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An Assessment of Alternative Elected Leadership Models for Australian Local Government

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Abstract: Strong leadership has been offered as an efficacious mechanism for local government reform by scholars and practitioners alike. In the Australian context, despite two decades of far-reaching reform processes across state government jurisdictions, focused heavily on structural change, local government still faces daunting problems, and yet the potential of strong leadership as a method of alleviating these problems has not been fully explored. This paper thus examines the applicability of stronger leadership models to Australian local government in the form of the elected executive model of municipal leadership which characterises some local government systems in the United States and Europe. We argue that the introduction of elected executives could prove problematic when assessed in terms of accountability and representation in Australian local government.

Keywords: Accountability; democracy; elected representatives; local government.

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1 Introduction

In their review of urban political leadership to the European Symposium in 2004, Borraz and John (2004: 108-120) observed that the heightened role for leadership in local government across all European jurisdictions had been symbolised by the shift to directly elected mayors in a number of countries, including Germany, Italy and Norway, with the option for direct election available in English local government. They offered four reasons to account for this shift. In the first place, 'as a functional response to the complex character of networks'. Secondly, as an element in a 'new political culture', in which politicians had to appeal to a broader cohort of electors with divergent interests and aspirations. Thirdly, as a response to the 'increasingly powerful European Union institutional framework and policies, which provide ideas, models and new standards for locally elites'. Finally, due to what they termed 'institutional mimetism', where 'institutions adopt similar forms in order to achieve higher recognition and legitimacy from their citizens and in response to the concerns of policy-makers in higher levels of government'. In addition, Borraz and John (2004) noted that whereas stronger leadership did not necessarily entail 'a more personal style of decision-making', local leaders had become more 'charismatic' in their approach, that decision-making systems had, in many instances, been altered, and that 'political leaders had gained a reputation for delivering prosperity to their localities'. Finally, they offered the observation that 'local leaders [now] qualify as skilled social actors … where the creative functions of leadership are an important dimension of their power'. As a consequence, local political leadership in Europe had emulated the Chester Barnard Functions of the Executive (1938) approach and brought 'European accounts of political leadership much closer to the practice in U.S. politics'.

Although principally concerned with institutional reform across European local government – for example, the adoption of three models of municipal leadership in England (Leach and Wilson, 2004; Cole, 2008) and the use of directly elected chief executive mayors in Germany (see Wollmann, 2004; Lenk and Falken-Großer, 2008) - Borraz and John (2004) also made an important claim about the

changing nature of political culture at the municipal level, from what they termed the 'Northern European' model to the 'Southern European' model, and towards 'practices in U.S. politics'.

In parallel with these changes, Australian local government has not been immune from institutional reform to its executive roles across state jurisdictions. A number of scholars have documented reforms to the managerial and political executive functions as part of sweeping reforms to the sector generally, noting the 'professionalisation' of these roles (see, instance, Aulich, 1999; 2005; Marshall, 2008), as well as senior management's role in 'bedding down' the implementation of instruments of New Public Management (NPM) (Martin, 1999). Moreover, the empirically slippery notion of 'community-based leadership' has been proposed as central in the move 'from citizen participation to participatory governance' (Aulich, 2009) and executive roles have been perceived to be pivotal in 'network democracy' where economic redevelopment has been a primary task (Gunasekara, 2008). These reforms have coincided with the introduction of leadership training programs by a variety of specialist organisations and public agencies (see, for example, CLG UTS, 2010; LGMA, 2010; Dorizas, 2010).

However, while leadership has developed as a technique of Australian local government administration, in common with the 'professionalisation' of the local sector generally, the changes to political leadership in local government have fallen far short of those considered by Borraz and John (2004), both in terms of institutional form and institutional culture. The option of directly elected mayors is available to local councils in only two local government jurisdictions: New South Wales (NSW) using an optional preferential system (LGA, 1993, §§ 282-284), where, following the 2008 local government elections, there were 31 popularly elected mayors from a total of 152 councils, 3 of which were under administration (Electoral Commission of NSW, 2008), and in the Northern Territory under the new Local Government Act 2008 (LGA 2008, §§ 44-45), where the option of directly electing a Mayor, or 'President', has not been taken up by any of the Territory's recently amalgamated councils. Other states have not broached the

issue of popularly elected mayors despite reforms to local government acts across in some jurisdictions (see, for example, DPLG, DLGRD, 2010[1]) and the introduction of whole new acts in others (DHLGRS, 2008; DIP, 2009).

It must be stressed that the option of a directly elected mayor still prescribes mayoral authority to the sphere of the elected council; it does not seek to explicitly combine the political and administrative roles in the form of a chief executive/mayor. In the Australian context, this latter form of local government executive authority has only occurred briefly, 'as one of Labor's democratising reforms of Queensland local government in 1920' (Tucker, 1994: 510). Tucker (1994: 510) noted that, at the time, the model of 'a mayor elected at large as chief executive officer' was inspired by American municipal government, as well as the office of the American Presidency. However, in Queensland, it was superseded initially by a strong executive committee system in 1930, and eventually by the appointive-CEO model that now characterises much of Australian local government generally. The elected executive model was revived in 1933 in the Greater City of Brisbane (constituted by its own Act of State Parliament in 1925 under the Greater Brisbane scheme), and variations of the form, including, for example, an elected executive partnered with either strong or weak committee structures, have characterised that City. But this process has taken place in Brisbane alone: thus Tucker (1994: 518) was able to conclude that 'for the foreseeable future, Brisbane City will probably continue with its (now) unique mayor as CEO arrangement'.

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[1] For example, South Australia introduced seven acts adjacent to the Local Government Act 1999. Some of these, such as the Local Government (Elections) Act 1999 and the Local Government (Elections) Regulations 1999 reformed the procedures of local politics in the state, yet none broached the area of stronger leadership models for municipalities. Nor has more recent legislation including the Local Government (Elections) (Miscellaneous) Amendment Act 2009 addressed the issue, instead concentrating on voter participation rates (see: DPLD, 2010). Similarly, there were reviews to the Western Australian Local Government Act 1995 in 2004, 2006 and twice in 2007 (see DLGRD, 2008), yet the issue of leadership has been largely captured by the Western Australian Local Government Association's (WALGA) proposed reforms that have been designed principally to stave off municipal consolidation (see Dollery and Grant, 2010). In 2002 the Tasmanian Government undertook a review of the Local *Government Act 1993* but did not broach leadership reform (DPC, 2009). Victoria has only introduced one major legislative change since the comprehensive recasting of its Local Government Act in 1989 (in the form of the *City of Melbourne Act 2001* – DPCD, 2009b) and this did not address the issue of directly elected mayors.

While Tucker (1994) provided a most useful historical account of leadership changes within the Brisbane City Council, scholars of Australian local government have failed to explore how local leadership in the contemporary Australian context could be reformed. This neglect has been unfortunate since the international literature on leadership in local government has focused on the transformational role of strong local leadership in other contexts, including developing countries (see, for example, Grant and Dollery, 2010), as well as Europe and the United States (see, for example, Borraz and John, 2004; Svara, 2009).. This is a matter for regret because, despite processes of deep reform, including the widespread adoption of forced amalgamation programs, the modernising of the regulatory apparatus for local government, the application of market mechanisms to local service provision, and mandated community participation in decision-making procedures, Australian local government still faces many pressing policy problems.

By far the most important problem resides in the massive and growing local infrastructure backlog, which the PriceWaterhouseCoopers National Report (2006: 10) estimated at $14.5 billion in total. Similar conclusions were reached in various other recent state and national inquiries (FSRB; 2005; Hawker Report, 2006; LAGQ, 2006; LGAT, 2007; WALGA, 2006). The genesis of the problem of financial sustainability is complex and multi-faceted, but little doubt exists that it has been exacerbated by intergovernmental cost-shifting, an expansion in the role of local government, increasing community expectations, inadequate sources of funding and inept policy choices by some local councils (CGC, 2001; Dollery, Wallis and Allan, 2006).

In addition to these problems, serious doubt has been cast on the efficacy of local government in some jurisdictions, particularly in relation to planning procedures and development approval processes (see, for example, NSW DLG, 2009). As a consequence, in some state jurisdictions state governments have appropriated many of the powers of local councils in planning and development approval. Finally, the overwhelming complexity of the federal system has

rendered local councils increasingly ineffectual players on an extremely 'crowded pitch' (Kelly, Dollery and Grant, 2009).

Against the background of these pressing problems, it is worth asking whether reform to leadership in local government could enhance the prospects for Australian local government. Put differently, in the Australian local government milieu, can leadership play the transformative role that policy-makers and scholars alike in Europe and elsewhere have been attributing to it for the last decade? The present paper does not attempt to address this question by way of a comprehensive review of the multifarious strands of leadership theory and practice. Despite recent questions on the validity of comparative political studies (see Caramani, 2010a; 2010b; Haverland, 2010; van Kersbergen, 2010a; 2010b; Schneider, 2010), we investigate the question by way of the contemporary, comparative example of local government in the United States.

For more than a century, American local government has been able to choose between two forms of executive authority: On the one hand, a council-manager form in which the administrative executive or council manager can be removed by the elected council, and on the other hand, a mayor-council form, in which the elected political executive also fulfils administrative executive functions and is held to account by the elected council. Neither of these types of executive management conforms to the traditional Westminster distinction between a professional (and more or less permanent) administrative arm of council (with its attendant chief executive officer), and an elected council with a mayor and deputy mayor decided by a 'cabinet' model of election. However, the latter form of local government in the United States constitutes a contemporary, comparative example of greater powers, and thus apparently stronger leadership at the local level. This paper considers the relevance of these models of local government leadership to Australian local government.

The paper is comprised of five main parts. Section two describes the changing role of political and administrative leaders in Australian local government, noting that widespread reform of state and territory Local Government Acts since the

1990s have reinforced the distinction between political executives and administrative officials. Section three examines the comparative roles and responsibilities of leadership in the council-manager and mayor-council forms of local government in the United States, principally by way of a consideration of the work of James Svara (Svara, 2009; Svara and Hoene, 2008; Svara and Nelson, 2008; Svara, 2006a; 2006b; 2006c; Svara, 2002). Section four explores the implications of elected local leaders for Australian local government, drawing on the experience of elected local leaders in the context of English local government.

2 Political-Administrative Divide in Local Government

The roles of both locally elected politicians and appointed administrative officials in local government in Australia are firmly circumscribed in the Local Government Acts across state jurisdictions. For example, the NSW Government's Local Government Act 1993 (LGA 1993, §§ 219-225) requires that a council is constituted for all local government areas and that 'an area must have a mayor who is elected in accordance with this', before specifying that the mayor must meet the following stipulations:

- 'To exercise, in cases of necessity, the policy-making functions of the governing body of the council in between meetings of the council
- To exercise such other functions of the council as the council determines
- To preside at meetings of the council
- To carry out the civic and ceremonial functions of the mayoral office' (LGA 1993, § 226).

Under the same Act (LGA 1993, § 332-341) councils are charged with the responsibility of constituting an administrative structure for the council, inclusive of the appointment of senior staff positions and a general manager, who is required to undertake specific functions in accordance with the Act, embracing 'the day to day management of council'. Moreover, the Act specifies that the

employment of the general manager must be 'performance-based' and 'not an industrial relations matter for the purposes of the Industrial Relations Act 1996'.

Thus a literal interpretation of the NSW Local Government Act 1993 – and indeed of similar state government Acts throughout Australia2 – would suggest that general managers serve at the pleasure of locally elected officials. However, the reality of democratic convention in Australia has seen the development of a traditional division, if not formal separation of powers between the elected executive arm of local government, and a permanent local government bureaucracy. In essence, this arrangement conforms broadly to the Westminster system, albeit overseen by state Departments of Local Government. Moreover, while the Act allows for the direct election of a mayor by the sum of all constituents for the area (see LGA, 1993, § 227 and § 282-284), in general the bulk of mayors continue to be elected by councillors.

Despite these conventions, the relationship between the political executive and the administrative arm of council, as well as the exercising of authority by each office, has been affected by sweeping reform processes in local government across Australia over the past two decades. On the one hand, a series of compulsory amalgamation programs across all state and territory jurisdictions, with the sole exception of Western Australia, has seen the number of elected municipal bodies reduced from 840 in 1982 to 532 in 2008 (see, for example, Grant, Dollery and Crase, 2009: 853). The concomitant reduction in elected officials has been particularly marked in some state jurisdictions, with South Australia, Tasmania and Queensland losing 31, 37 and 30 per cent of their councillors respectively and Victoria losing an astonishing 73 per cent (Marshall, 2008: 19; Hughes and Costar, 2006).

This diminution of the ratio of formally elected representatives to constituents has been accompanied by an increase in cooperation between local councils in a variety of types of arrangements (see, for example, Dollery and Johnston, 2005),

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[2] See DPCD, 2009; DIP, 2010; DPLG, DLGRD, 2010; DPC, 2010; DHLGRS, 2009 for links to all current local government acts in Australia.

the burgeoning of other local, regional and national representative and decision-making bodies, including Regional Organisations of Council (ROCs), state and national peak industry bodies, like the state Local Government Associations, and the Australian Local Government Association (ALGA), as well as 'in excess of forty Commonwealth-State Ministerial Councils ... many of which affect local government (Kelly, Dollery and Grant, 2009, 172). Moreover, there has been what Aulich (2009) has labelled as a 'mandate for community participation in local decision-making', across all state jurisdictions. In all these ways, political authority both within councils and between local authorities and other bodies has been significantly altered.

Comprehensive reform to council management processes has also occurred over the same time period. Marshall (2008: 38) has provided a portrait of the situation prior to reform:

'Many municipalities in Australia during the late 1970s were parochial in outlook and lacking in adequately trained personnel. Apparently as late as the mid 1980s some senior Victorian government officials still viewed their local government sector as 'mediocre beyond redemption ...'

According to Marshall (2008: 38-39), reform of the functioning of the administrative executive has taken place across two broad fronts. In the first place, there have been sustained efforts to 'professionalise' the workforce, with the Commonwealth conducting an inquiry into the municipal labour market in 1997, and then deploying training programs in various management techniques, such as performance measurement and best practice, with the Local Government Managers Association (LGMA) also providing training schemes. These management techniques became enmeshed with the move to conform to National Competition Policy (NCP) requirements of compulsory competitive tendering, as well as the introduction of comprehensive financial reporting requirements (see, for example, Martin, 1999, Aulich, 1999; 2005; Davidson and Grant, 2001).

Second, the relationship between political and administrative executives has been subject to clarification across state local government jurisdictions, with 'revised legislation in each state essentially grafting elements of the corporate governance model onto existing structures of representative government', in order that 'the new prescribed roles and responsibilities of councillors and senior management approximated the functions of a board of executives and the CEO in the private sector' (Marshall, 2008: 40). Thus CEOs have gained responsibility for the recruitment, supervision and dismissal of employees, as well as responsibility for a range of other functions, including environmental reporting and EEO policies (see, for example, LGA 1993, § 335). For their part, councillors must represent their constituents, make decisions about policy direction, and 'oversee the implementation of policy proposals and to review the ongoing performance of the council as a whole' (Marshall, 2008: 40), thereby instilling a requirement of professional competence.

While these reforms to both political and administrative leadership have formed an important part of the modernisation of Australian local government, they have nevertheless fallen short of embracing directly elected local council managers along the lines of some American municipalities, despite the fact that a number of the underlying conditions identified by Borraz and John (2004) have been present in the Australian milieu. Thus there has undoubtedly been a complication of governance and decision-making bodies surrounding local government, a professionalization of roles in local government, and the implementation of a wide suite of administrative and financial techniques have certainly ushered in a change in the culture of local government. Furthermore, while Borraz and John's (2004) argument about the strengthening of local government in response to the 'Europeanization' of continental politics is of course not relevant, the idea of local government being heavily influenced by a strong central authority has been evident in Australian politics.

Over successive governments, the Commonwealth has been directing policy at the local and regional levels of administration over and above state government policy, particularly in the areas of funding for roads through the Roads to

Recovery program (see Kelly, Dollery and Grant, 2009) to the extent that the constitutional validity of these policies has become a focus for concern (see, for example, Dollery, Pape and Byrnes, 2007). In addition, local government managers have become increasingly enmeshed in Commonwealth decision-making procedures, the most salient example of which has been the new Commonwealth Council for Local Government. Indeed, in many respects the overall impact has been one of key personnel operating across tiers of government within various decision-making and service delivery committees, councils and other peak organisations – a situation ripe for the 'institutional mimesis' that Borraz and John (2004) refer to in the European context.

There is also another form of 'institutional mimesis' that ought to be expected in this context; Australian local government being influenced by reforms in similar jurisdictions, particularly those that have occurred in English local government. Alongside the move to devolve authority to the national parliaments of Scotland and Wales under successive Labour governments, reforms to English local government have not only emphasised devolution, but also a stronger role for local leadership. While local government did not initially embrace the stronger leadership models available in the Local Government Act 2000 (originally put forward in the 1998 White Paper, DETR, 1998), they have nevertheless been exemplified by the role that the Mayor of the Greater London Authority, Boris Johnson, and before him Ken Livingstone, (see Cole, 2008) have played.

More broadly, the recommendations of the Lyons inquiry into local government in England (Lyons, 2007) argued strongly for leadership at the local level. Specifically, the Inquiry claimed that local leadership could address several problems in local government, including accountability, service delivery, particularly in the form of leaders developing public-private partnerships for components of municipal service delivery, as well as economic development (see, for example, Dollery, Grant and O'Keefe, 2008)[3]. The Inquiry also argued that municipalities ought to harness 'local identity' in the service of local

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[3] In this regard, the Inquiry's argument is distilled in the phrase 'where people know who is in charge, they know who to call to account' (Lyons, 2007: 17).

economic development which the Inquiry (Lyons, 2005; 2006; 2007) labelled 'place-shaping'.

All of these roles for leadership were dependent upon a blurring of political and administrative roles at the local level, with local political leaders 'championing efficiency and service innovation – getting the best value from public expenditure and maximum impact from private investment in their area', as well as fulfilling strategic and convening political roles, and local executives being encouraged to not overshadow the public profile of locally elected leaders 'all of the time' (Lyons, 2007: 180).

These justifications for the directly elected mayoral model have recently been reiterated by both the New Local Government Network in the United Kingdom with the publication of New Model Mayors: Democracy, Devolution and Direction (Hope and Wanduragala, 2010a), with David Cameron's Conservative opposition taking the initiative in announcing referenda on mayors in England's 12 largest cities (Hope and Wanduragala, 2010b). This has coincided with the development of a significant body of research into local leadership at the local level in England, ranging from accounts of the relationship between leadership and service delivery (Entwhistle, et al., 2005); comparative empirical investigations of leadership capabilities in local contexts (Lowdnes and Leach, 2004); challenges of community leadership (Sullivan, et al., 2006); and ethics in leadership at the local level (Morrell and Hartley, 2006).

There is some evidence of Australian local government warming to elements of this substantive platform of reforms, in particular in terms of public-private partnerships, with various councillors recently undertaking a study tour to the United Kingdom (see Dollery, Grant and Crase, 2008), and some Local Government Acts making explicit provision for public-private partnerships (see, for example, LGA 1993, §§ 400B – 400I). However, at least two elements of this enhanced role for local leadership have been noticeably absent from the overall Australian reform process. First, the pursuance of *localism* as an element to local government (see, for instance, Pratchett, 2004). Secondly, the blurring of political

and administrative executive roles as mechanisms to enhance local government, as assessed principally by the criteria of accountability and operational efficiency as important elements in localism. Against this background, we now consider the American directly elected manager model..

3. Models of American Municipal Leadership

Commenting on local government reform in the United States, Svara and Hoene (2008: 155) have observed that if it had been in step with other Anglo-American countries over the past two decades, a number of sweeping reforms, including council consolidation, the implementation of NPM doctrine, and the outsourcing of services, would have been set entrain, but 'none of these happened', principally due to the multifarious nature of local government across that country. However, despite the lack of reform, at the same time the United States 'continues to have a lively debate amongst citizens and officials about the preferred form of government and the appropriate roles of elected officials and professionals' (Svara and Hoene, 2008: 155).

In addition to the absence of concerted reform programs, Svara (2009: 109) argued that 'the United States is unusual compared to other countries because of the use of two different forms of local government'; the 'mayor-council' form and the 'council-manager' form. With respect to the mayor-council form of local government organisation, Srava and Hoene (2008: 147) sub-divided this type into the 'weak-mayor' form in which the council possesses both legislative and executive authority; it may appoint officials and approve of mayoral nominations, as well as exercise primary control over the municipal budget. Despite being elected, the mayor has little political power and less independence, performs largely ceremonial duties, and may be a member of the council. The weak mayor-council form of local authority is usually found in small regional and rural towns.

By contrast, the 'strong-mayor' or 'executive' form of mayor–council government comprises of an elected executive branch and an elected legislative branch, typically structured as an elected mayor and an elected unicameral city council respectively. Under the 'strong-mayor' form of local government, the mayor is generally given almost total administrative authority and a great deal of political independence, which almost invariably includes the power to appoint and dismiss senior professional staff without council approval. In this form, the mayor has charge of the budget, which must usually be approved by the city council. In some cases, the mayor can appoint a chief executive officer (CEO), termed a city manager, who is responsible exclusively to the mayor, and who will supervise department heads, prepare the budget, and coordinate departments on behalf of the mayor. Most major American cities use the 'strong-mayor' form of the mayor–council system.

Under the 'council–manager' form of government, the elected city council holds responsibility for the legislative functions of local government, such as the determination of local policy. It will appoint a CEO to run its administrative operations, implement its policies, and provide it with professional advice. Under this system, the mayor is indirectly elected from the members of council present, chairs council meetings and attends to ceremonial functions. It is thus apparent that the American 'council–manager' form of government closely resembles the Australian system of local government.

Svara (2009: 110-11) distinguished between the two forms of government on the basis of two kinds of accountability. In the first place, 'holding persons to account for their actions', which implies external control based on authority or power. Second, 'being accountable', 'based on norms and internalised controls and a feeling of obligation'; a distinction is similar to that between 'making the manager manage or letting the manager manage' and 'legal and political accountability systems' and 'bureaucratic and professional systems'. For Svara (2009), both these forms of accountability required what he characterised as 'supporting conditions', which he defined as a set of 'expectations … which provide the basis for determining whether performance is satisfactory' within 'an overall system of

management'. In addition,, 'accountability requires leadership that assigns a high priority to performance'. These observations have been summarised as set out in Table 1:

Table 1: Accountability in American Local Government

| Council-Manager Form	Mayor-Council Form
City Manager serves at the pleasure of the Council and can be removed at any time	Elected Mayor serves for a fixed term
City Council can exercise continuous scrutiny over managerial performance and City Manager is expected to provide information on that performance	Councils may have difficulty in getting information from strong Mayors
Unitary model with all political authority placed in the hands of the City Council and all administrative authority assigned to the City Manager	Characterised by a separation of powers with checks and balances between the Mayor and the Council. With two 'veto players', administration is subject to less control.

Source: Adapted from Svara (2009).

As we have seen, the 'council–manager' form of government corresponds most closely to the contemporary model employed in the vast majority of Australian local government settings. The council-manager form is thus founded on the principle of unitary government where all authority is vested in the elected councillors who in turn exercise control over the council's performance. The CEO 'serves at the pleasure of the council and can be removed at any time'. By contrast, both kinds of the mayor-council form are grounded in the principle of separation of powers between the elected council on the one hand, and (in the vast majority of cases) the independently elected mayor on the other hand, who is responsible for the administrative performance of the municipality to the elected council for a fixed term.

With respect to trends in the adoption of these models of local government leadership, Svara (2008, 147/8) has observed that there are interesting

correlations between the models employed by local authorities and the size of the municipal entity, as illustrated in Figure 1:

Figure 1:   American Council-Manager Cities, 1990 and 2005
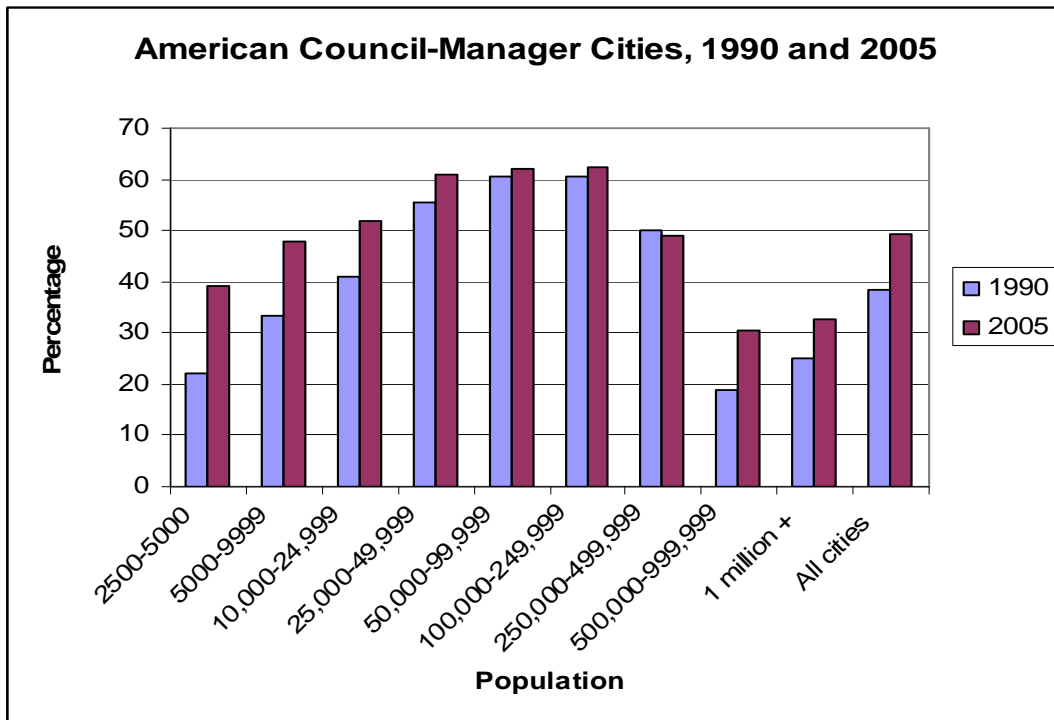
Source: Svara (2008: 149).

Figure 1 shows that an increasing proportion of councils moved to the council-manager from in the period 1990 to 2005. However, this trend cannot be explained by popular mandates. Svara (2008: 148) has argued that 'the primary source for the number of council-manager cities comes from the newly incorporated cities and smaller cities with the need for higher governmental competence to adopt the form'; growing cities were more likely to use the council-manager form as their populations increased. A striking feature of Figure 1 resides in the relatively stable balance between the two governmental models for cities from 25,000 to 500,000; in 2005, the mayor-council form still accounted for over 35 per cent of councils, and in particular the comparative dominance, in numerical terms, of the mayor-council form in cities both less than 5, 0000 and greater than 250, 000 (with the category 250, 000 to 499, 000 being the only size cohort where the percentage of council manager cities decreased). In other

words, both extremely small (< 5, 000) and extremely large (> 250,000) local authorities favoured the mayor-council form, with the figure for cities '1 million +' being in excess of 60 per cent in 2005.

Svara (2008: 150) argued further that in addition to the persistence of the mayor-council form (and its adoption by nine cities with over 100, 000 inhabitants), mayoral powers have expanded under the mayor-council form, alongside an extension of local government power. This expansion of formal authority has also occurred in council-manager cities. In addition, Svara (2008: 151) contended that 'all mayors generally are becoming more media-based in their campaigns rather than relying on parties' and thus 'promote change by appealing directly to voters over the heads of members of the city council'.

Svara (2009: 114) has advanced four reasons for the rise of the mayor-councillor form in the particular size cohort illustrated in Figure 1. In the first place, it is commonly held that with increased size and greater diversity, councils are not able to effectively cope with 'the inevitably higher levels of conflict', with mayors in the council-manager form lacking both the formal powers and attendant resources required for exercising incisive leadership. Secondly, that councils themselves tend to become fragmented and thereby less able to provide effective direction to the city manager. Thirdly, confronted with a lack of political will, managers are unwilling to confront entrenched departmental heads in the bureaucracy. Finally, a combination of these factors induces a situation 'where nobody is in charge'.

Svara (2009: 113) made two general observations about the mayor-council form. Firstly, councils may have difficulty in obtaining adequate and accurate information from strong mayors. Secondly, the mayor-council form of administration is subject to less regulation due to there being two 'veto players' (i.e. a directly elected executive mayor and a elected council) which may not agree on the priorities for the council. Under these circumstances, the local government administration continues to function of its own accord due to 'logjams' in decision-making.

In his evaluation of the 'accountability record of cities with mayor-council and council-manager governments', Svara (2009) has juxtaposed accountability 'compelled by superiors, unidirectional and short term' (associated with the mayor-council form), with accountability which is 'volunteered or induced, multi-directional and long-term' (associated with the council-manager form). He finds clearly and consistently in favour of the latter, noting that the rise to prominence of the mayor-council form has been associated with 'the successful mayors in the 1990s' (Giuliani in New York and Riordan in Los Angles) and that the drive toward the mayor-council form in large cities been driven by electoral support for strong political figures critical of local municipal administration.

Yet this form of accountability – political accountability to constituents – appears absent from Svara's typology of the phenomenon as summarised in Table 1 above. This may be because the author attempted to limit himself to an analysis of accountability within the comparative administrative systems. Nevertheless, Svara (2009: 15) is quite clear that a particular understanding of accountability to the electorate has been associated with the perceived rise of the mayor-council form. Thus:

The charter change in Richmond created a strong executive that, in the words of a political consultant, 'the voters can hold accountable in terms of addressing the issues, such as ending corruption, cracking down on crime, improving schools, revitalizing neighbourhoods and fighting poverty…'. In this view only a strong political leader has the clout to direct strong subordinates (Svara, 2009: 115).

It seems clear that the juxtaposition of different types of accountability will inevitably spill over into the relationship between the electorate and the polity. We are entitled to ask to what extent the mayor-council form is constitutive of an alternate mode of accountability when it comes to the relationship between the executive and the electorate. After all, the relationship between political leadership and the electorate is dependent upon a particular kind of accountability relationship within councils, which, in the words of Borraz and John

(2004: 112), bring 'European accounts of political leadership much closer to the practice in U.S. politics'. Indeed, just as it is clear that that the purported advantages of the mayor-council form lie precisely in blurring the distinction between the administrative and political roles as practiced in the Westminster system, as well as Australian local government. Thus an elected executive does not merely tinker with the relationship of accountability between administrative and political elements of government, but it also necessarily involves a reconsideration of the appropriate role of government (Svara's (2009: 111) 'supporting conditions' of that accountability). This obviously requires a clear notion of the meaning of local representation and local democracy. With these broader considerations in mind, we now focus on the desirability elected executives in Australian local government.

4. Elected Executives in Australian Local Government?

At first glance, it may appear that the experience of U.S. cities – particularly those inhabited by over 250, 000 people – would be relevant only to a relatively small proportion of Australian local councils. This observation derives from the fact that Australian local authorities range 'in size from three hundred or so residents in Diamantina in remote Queensland, to over a million in the City of Brisbane, and from four square kilometres in Walkerville in metropolitan Adelaide, to 143,000 square kilometres in remote Halls Creek in Western Australia' (Marshall 2008: 17). However, it could be argued that that recent sweeping reforms of local government have created a need for stronger local leadership. In particular, the concentration of administrative and political power following forced amalgamation, and the need to participate effectively in regional, state and federal decision-making procedures may require strong leadership – no matter what the jurisdictional size of the municipality – and leadership that is accountable to the electorate in a manner suggested by the mayor-council model.

Indeed, given the systemic stress that faces local government in Australia, it is easy to imagine scenarios where an elected executive may be an appealing model of municipal authority to adopt, particularly in the case of extremely small jurisdictions (where, for example, a combination of popularity on the one hand skills shortages on the other hand would suggest a melding of the mayoral and manager/CEO roles – the mayor-council form is popular in extremely small jurisdiction in the United States); also in the case of extremely large jurisdictions where a directly elected mayor would be perceived to have a mandate of addressing gross failings of a council in service delivery, corruption (perceived or otherwise) – again, as has been the case in the United States. In effect, a political takeover of the administrative arm of council would be more likely in the event of a directly elected mayor. In the Australian context, any such occurrence would be given added impetus if a state administration was perceived as incompetent.

In the case of such a scenario, it would not necessarily follow that the operation of accountability would shift to that which Svara has asserted characterises the mayor-council model, namely, 'compelled by superiors, unidirectional and short term' from that which is 'volunteered or induced, multi-directional and long-term' (associated with the council-manager form). However, one might argue that it would be extremely likely. Moreover, even if the particular mayor, acting also as CEO, was committed to procedure, it may well be the case that in such circumstances they would be compelled to act in ways in which reflect the form of accountability underpinning the mayor-council form due to expectations placed on them by the electorate.

This brings us to operation of accountability between council and the electorate that would accompany an elected executive, outside the purview that Svara (2009) set himself. In this form of local government, accountability may alter to what the political consultant (above, commenting on Richmond, Virginia) labelled one where 'the voters can hold [the mayor] accountable in terms of addressing the issues … [and where] only a strong political leader has the clout to direct strong subordinates'. Yet it also affects the understanding of representation

underpinning the democratic process. In such a scenario, the elected executive has been appointed to fulfil a series of (urgent) tasks and is thereby an instrumental delegate of the electorate rather than embodying any form of 'trustee' of the polity and the council more generally (see, for example, the discussion of Burke in Haus and Sweeting, 2006: 271; Hearfield and Dollery, 2009). The elected executive also has a 'mandate' to act, rather than exercising any 'independent' or distanced perspective on the functions of government (Pitkin, 1967: 144-147). Notably, this stands in contrast to the idea of a professional civil service and rests uneasily with the conventions attendant to the Westminster tradition and indeed the idea of public value as it has been recently discussed (see, for example, Rhodes and Wanna (2007); Colebatch, 2010). Rather, it is predicated on the idea that only those *outside* the sphere of government that can correct its ills. Further, the ideas of representation and accountability underlying the elected executive model need not be confined to this particular model of local government executive appointment, but may also be present in the current political milieu, where, as we have seen, individuals move between spheres of government, where their public role is highlighted and as such where the electorate perceive them to be in charge and therefore accountable. Yet it is by no means clear that this is a desirable situation.

Moreover, the endorsement of such a change in prevailing forms of accountability and representation in Australian local government may be severely hampered by barriers to the exercising of such power, to the extent that it is damaging for the legitimacy of local government. Leach and Wilson (2004: 141-3) identified several such barriers in the context of English local government that are relevant to the Australian milieu, and would be more relevant in a situation where a mayor has taken on an executive role in administrative functions. Firstly, there are significant political barriers to the exercising of council-mayor style authority: The decisions of elected mayors, even those who have achieved a popular mandate, would still be subject to approval by council. Even in situations where a council is initially compliant, this would not necessarily remain so and would certainly be affected by the electoral cycle. Further, in many instances candidacy would be governed by party-political concerns and as such, this

framework of decision-making would be present in the relationship between mayor and council. Only in the event of extremely high profile political figures that are prepared to take the risk of running as independent candidates would this latter constraint be undermined.

Secondly, in the Australian context, these political barriers pale into insignificance compared with elements of legislation state legislation. For example, typical of Local Government Acts across Australian jurisdictions, the *LGA 1993* § 402 requires community participation in the development of the community strategic plan. Under § 28 of the same Act, all classifications and reclassifications of public land are subject to ministerial approval. Other limitations are inclusive of (but by no means limited to) auditing requirements under Part 3 of the Act, environmental legislation, and so forth. In short, state government oversight of local government in Australia is intense.

Third, in terms of what they refer to as 'strategic policy direction', Leach and Wilson (2004: 143) noted that constraints on municipal authority limit the plausibility of local councils planning for the long term. This is even more so in the Australian context, where municipal authorities are responsible for a far narrower range of functions. For example, municipalities in England can run campaigns centred on law and order issues. This would be barely credible in the Australian context. Moreover, Leach and Wilson (2004: 143) noted that the provision of basic services would likely trump any claim to 'strategic vision'.

Fourth, in terms of what Leach and Wilson (2004: 145) referred to as 'ensuring task accomplishment' or 'what happens on the ground', they observed that while the option for taking responsibility for particular accomplishments may become open to elected mayors (and by implication those that take on CEO functions) this had not occurred in England, with the authors speculating that 'the tradition of collective responsibility (at least in formal terms) for decisions has proved resilient'. While Leach and Wilson (2004: 144) were more positive with respect to elected mayors 'representing authority to the external world' there is no need for mayor to be directly elected, nor to conform with a functional role akin to that of

an elected executive, in order to fulfil the function. On the contrary, we have argued that the elected executive role is more concerned with making sure one's own 'house is in order', and being accountable to and representing constituents' interests, rather than being principally concerned with politics outside the municipal sphere. For all these reasons, in the Australian context, the game may well not be worth the candle when it comes to promotion and adoption of the elected executives model.

5. Concluding Remarks

These arguments serve to alert us to a number of general points with respect to leadership in local government. The first is the extent to which local government, both as a field of intellectual inquiry and, to a lesser extent, as a practice of public administration and politics, has been 'bitten by the leadership bug'. Borraz and Wilson's (2004) claims concerned with both institutional reform and, importantly, political style have not suffered a resounding rebuttal in the field of local government studies. On the contrary, the stocks of leadership in local government have risen since their comments and have been reflected, as we have seen, in the development of leadership as a technique of local government.

Nevertheless, the gap between this scholarly rhetoric and the reality of modern local government is marked. To a large extent this can be explained by legislative constraints, which, to the extent that the conventions of the Westminster form of responsible government are at stake, may be entirely justified. The second is that any move toward the adoption of elected executives in Australia would not result in an immediate jettisoning of the conventions of local government. However, it may well simply juxtapose one form of representation and accountability between local governments and the electorate (which is legislatively and institutionally inscribed) with an alternative characterised by 'mandate' politics, where accountability is wrapped up in one individual. In the event of elected executives, it is probable that the expectations of the local electorate would be significantly frustrated with disenchantment bound to follow.

These barriers to definitive executive action are prone to being significantly compromised only in the event of a highly complicit, if not enraptured council, and only for a honeymoon period: State government oversight, in its numerous strands, would significantly limit the scope of any action. Moreover, the challenges of moving to this form of local leadership would be significant for the day-to-day operation of any municipal authority; councillors may well err to on the side of caution for the simple realities of administrative cohesion – and in situations where skilled staff work in a market place: In the face of significant conflict, they may seek alternative employment. In answer to the question: Can an enhanced role for leadership offer any positive scope for reform? Our modest answer to this question is yes. However, it does not reside in enhancing the formal powers of mayors, nor councils, nor CEOs at a local level. Nor is it dependent upon the adoption of a particular form of local government as delineated by the relationship between these three elements of council. Rather, local leadership could invigorate the development of local areas based on the articulation of local identity. This is an underlying theme in the contemporary literature discussing local government and leadership (see, for example, Harvey, 2002; Lyons, 2007) yet is one that has not been fully explored in the Australian context.

Yet this potential ought not to distract attention from the fact that the problems of local government in Australia are fundamentally financial. Given the acute degree of vertical fiscal imbalance in the Australian federation, and the limited 'own' sources of revenue available to local councils, it appears inevitable that no form of local leadership can ever act as a 'silver bullet' to magically pluck resources from the air. The old public finance adage that 'finance should follow function' simply does not apply in Australian federalism without Commonwealth government agreement.

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