

REIMAGINING PUBLIC SECTOR MANAGEMENT

A New Age of Renewal and
Renaissance?

Edited by John Diamond
and Joyce Liddle

CRITICAL PERSPECTIVES ON
INTERNATIONAL PUBLIC SECTOR
MANAGEMENT

VOLUME 7

REIMAGINING PUBLIC SECTOR MANAGEMENT

CRITICAL PERSPECTIVES ON INTERNATIONAL PUBLIC SECTOR MANAGEMENT

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SECTOR MANAGEMENT VOLUME 7

**REIMAGINING PUBLIC
SECTOR MANAGEMENT: A
NEW AGE OF RENEWAL
AND RENAISSANCE?**

EDITED BY

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And

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United Kingdom – North America – Japan
India – Malaysia – China

Emerald Publishing Limited
Howard House, Wagon Lane, Bingley BD16 1WA, UK

First edition 2023

Editorial matter and selection © 2023 John Diamond and Joyce Liddle.
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British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN: 978-1-80262-022-1 (Print)
ISBN: 978-1-80262-021-4 (Online)
ISBN: 978-1-80262-023-8 (Epub)

ISSN: 2045-7944 (Series)



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INTRODUCTION

John Diamond and Joyce Liddle

ABSTRACT

Purpose: To set the context for this edited collection by situating the discussion within both a global setting as well as examining the development and framing of processes, initiatives, policy paradigms and theoretical models which have shaped contemporary discourse and practice.

Design/Method: To draw on extant and current academic literature, contemporary thinking derived from policy organisations, think tanks and governmental institutions but also draw on the experience and insights provided by the contributors.

Findings: There are three core findings drawn prior to March 2022. Firstly, that the overall impact of the Global Financial Crash of 2008 and COVID-19 marks a new paradigm shift that will, more likely, shape thinking over the next decade; secondly, global attention to the climate emergency and sustainability agendas suggest that new forms of locally led responses will be necessary; and thirdly, the perceived political uncertainty of the institutions of the European Union and the USA make the stability of the policy making process and its responses to COVID-19 or the Climate Emergency much less predictable over the next 5–10 years.

Originality: This series of essays reflects the work undertaken by each of those contributing to the collection. Each author was invited to start with their primary research focus and to take their ideas and thinking for a ‘walk’ in order to stimulate discussion, novel thinking and different approaches to policy dilemmas.

Keywords: New municipalism; new public enterprise; collaborative leadership; populism; globalism; local public leadership

This edited volume was imagined in a very different global setting from the one we are now in (March 2022). The dominant conversation was, at that time, summarised by the term COVID-19. The final impacts of the global pandemic of 2020 are still difficult to assess given the on-going nature of the crisis. The huge loss of life and the uneven impact of the pandemic on places and communities divided by health, gender, age, class and ethnicity has been the prevailing discourse of the last two years. The sharp differences between nation states and which individuals and groups have access to vaccines will mean that there are no short- or medium-term impacts but inevitable long-term effects as the pandemic has some time to go. It remains difficult to anticipate precisely the longer economic and public policy consequences of the impact of COVID-19 on the ways in which cities and more broadly defined public policy and public management questions are defined. It is possible, however, to discern some immediate areas of public policy making which have become foregrounded as a result of the pandemic. These three emerging areas are: crisis and emergency management and the ways in which different agencies responded to the pandemic and the lessons learnt in terms of disaster planning and the co-ordination of all relevant services; and secondly, the ways in which health services (including public health prevention) and the associated work linked to vaccine development provided significant lessons for those involved in public policy making and analysis; and thirdly, the emergence of a new consensus on the role public agencies and institutions could play in the post-pandemic environment which was captured in the slogan *Build Back Better*. In an important sense (from the perspective of seeking to interpret the anticipated political and policy consequences) it is possible that we are experiencing a transition phase of which ‘re-imagining’ and recalibrating the institutional architecture including new kinds of strategic relationships is underway. There are initiatives which are not restricted to particular nation states in which the relationships between local institutions of civic governance and their universities and primary employers are being redefined. Clearly this is not new but the context is profoundly different from before as are the language and discourse, with ‘business as normal’ no longer seen as a viable option. And perhaps the ‘perfect storm’ of the impact of the pandemic, the climate emergency and the profoundly uncertain global context are shaping these developments (see [Kempton et al., 2021](#)).

Each of these three areas are examined in the chapters that follow. We make here an important set of observations on the international dimension of the work presented and the reflections, comments and conclusions which contribute both to the opening and closing chapters of this collection.

There are five key points we want to make. Firstly, whilst the impact of the pandemic was global in terms of the closing down of international travel and the movement of people it was not the case that the economic and social impacts were felt the same everywhere. Indeed, the differential economic impact of COVID-19 on the global economy makes it challenging to anticipate the medium to longer term consequences of the past two years. These unequal and uneven dimensions to the global close down were not unexpected. Indeed, we can argue that the differences were further exacerbated by the differing levels of access to

vaccines and the public health infrastructures in place both to distribute and to administer them. Both of these elements: the uneven nature of the economic impact and the unequal access and allocation to the vaccines are likely to make the overall global recovery slower and more regionally uneven with national variations and differentiations.

Secondly, the institutions of governance and administration at all levels (from the supra nation state to the city region or the local neighbourhood) were tested and stretched in their responses. Across the globe many of these agencies and systems were already under immense pressure following the global financial crisis (GFC) of the latter part of the first decade of the century. In a number of advanced economies (notably the USA and the UK), part of the response to the GFC had been to adopt policies which became known as ‘austerity measures’. By 2020 there had been a decade of cuts in public spending and lack of investment in the necessary infrastructure at local levels to support public health and social and welfare agencies. In a number of other countries the public welfare institutions were relatively weak and vulnerable to major crises. The weakening of welfare systems and public service delivery organisations, and associated not for profits meant that the immediate responses were, sometimes, lacking in coherence and informed leadership. The impulse in some national or federal jurisdictions to privilege decision making at a local or regional tier, also, added to the fragmented response at different stages (Beer et al., 2020).

Thirdly, it was possible to observe, over time, a more nuanced and coherent response by public institutions to the pandemic. An important theme of the period between 2020 and 2022 has been a re-emergence of local or regionally based public institutions and agencies (see O’Flynn et al., 2014 for an important exploration of both the conceptual underpinning of the idea of collaboration across disciplines and its application internationally). Even as public sector institutions were weakened through the austerity period there were initiatives and actors with memories and skills to revive practice and think strategically when the crisis moments came. The success of the vaccine can be understood through this approach. It is possible to discern this trend in the UK as well as in a number of member states of the European Union. The patterns of activities in the United States had more mixed success, as was evident in many other advanced economies. The slogan Build Back Better has been used in a number of advanced economies of the global north. There is no one shared or precise definition of what is understood by the term except that it is advocated by those who see the role of public administration or public management as critical in developing, adopting and implementing social and economic policies aimed at addressing inequalities not solely caused by the impact of the pandemic but by the preceding austerity measures. To some extent in the UK it is possible to see that the ‘Build Back Better’ rhetoric occupies the same space as the ‘Levelling Up’ agenda of the current UK Conservative Government. Interestingly, both make the case for enhanced public services, public investment in infrastructure, local economic recovery plans, a commitment to education and skills training and a greening of the economy which acknowledges recent agreements on sustainability (Martin et al., 2021).

Fourthly, these trends and specific policy initiatives appear to mark a break with a general endorsement of market and new-liberal priorities which has been a characteristic of advanced economies for over 40 years. Whilst this period has been a time in which these ideas have been contested and debated it is, nonetheless, important to recognise a level of consistency and continuity between governments of different parties. Even allowing for some differences over specific initiatives it is evident that there was a new consensus on some basic assumptions about macro-economic policy what this required at the level of the nation state or where responsibility for the regulation of labour and markets sat. This is why it appears as if we are in a period of transition in which ideas about the role of the state in regulating markets might become part of a new conversation. The perception that the state (and/or governments) can play a part in addressing some of the collective and individual negative effects of the consequence of the GFC marks another point of reflection in this period of global change.

Finally, it is necessary to situate these observations in a broader context concerning the 'health' or crisis of legitimacy of liberal democratic institutions. Arguably, the last 30 years or more have been marked across advanced economies by a decrease in confidence of political leaders and political settlements. This has led, over time, to a number of significant breaks with the dominant political views and establishment in different places. In the UK it led to the decision to leave the European Union which itself was followed by internal disruptions within the two main political parties and a perceived lack of social, economic and political stability. In the USA the election of Donald Trump in 2016 might have been foreshadowed by mainstream scholars and the media as it was by others but what might not have been fully appreciated was the 2020 election result and the situation that followed. Across the European Union there is a marked rise in authoritarian or, at best, anti-consensus candidates and parties. The increase in electoral success of far right parties in Europe reveals the extent to which conventional or centre right/left parties and leaders are discredited). Some of these far right groups appeal to ideas of nationalism as well as being (often) anti-immigrant and anti-left. Another reading of Europe after the collapse of the Soviet Union is to see the rise in nationalism accompanied by real conflict from the break-up of Yugoslavia to the on-going war in Ukraine (in 2022) is to see how these underlying tensions were released both by the ending of particular forms of authoritarian governments and the promise of liberal democracy. What appears to be the case is that liberal democracy itself as a form of political organisation and representation is in crisis at the same time as a limited but perceptible level of expectation in public institutions and agencies as non-partisan in their administration. These are, necessarily, complex and contested patterns which are emerging. There are shared characteristics of those that rejected Biden in the USA – they do tend to be anti-vaccines, anti-climate change and less likely to condemn Putin over the invasion of Ukraine. What these activists represent is a much more profound scepticism of government and its actions.

It is in this context that we are deeply interested in, and committed to, the understanding of how this contributes to the place of public policy making and the linked questions of the importance or otherwise of local and national

governance public administration, public sector management and civil society associations and agencies. The overarching framing of this edited collection was centred on the idea of 'reimagining' the public sector in a context of renewal and renaissance. The overall themes emerging from the collection and the settings within which they are situated suggest that we are not in a period of renewal or renaissance. We do want to propose, however, that such a conclusion or interpretation might be premature. We suggest that we are living through a transition point between that of neo-liberalism and its celebration of markets as a means of regulating and distributing resources and maintaining the stability of global financial and commercial institutions and activities and a new more regulated and decentralised set of arrangements in which local public institutions have more autonomy and responsibility (see [Massey, 2019](#) for a discussion of the key imperatives for a new research agenda for public administration. It predates the pandemic but draws out a number of important policy, practice and conceptual questions which are relevant for this broader discussion. See also [Bryer, 2021](#) for a detailed analysis of global trends in public administration). We set out what might be the trends or constituent parts of this period of transition below.

Firstly, this period of transition can be seen to have been shaped or pushed by a combination of the pandemic and global collapse of institutions and arrangements to maintain stability and order. It is debatable whether the latter was accelerated by the former or whether they are quite separate but inevitably interconnect. The overall pattern of responses to the pandemic by governments globally (regardless of their ideological positions) was to introduce significant restrictions on the rights of their citizens and to close down cities and whole nations. We think these measures have had the unusual impact of appealing to different groups and positions. One set of groups which have opposed such restrictions, also, appear to overlap with those who are most sceptical of government and mainstream political parties. Their growing opposition to such measures appears to cross over in some states for political parties who appeal to their sentiments. This is adding to a sense of political instability at all levels of the nation state.

Secondly, those groups which have supported the need to contain the virus (which might not be the same as supporting their respective governments) have, often, promoted the value of public sector agencies and public sector expertise through public health agencies, scientists working to find a vaccine or to those agencies supporting vulnerable groups). The success of developing the vaccine and the ways in which local public agencies responded to and co-ordinated 'on the ground' activity to give support to the most vulnerable all added to, what we observed as, a perceived shift in the recognition of the value of the 'public agency' and professional expertise.

Thirdly, there appears to be a 'governance gap' or rather the space within which institutions of governance seek to operate has become more fluid. In the United States this is, perhaps, more obvious to observe. The federal system with devolved responsibilities not just at state level but, also, at city level makes for very crowded spaces. This makes it more difficult for a single point of authority and decision making as the Biden Administration experiences such challenges.

They cannot secure the passing of all their legislative plans because they do not control all branches of government (even though technically they do).

In the UK the devolved nations and the English city regions with their elected mayors pursued at times (or sought to) different strategies from the Conservative Government thereby leading to fragmented governance and public administration (Elliott et al., 2022). These contested spaces not only make decision making difficult but also can create a political vacuum in which government fails to function and the ruling party cannot secure its legislative agenda. Crowded spaces can also, be understood as a direct challenge to central authorities. The concept of ‘dual power’ captures the essence of what is taking place. In the liberal democratic systems present in most advanced economies ‘dual power’ can only be temporary. Crowded spaces might be illustrative of the sometimes messy nature of governance but dual power is indicative of direct challenges to the status quo.

Fourthly, we recognise that these developments are, in a sense what is observable. The chapters that make up this collection reflect the practice, scholarship and research of engaged researchers and practitioners within their areas of expertise and fields of practice. In an important way they bring their insights and sense making to this broad canvas within which we have tried to contextualise the discussions to follow.

Finally, we do think that what is observable in some places is this reimagining of the public sector. We are not suggesting that the examples cited below are embedded sufficiently for us to be confident that they represent a new and significant phase of public sector management rather they provide useful perspectives on global and broader trends impacting on the phenomena. We, also, think that the instability in global relations at all levels makes it difficult to discern whether these developments have a ‘purchase’ outside either their national boundaries or their economic spheres of influence. We are suggesting, tentatively that we are entering a new phase which might be described as one of ‘renewal or renaissance’. We have come to this view because there are some significant questions that these chapters address and in so doing we can see the emergence of a more nuanced appreciation of the changes taking place in different settings.

We discuss the specific contributions of each of the chapters below but we tentatively suggest that each may illustrate the patterns of development which could constitute a new phase and that questions of forms of governance and leadership be decided on the basis of what is appropriate:

- A need to reclaim the importance of public administration in strengthening local and national institutions of governance and decision making and supporting initiatives at the local/regional levels
- A renewed and more systematic emphasis on the ‘local’ including support for capacity building including leadership capacity across sectors
- A recognition of the need to strengthen municipal agencies and institutions
- A more deliberate privileging of collaboration and multi-agency working than in previous periods

- A focus on supporting initiatives designed to secure cross public and not for profit sector cooperation and for supporting and identifying local leaders
- An emphasis on supporting and developing collaborative skills and capacities in local decision-making
- A renewed focus on community wealth creation and economic development
- An examination over time of the most appropriate leadership models to be adopted

HOW THE COLLECTION HAS BEEN ORGANISED

The collection has been organised into four separate but interconnected themes. Each chapter and each theme are complete in themselves but we hope that readers will look at the whole collection so that the connections between the themes and the conclusions can be drawn as clearly as possible. The overarching theme of the initial invitation to participate in the Roundtable held (virtually) at The Newcastle Business School of Northumbria University in February 2021) was ‘Re-imagining Public Sector Management: A new age of Renewal or Renaissance?’. Participants were encouraged to interpret the call for papers in two ways: either to draw on their research and scholarship to inform their insights and contribution but also to be imaginative and creative going beyond conventional analyses. This series has always sought to facilitate dialogue and discussion where ideas are ‘taken for a walk’ and to resist repackaging the conventional or the received wisdom. Clearly, the context to the event reflected the dramatically changed environment occasioned by the pandemic. Quite apart from the fact that this was a virtual gathering (some participation by colleagues working outside of the UK was not unusual) and everyone was required to be at home made the setting and the context shape the discussion and conclusions in ways that were unpredictable.

The four themes or groupings of the collection are:

- Context and Setting overarching questions – Anthony Cheung’s chapter on framing a new paradigm for Public Sector Management and Kristy Docherty’s chapter on working with, and within uncertainty
- New Forms of Localism and Community Wealth Building – John Fenwick and Lorraine Johnston’s chapter on the emergence of ‘new municipalism’ in the context of the UK; Dane Anderton and Paula Turner’s chapter on Rethinking Procurement as part of an inclusive local economy; and Peter Furmedge, Carl Hughes, Alan Southern and Matt Thompson’s chapter on the need for a radical reimagining of local government
- Cross cutting questions for a reimagined Public Sector – Rory Shand, Steven Parker and Catherine Elliott’s chapter examines the idea of public service ethos; Roxana Corduneau’s chapter reflects on fostering resilience in the public sector to achieve greater public service motivation; and Tobias Polzer and

Dunli Li's chapter explores the questions raised by the use of Big Data in Policy decisions

- Service reforms and concept of risk – Paresh Wankhade, Geoff Heath, and Peter Murphy's chapter examines the ways in which ambulance services have been 'reimagined' and Gareth Addidle considers the challenge for policing services of managing vulnerability and risk in the context of public health policing.

CONTEXT SETTING AND OVERARCHING QUESTIONS

The two chapters in this section by Cheung and Docherty provide a number of ways into how the discussion of 'reimagining' can be framed. They both draw on an extensive literature as an approach to situating their analysis and observations. Whilst they are addressing different elements of the public management/public administration discourse their respective contributions are complimentary. Cheung asks important questions about whether we are working in a post New Public Management context and if this has been speeded up by the impact of the pandemic or whether there had been a slow shift to a new and different setting. He addresses, as well, the historical and global legacy of public administration and the impact of the US informed Wilsonian paradigm which has shaped and defined the way public administration is taught and understood. Arguing that we do need to acknowledge that important changes have taken place and are in place with respect to the role, function and authority of public sector institutions it is important not to conclude that they have lost their legitimacy. He emphasises how in the past Asian nations had learnt from their Western counterparts, but that nowadays within broader global uncertainties, and as trust in leadership and government has become more precarious, old models of public administration are 'up in the air' and we need a new language to understand new realities. Docherty explores the ways in which individual and groups of public sector leaders and managers work with uncertainty. Drawing on an empirical study she undertook in Scotland Docherty takes us not just through the literature on working with uncertainty or the concepts of emergence and collaboration but situates these developments in the lived experience and practice of a group of leaders and managers working in a multi-agency/disciplinary initiative.

NEW FORMS OF LOCALISM AND COMMUNITY WEALTH BUILDING

The three chapters in this section provide both specific examples of initiatives which might be seen as contributing to a new paradigm within which to locate public management and public administration at a local level as well as offering a historical context to these initiatives. Fenwick and Johnston's chapter sketches out the historical context to the initiatives being developed at a local level which they describe as 'New Public Enterprise'. In the UK context where the legal and