted 'the rise of multi-level governance', which signified a shift away from the two-way relationship between central and local government to 'a wider web of intergovernmental relations'. To this can be added regional, multinational and neighbourhood organisations (Stoker, 2004, 20). Finally, Networked Community Governance is characterised by what Stoker described as 'the search for fiscal fudges and value for money'. In the face of fiscal austerity due both to a rise in demand for services and a limit on government's ability to raise revenue, 'the focus of governance is, in part, about the search for solutions to manage the tension' through different methods of working such as partnerships and contracting out. In addition, Stoker (2004, 21) endorsed the idea that these measures 'can also be more about fiscal fudge through dressing services in private clothing to give them greater public appeal or an appearance of efficiency.

This account of local politics – which is a sociological description as well as a political ideal (and without discernable space between the two) –constantly emphasises increasing complexity (Stoker, 2004, 15-17). This alerts us to more fundamental claims by other advocates of 'network democracy' – claims that are (again) at once both empirical and normative. Haus and Sweeting (2006, 281), for example, offer the view that for 'network democracy', 'the real problems of modernity' are distinctly *not* efficiency problems but rather matters of organisation – particularly of coordination – in the face of a complex and interdependent political world, such that 'networks are placed at the heart of decision-making'. The role of the expert is elevated and 'interface management' and 'reticulist roles' are emphasised. Networked democracy is thus designed to take into account what Stoker (2000: 94) has called 'the inevitability of governance failure' and coincide with Jessop's notion of the 'hollowed out' state (Haus and Sweeting, 2006, 281).

3.2. Public Value Management

Networked Community Governance was thus anchored in the requirement for an ethically defensible break from the assumption of the legitimacy of single, multi-purpose authorities. In this sense we have described it as Stoker's (2004) account – both positive and normative – of English local government. It is timely, as well, to note the broad similarities with reforms to Australian local government systems, for example, the move to general powers of competence beyond the doctrine of *ultra vires* in the redrafting of all Australian local government acts (see, for instance, Wensing, 1997), mandated community participation in strategic planning in many states (Aulich, 2009; Prior and Herriman, 2010) the reemphasis upon networks of councils at regional levels (see, for example, Dollery, et al., 2005) alongside the overlap of key individuals in multiple tiers of governance and compliance agencies (Grant and Dollery, 2011a) and a heightened role for both elected and non-elected executives (Grant, Dollery and Gow, 2011) in what is generally described as a 'networked' political environment (Gunesekera, 2008).

Gerry Stoker's (2004) idea of Networked Community Governance was advanced considerably with his adaptation of Moore's (1995) theory of public value. The details of Moore's original theory have been well-traversed and need not concern us here (see, for example, Talbot, 2009; Wallis and Gregory, 2009; Grant and Fisher, 2011). Nevertheless, they fit hand in glove with Stoker's Networked Community Governance. Whereas 'networked governance is a particular framing of collective decision-making that is characterised by a trend for a wider range of participants to be seen as legitimate members of the decision-making process', Stoker (2006, 41) characterised Public Value Management (PVM) as

> [M]ore than a summation of the individual preferences of the users or producers of public services. The judgment of what is public value is collectively built through deliberation involving elected and appointed government officials and key stakeholders. The achievement of public value, in turn, depends on actions chosen in a reflexive manner from a range of intervention options that rely extensively on building and maintaining networks of provision. Networks of deliberation and delivery are central features of this governance approach (Stoker, 2006, 42).

Stoker (2006) attributed 'paradigm status' (our phrase) to PVM, arguing that it differs from both traditional public administration in that the administrative/bureaucratic realm is not subordinate to political will, nor is the reverse the opposite, i.e.: where governance as technique within a New Public Management framework can trump direction by politicians (in the name, for example, of efficiency or competition). Nor is it a mere synthesis of the two ('the relationship between the paradigms is more confusing and complex' – Stoker, 2006, 42). Rather, PVM is defined by several key features besides the need to give recognition to the legitimacy of a range of different actors. Firstly, politics is not the preserve of a specific realm (a parliament, a council chamber); rather it is omnipresent and legitimately so. Second, 'Public interventions are defined by the search for public value' (Stoker, 2006, 47). It can be argued that, in stating this it is possible to discern that Stoker (2006) inherited the abstract/analytic and indeed American nature of Moore's (1995) theory, wherein an underlying assumption is that the

market forms a ‘state of nature’, into which government intervenes. This assumption is hardly uncontroversial historically. Nevertheless, the key point is that: ‘providing services is no longer a sufficient justification for state intervention... The question that has to be answered is: Does this service advance valued social or economic outcomes?’ (Stoker, 2006, 47). This is a question which can only be answered through deliberative and inclusive political processes, or what Stoker (2006, 51) following Moore (1995, 302), referred to as public managers (whether they be elected or appointed) being ‘explorers’ searching for public value’.

Third, due to its context-dependant nature, the concepts of efficiency, equity and accountability are defined as being dependent upon particular deliberative processes, as opposed to, for example, efficiency being based upon utilitarian calculation of savings and equity being assessed as an even distribution of goods or of life chances (or indeed both). While accountability still entails fiscal regularity, efficiency (or value for money) and ‘program accountability’ or assessing the achievement of stated ends, Stoker (2006, 52) also asserted that for PVM also entails ‘rendering an account’ of public activity which is justifiable based on a principle of ‘openness’ (Moore (1995, 300) explicitly discusses this at length).

Fourth, this has important implications for how democracy is perceived:

> The focus in modern democratic theory therefore goes beyond democracy’s moral or instrumental value in defending basic human rights to an argument that properly organized democracy increases our capacity to address fundamental social problems. Democracy helps to provide solutions by enabling us to exchange and learn from one another. The appeal that lies behind networked governance is that it provides a framework for that more expansive vision of democracy to operate. The conception of democracy that underlies the idea of networked governance is that democracy is a process of continuous exchange between governors and governed (Stoker, 2006, 53).

In the context of our discussion this is an important claim, as it necessarily entails that local governance is an extremely frenetic and indeed crowded activity. However, it is not an activity that everybody is obliged to be involved in – nor one that the state ought to be obliged to coerce individuals into so doing. Rather, 'In [this] democratic system, the participation of all is not required; rather, its defining characteristic is [again] openness to all' (Stoker, 2006, 53). The dilemma associated with this view of democracy – one that has been noted by several commentators, most prominently Rhodes and Wanna (2007; 2009) is also recognised by Stoker, namely that in managers 'managing democracy' [they] 'can push both politicians and citizens to the margins' (Stoker, 2006, 56). In this sense managers are poised between taking executive action illegitimately, or alternatively not making any decisions at all. Yet for Stoker (2006, 56) as for Moore (1995) this is the poise which is the role of the manager, and for the political system, wherein excessive managerial authority is guarded against by 'vigilance and regular critical review by all the partners in the system'.

Fifth, Stoker (2006, 48) emphasised that PVM is more than just the recommendation of deliberative processes wherein management has a key role to play. Moreover, individuals within this system must be committed to 'an open-minded, relationship approach to the procurement of services [which] is framed by a commitment to a public sector ethos' underlain by a performance culture, a commitment to accountability, a capacity to support universal access, responsible employment practices and a commitment to contributing to wellbeing. The market mechanism for service provision is thus significantly bounded by a set of ethical guidelines, alongside the requirement that in assessing their own activity, public managers – including politicians – '... are asking more than whether procedures are followed [and] they are asking more than whether their targets have been met. They are asking whether their actions are bringing a net benefit to society' (Stoker, 2006, 49). Stoker (2011, 18) produced a comparative account of what he referred to as different 'eras of governing'. This has been included as Appendix 1 to our discussion here.

4. The Benefit of Hindsight?

This concept of Networked Community Governance, buttressed with an interpretation of Moore's (1995) theory of public value, would *prima face* appear to form a strong basis for thinking about contemporary local government, both empirically as well as normatively. Nevertheless, in his contribution to the edition of *Public Administration* in honour of the work of Rod Rhodes, Stoker (2011) expressed significant reservations about, and indeed personal culpability for, the propagation of this model of local government. Summarising the contribution that both he and Rhodes have made to the field, Stoker (2011, 15-16) reiterated the suggestion that, primarily through the work of the UK's Economic and Social Research Council's Local Governance Programme (1992-1997), the concept of 'Networked Community Governance' influenced thinking about local government in the UK, to the extent that '... it can be seen in, for example, Blair (1998) and the Lyons Report (2007)'. Stoker (2011, 16) is not merely claiming to have a marked affect on local government policy, but that this affect has been relatively long-lived and has permeated through different forms of thinking about the subject, from a political tract penned by the [then] Prime Minister (Blair, 1998) through to a three volume, Independent Inquiry into local government finances in England (Lyons, 2005; 2006; 2007). Yet this influence is now a cause for concern:

> But the thing is that I worry that we ... may have sold local government 'a pup' that is the idea of local governance and the role of community governor. I have doubts about the sustainability of local government if all that is has to offer is the role of community network coordinator (Stoker, 2011, 16).

By way of explaining these regrets, Stoker (2011) urges us to see his (formerly championed) concept of Networked Community Governance as one of four in a revitalised typology of local governance as a global empirical phenomenon. Stoker (2011, 19) differentiated this typology from previous efforts by Lidstrom (1999) (who delineated between historical and contemporary/institutional accounts of local government) and from Hesse and Sharpe's (1991) typology of three main groups

(Franco; Anglo and Northern European), as well as other classifications (Norton (1994), for example, who included a specific category for Japanese local government). We would add that Stoker's (2010) approach can be juxtaposed with that developed by Garcea and Le Sage (2005) and deployed by Dollery, Garcea and Le Sage (2008) based on a five part taxonomy of reforms to functions of local government (structural, functional, financial, jurisdictional and organisational/managerial, which in turn resembles the approach developed in the United States by the American Council for Intergovernmental Relations (ACIR, cited in Kincaid, 1999, 9).

Stoker's (2011, 15) typology is based upon what he describes as 'four societal functions':

- The expression of local identity;
- Economic development (inclusive of infrastructure provision and planning powers as well as 'human capital' roles, topped up with 'Boosterism');
- Welfare provision and redistribution of core elements of welfare state goods, and
- 'Place-shaping', derived from Networked Community Governance, defined as 'the creative use of powers and influence to promote the general wellbeing of a community and its citizens' (Lyons, cited in Stoker, 2011, 22).

According to Stoker (2011, 20), these four social functions are in turn supported by a 'social base' particular to the dominant function, since the four types are representative of local government systems in particular countries:

Table 2: A Typology of Local Government Societal Functions

Societal function	Identity	Economic Development	Welfare	Lifestyle Coordination
Social Base	Among general citizens	Among power holders relevant to the project and those kept in by small incentives	Providers of services and also the clients of services	A broad and changing mix of individuals and groups in community governance
Countries where that function is prominent	Italy, France	United States, China	Sweden, Brazil, South Africa	Australia, UK

Source: Adapted from Stoker, 2010, 20.

Examining Table 1 it would appear that the correlation of the four types of social function with different social bases does make some intuitive sense (such that local 'identity politics' is underlain by support among general citizens, and that economic development is supported by power holders in relevant development projects, for example). Nevertheless, the extrapolation from these abstract generalisations to characterisations of 'real world' local government systems is, we suggest, potentially very misleading. For example, upon what basis one would establish that identity is the major (comparative) social function of local governments in Italy and France? Similarly, while there may be some evidence that local government in contemporary South Africa has been given a large share of responsibility for welfare provision, it is also clear that its constitutionally defined function emphasises a role in economic development as well (see, for instance, Grant and Dollery, 2010). Moreover, to argue that the primary function of local government in Australia is 'lifestyle coordination' is highly controversial. On the contrary, dominant approaches to Australian local government have identified its primary role as the efficient delivery of a particular (if expanding) range of services (see, for example, Aulich, 2005). These services Stoker (2011, 20) regards as falling within the category of 'economic development' rather than 'lifestyle coordination'. Over and above this particular controversy, placing local government in Australia and the United Kingdom *writ large* in this last category is very problematic: As we have seen, the two local government systems have very different functional ambits and occupy very

different spaces in terms of the political contestation surrounding them. For instance, in the same article, Stoker (2011, 29) claimed that 'you could make the case that Australian local government has never made the grade in terms of being a substantial part of that countries' governing arrangements'. Placing the contestability of this statement aside, to then claim that Australian local government and local governments across the UK have the same primary function is puzzling.

Nor is this lack of coherence assisted by Stoker's (2011, 25) extrapolation from his four-part typology of primary local government function to associate different types of institutional and cultural arrangements with each type. In some instances these associations make *intuitive* sense. However in other cases they do not (see Appendix 2 for a brief discussion of this). Moreover, there seems little point in attempting to test the empirical validity of these categories of function, institutional form and culture when they are, in many instances, counter-intuitive in the first place, and when traditional approaches to comparative analysis – for example, that reliant upon comparative institutional analysis (see Lowndes and Leach, 2004; Grant, Dollery and Gow, 2011; Grant and Dollery, 2011a) are readily available.

However, our primary task here is not to question Stoker's (2011) refashioned typology of global government systems. Rather, it is to examine his misgivings with respect to Networked Community Governance. It is on the basis of this four-part typology, as well as the working out of the idea of Networked Community Governance already discussed in this paper, that Stoker (2011) advanced 3 specific misgivings concerning his own theory. Drawing upon drawing on Nye's (1990; 2008) distinction between 'hard power' on the one hand ('... the power of command and incentives...' associated with economic development and welfare provision) and 'soft power' on the other ('the power to get other people to share your ideas and vision...', wherein '... local government that bases itself on expressing a sense of identity ... appeals to the souls of citizens') Stoker (2011, 27-29) argued that Networked Community Governance is 'fatally flawed' for three reasons:

1. It fails to recognise the value of hard power and has over-emphasised '...diplomacy, communication and bargaining such that coordination would be achieved' (Stoker, 2010, 28);

2. The limits of soft local power available to local government were not recognised in the original idea of 'Networked Community Governance'. Further, soft power '... has far less support from citizens or organised interests within society... '. Moreover, while 'it is one of those ideas appealing to academics discovering a new paradigm ... it is very difficult to embed in popular culture understandings of how societies are governed' (Stoker, 2010, 28).

3. Offering to be a place shaper or community governor places local government on a slippery slope to the sidelines of governing arrangements. The United Kingdom, and most particularly England, could be seen as an exemplar of this trend (Stoker 2004). There is an increasingly desperate rhetoric about a community governance role but limited substantive functional capacity in relation to welfare provision and economic development limits elected local government in England. Moreover there is little scope for identity politics because multiple reorganizations have created a local government system of a scale and coverage that has in large parts of the country little to do with citizens' felt sense of community' (Stoker, 2010, 28).

Further, Stoker (2011, 28-29) also asserted that it is only local governments which have a 'sustained relationship' with the 'big ticket items' of identity, economic development and welfare provision that will be 'better placed to hold on to a substantial governing role', and that 'local government systems need a substantial amount of hard power in order to exercise soft power. You can't win with the losing hand' (Stoker, 2011, 28).

We have cited at length here because it is rare that the principal proponent of a major suite of reforms – in any area of public policy – has undertaken such a public *volte face*. Yet the point here is hardly personal culpability, or for us being engaged in a 'calling out' of Gerry Stoker for this revisionism. Instead, it is what is reveals about the concept of

Networked Community Governance which, as we have seen, has formed an important backdrop to local government policy formulation and reforms in England and the United Kingdom, and (we have argued) in Australia and more generally. In this respect a number of observations can be made.

The first is the extent to which Stoker (2011) associated Networked Community Governance with Nye's (1990; 2008) concept of 'soft power', and implied that it ought to be defined against 'hard power'. In itself, for Stoker (2011) to adhere to this methodological dualism is quite extraordinary (particularly given thelengths he goes to in an attempt to provide a renewed typology of local government globally). Yet is does confirm the suspicions of some with respect to the idea of Networked Community Governance. For example, commenting on Haus and Sweeting's (2008) account of 'Networked Democracy' (which was derived primarily from the work of Rhodes (1997) and Stoker (2004)), Dollery and Grant (2011, 15) have argued that '... the model is too descriptively general' because most of the activities of government can be described as "networking" of one kind or another such, that the idea of 'democracy' looses all defensible content. Further, '... the distinctive features of networked governance ... such as the increased role for consultants and public-private partnerships, are far from being ethically problematic when seen as elements in a model of democracy'. Most importantly, Grant and Dollery (2011, 15) also asserted that:

> The core of the model is both ethical and empirical: we have to take the model's radical suggestions of first, a 'hollowed out state' (Rhodes, 1997) and second, accept the idea of 'permanent government failure' (Stoker, 2000) as necessary to a defensible theory of local government. These are claims of a foundational sort about the nature of the state and of politics generally; not arguments that can be tacked on to a more traditional defence of local government founded in representation and participation. In jurisdictions where traditional democratic mechanisms such as electoral participation are weak, this may lead to intense and messy local politics, the democratic components of which remain unclear and prospects for rent-seeking, decreased accountability and cost-shifting potentially increased (Grant and Dollery, 2008). Perhaps even more fundamental,

> however, is Davies' (2008, 7) observation when commenting on the 'proselytising style' of the three Local Government White Papers in England since 1998: 'It offers no space for dissidence, the central measure of political freedom'.

It would appear that with hindsight Stoker (2011) recognised the validity of these criticisms to 'Networked Community Governance': if indeed one argues for a 'hollowed out' local government and endorses a vision of 'permanent government failure, this may indeed end up with what one receives.

Our second observation is with respect to Stoker's (2011) *post facto* claim that despite his 'proselytising style', Networked Community Governance was not enthusiastically embraced by citizens. Leaving aside the question of whether or not it ought to be the responsibility of 'academics' to 'embed in popular culture [their] understandings of how societies are governed' (which, in the view of these authors, it most certainly is not), again, Dollery and Grant (2011, 15) stated:

> [T]he supplanting of representative forms of democracy with network forms of democracy necessarily entails that to be involved in politics at all necessarily takes up more of people's lives, which in itself is not ethically uncontroversial.

It is not ethically uncontroversial for at least two reasons. First, many individuals in liberal societies simply may exercise a preference not to be involved in network processes. The reasons for them opting out of these processes are irrelevant. However, these same individuals ought not to be disadvantaged because they choose to rely upon the more mundane, but nevertheless sanctioned and legislatively enacted mechanisms of democratic participation – like electoral processes, for example. Secondly, as argued by Grant and Dollery (2011c, 24) this lack of involvement will sometimes not be a matter of choice: Networked Community Governance implies the resources to do precisely that, '… and for many individuals this engagement will be outside their logistical capacities'.

The third point to be made with respect to Stoker's (2011, 28) comments concerns his equation of Networked Community Governance with 'place-shaping'. Noting that the '… increasingly desperate rhetoric about a community governance role…' is matched by a '…limited by lack of substantial functional capacity in relation to welfare provision and economic development'. However, to equate place-shaping' with Nye's (1990; 2008) 'soft power' is erroneous. Within the recommendations of the Lyons Inquiry, (Lyons, 2007), place-shaping did indeed entail suggestions for organizational reform which were based on networked democracy, 'joined up' service delivery (i.e.: public-private partnerships) and, in particular, an enhanced role of both elected and appointed leadership (see, for example, Dollery, Grant and O'Keefe, 2008, 484; Grant, Dollery and Crase, 2008). These elements to place-shaping are reflected in the characteristics of Networked Community Government as 'participant integrated' and 'boundary spanning' (Stoker, 2011, 25) and encapsulated in the idea statement that 'Sir Michael makes it plain that modern local government must occupy a central and leading role in communities beyond its traditional provision of local services' (Grant, Dollery and Crase, 2009, 863).

However, Lyons (2007) also argued strongly for a substantial increase in 'hard power'. This included strengthening the 'command power' of local mayors, with the introduction of the option of directly elected executives. Far more importantly Lyons (2007) strongly advocated increasing local governments' capacity for revenue raising, including the introduction of more rate bands, regular revaluations of both residential and business properties, the introduction of tourist taxes and the possibility of local income taxes 'in the medium term' (see Grant, Dollery and Crase, 2009, 860). Lyons' place-shaping implies the 'hard power' to do precisely that; to equate it with Stoker's idea of Networked Community Governance is misleading.

Nevertheless, both Lyons (2007) and Stoker (2011) recognised that the identity function of a council is a 'big ticket item', alongside economic development and welfare provision. It is here that the most significant implications for Australian local government

reside, alongside what we will refer to as the integrity of local government. It is to these implications that we now turn.

5. Implications for Australian Local Government Reform

Examining how Stoker's (2010) reservations with respect to Networked Community Governance shed light on Australian local government reform, Stoker's (2010) first regret was 'the failure to recognise the value of 'hard power', alongside a overemphasis on 'soft power'. In the Australian context there has been an increased emphasis on networked arrangements for local government. At a federal level, chronologically this commenced with the recognition of the role of local government by both houses of Federal Parliament in September and October 2006 following a recommendation in the Hawker Report (2006) and has culminated in the bipartisan support for Constitutional recognition of local government (see Grant and Dollery, 2011c). This increased salience of local government has coincided with both the head of the Australian Local Government Association (ALGA) taking a seat at all COAG meetings since 2006, as well as the initiation of the Australian Council of Local Governments (ACLG) and the Australian Centre for Excellence (ACELG) by the Rudd Government in 2008 (Grant and Dollery, 2011b), and the development of a significant body of reflection concerning the role of local government by the ALGA in recent years, particularly surrounding the National General Assembly of Local Government (NGALG) (see, for example, LGCS, 2008a; 2008b; NGALG, 2007, 55-56).

However, arguably these 'soft power' initiatives at the federal level have ridden on the coat-tails of the recognition of the need for increased funding of local government by the Commonwealth. This was initiated under the Howard Government in the form of the Roads to Recovery initiative (see Dollery, Pape and Byrnes, 2008) which was continued under the Rudd administration, alongside a host of other monies granted to local governments (albeit through a competitive application process) as part of the 'Nation-building and Jobs Plan' stimulus package, aimed primarily at infrastructure funding, following the global fiscal correction (see, for example, Australian Government, 2010).

Further, as several prominent politicians have noted, the primary impetus for constitutional recognition of local government has been as a mechanism to secure direct funding by the Commonwealth – a question of guaranteeing organisational capacity and as such a 'hard power' concern (see, for instance, Robb 2010; Truss, 2010).

Similarly at the level of state-local relations: As we have noted, while all the revised local government acts do incorporate a concept of community, and many mandate this as an input into strategic planning (see, for example, Aulich, 2009; Prior and Herriman, 2010), there is no justification for the view that these concerns have overtaken reforms to financial, managerial and in particular structural arrangements aimed at enhancing local governments' operational efficiency (see, for example, Grant, Dollery and Crase, 2009; Dollery and Grant, 2011). Further, there is a sense in which Stoker (2011) is castigating not local government itself but the significant networks of local government scholars and activists in England and the United Kingdom more generally (of which he has been a principal) for their advocacy of Networked Community Governance and its associated emphasis on leadership, rather than focussing upon issues of 'hard power'. On the contrary, local government scholarship in the Australian context has a far drier flavour, with various inquiries being headed by economists (see, for example, Allan, 2006; PWC, 2006; Productivity Commission, 2008) rather than the more general social sciences as is the case in England and the United Kingdom more generally (see, for instance, Lyons, 2007; Sorabji, 2006).

Secondly, while Australian local government has not dissipated into Networked Community Governance in Stoker's (2011) sense, this does not mean that it ought to not guard against reforms taking on too many 'soft power' characteristics. For example, Australian local government has historically been particularly prone to dissipation of authority in the past, primarily through the initiation of regional structures by the Commonwealth, which have stumbled and eventually faltered (Kelly, Dollery and Grant, 2009). To the extent that the current incarnation of federal government regionally directed policy initiatives threaten the integrity of councils – whether this be

conceptualised in terms of 'soft power', 'hard power', or more accurately both, is the extent to which Stoker's (2011) concerns about the dissipation of local governments' 'hard power' in the English context are a bell-weather for local government authority in the Australian context. Similarly, the extent to which legislation at the level of the states interferes with the capacity to make substantive decisions – for instance, with respect to planning – is the extent to which state governments exercising their authority ought to be guarded against (see, for example, Grant and Dollery, 2011a).

Third, notably, Stoker (2010, 28) lamented the fact that '... multiple reorganisations have created a local government system of a scale and coverage that has in large parts of the country little to do with citizens' felt sense of community'. In the Australian context we too can be critical of coerced or forced amalgamation programs, but this ought not to be for the sake of nostalgia. On the contrary, it is the integrity of individual local governments which ought to be the primary consideration of reform; that is, local government's capacity to act, alongside its efficacy as governance structures which people both recognise and place some credence in, which is of most importance. If we use this notion of integrity as a yardstick, constructive amalgamation can occur, as can constructive networked governance. However, this ought not to be the case to the extent that it brings the integrity of local governments into question[5]. Nor ought other

[5] Past President of the ALGA, Geoff Lake, expressed this point thus:

> My personal view around amalgamations is that I think it makes sense in metropolitan areas. I can't necessarily see the justification or can argue the justification as to why a city like Melbourne needs 31 metropolitan councils. However, I would struggle to see the benefit of Victorian's currently quite large rural councils being made any bigger. I think local government, the intrinsic part of what makes local government local is its connection to local communities. I guess someone living in Glen Waverly in Monash in Victoria -- they're a citizen of Melbourne essentially -- they don't see themselves as a citizen of Glen Waverly. So they could associate with a larger eastern suburbs council or even perhaps a Melbourne-wide council.
>
> But somebody living in Mansfield in country Victoria I think would struggle with the identity of their town, where they're from if you were to take the Shire of Mansfield and simply dilute it into a huge council covering the entire North East of Victoria. So I guess because of my position in local government I'm careful how I approach the amalgamation issue because generally the view of local government is amalgamations are fine when they're generated from the bottom up by councils and it's all voluntary. It's problematic and it's opposed when it's imposed top-down and that's my public position (Lake, in Dollery and Grant, 2011, 7-8).

kinds of reform be automatically jettisoned in favour of amalgamation. On the contrary, other models of municipal cooperation are fast emerging to take the place of amalgamation, including different hybrids of shared service arrangements (see Dollery, Grant and Akimov, 2010), as well as social capital approaches to amalgamation (see, for example, Dollery, Goode and Grant, 2010; Dollery, Grant and Crase, 2011).

Finally, and somewhat ironically, Stoker's (2010) *volte face* with respect to Networked Community Governance *writ large* in the English context need not entail that we cannot take the best of this model and encourage the take-up of these elements in the Australian context. This is particularly the case with respect to the 'place-shaping' approach developed an advocated by Lyons (2007). As we have emphasised above, Networked Community Governance, conceptualised as the over-emphasis on 'soft power' as opposed to 'hard power' is decidedly distinct from place-shaping as developed by Lyons (2007). On the contrary, Lyons (2007) argued aggressively for an increase in the 'hard power', or 'maximalist' (Allan, 2006 98) capacities of local government, alongside recognising their potential for ideational politics. In fact, the primary appeal of the Lyons Inquiry's work (2005; 2006; 2007) is that it recognises that to draw a distinction between 'hard power' and 'soft power', as Stoker (2010) does, while methodologically convenient, is not merely erroneous, it also closes possibilities for economic prosperity based upon not just municipal capacity, but ideational politics at the local level.

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Appendix 1

Table 2 Stoker (2011, 18): 'Eras of local governing'

	Traditional Public Administration	New Public Management	Networked Community Governance
Key objectives of the governance system	Managing inputs, delivering services in the context of a national welfare state	Managing inputs and outputs in a way that ensures economy and responsiveness to consumers	The overarching goal is greater effectiveness in tackling the problems that the public most care about
Dominant ideologies	Professionalism and party partisanship	Managerialism and consumerism	Managerialism and localism
Definition of Public interest	By politicians / experts. Little in the way of public input	Aggregation of individual preferences, demonstrated by customer choice	Individual and public preferences produced through a complex process of interaction
Dominant model of account-Ability	Overhead democracy: voting in elections, mandated party politicians, tasks achieved through control over the bureaucracy	Separation of politics and management, politics to give direction but not hands on control, managers to manage, additional loop of consumer assessment built into the system	Elected leaders, managers and key stakeholders involved in search for solutions to community problems and effective delivery mechanisms. System in turn subject to challenge through elections, referendums, deliberative forums, scrutiny functions and shifts in public opinion
Preferred system for service delivery	Hierarchical department or self-regulating profession	Private sector or tightly defined arms-length public agency	Menu of alternatives selected pragmatically
Approach to public service ethos	Public sector has monopoly on service ethos, and all public bodies have it	Sceptical of public sector ethos (leads to inefficiency and empire building) – favours customer service	No one sector has a monopoly on public service ethos. Maintaining relationships through shared values is seen essential
Relation-ship with 'higher' tiers of government	Partnership relationship with central government over delivery	Upwards through performance contracts and key performance indicators	Complex and multiple: regional, national, European. Negotiated and flexible

Source: Stoker, 2011, 18.

Appendix 2

Table 3 Stoker (2011, 25): Forms of local government function and associated politics and management

Associated form of	Identity	Economic Development	Welfare Provision	Community governance
Local Politics	Representative and clientelistic	Regime building	Collective and partisan	Networked
Civic culture	Parochial	Conciliation	Subject	Participant
Intergovernmental relations	Weak autonomy	Strong autonomy	Subject	Integrated
Management	Underdeveloped	Facilitative but selective	Active: hands on	Boundary spanning

Source: Stoker, 2011, 25.

Discussion

Examining Table 3, Stoker (2011) has augmented his four primary functions of global local governments with four categories of what we will describe as 'institutional behaviour'. For example, those local governments that emphasise 'identity' as their main functional role are characterised a representative and clientelistic local politics, a parochial civic culture, weak autonomy from other tiers of government and underdeveloped management structures, and so on, such that the four types of local government are now fleshed out by no less than sixteen descriptors.

With respect to this kind of classificatory exercise, we agree with Stoker's (2011, 24) assertion that 'a typology can only be a beginning of an analysis ... there is a danger in the end of producing an exercise in more effective description'. Further, we agree with Stoker's (2011, 24) assertion that: 'it is possible to move from a focus on typologies towards what George and Bennett (2005 p. 235) call typological theorizing which can provide "a rich and differentiated depiction of a phenomenon and can generate discriminating and contingent explanations and policy recommendations"'. In fact, the

authors have undertaken work of this kind on several occasions, for example, with respect to types of oversight of local government exercised by state government (Dollery, O'Keefe and Crase, 2009; Grant and Dollery, 2011a) and with respect to shared service arrangements between local councils (Dollery and Johnson, 2005; Dollery, Grant and Akimov, 2010).

Nevertheless, the problem with Stoker's (2011) sixteen-part typology is that while it may be possible to find local governments which conform to one of the four ideal-types, it is equally to find examples which belie the general categorization. For example, we have seen that Stoker (2011) asserts that local governments in both Italy and France are primarily engaged in 'identity' functions. But does this necessarily entail that they have weak autonomy from other tiers of government or that they have 'underdeveloped management structures? Similarly, Stoker (2011) has asserted that local government in South Africa is primarily concerned with welfare provision. Yet (again) does this necessarily entail that local politics are 'collective and partisan'? Moreover, if both English and Australian local government systems are dominated by 'community governance' functions, what precisely does it entail to assert that in both systems the 'civic culture' is accurately denoted by the signifier 'Participant'? Or that intergovernmental relations are accurately described as 'Integrated'?

In short, while this is an admirable attempt at the classification of local government systems, this typology both under-describes and over-predicts what are very complex empirical phenomena to the extent that even the initial goal of 'more effective description' is significantly undermined rather than enhanced. In short, other typological systems of local government, for example that deployed by Dollery, Garcea and Le Sage (2008) are less complex, thereby more accurate and useful for what Stoker (2011), following George and Bennett (2005) has identified as 'typological theorising'.