

Introduction

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[Does] democracy reside in the collective soul of a united nation, not so much a central government as a coherent and united people? Or does it reside in the decentralised empowerment of ordinary citizens in the governance of their communities and everyday lives? (Barber 2001: 231)

The original research leading to this book began with the editors' curiosity at the upsurge of spatially based policy activity which occurred in Queensland in the latter 1990s. This upsurge was a reaction to the radically conservative protest of the One Nation Party against the social and economic damage to regional Queensland then associated with economic rationalism. The policy response was expressed in terms of 'place management'. We were curious as to whether or not place management would prove ephemeral. Was it simply the product of short-term political need? Or was it in fact the beginning of a significant longer-term mutation in our form of regional governance which would in time replace the neo-liberal regime? Since then, spatially based initiatives have mushroomed across Australia in a variety of contexts and with apparent independence. State governments in particular have invested significantly in community engagement initiatives, with Victoria and Queensland actually creating separate departments to administer community policies. The idea for this book developed through a series of symposia and research papers all designed to lend critical perspectives to this rather frenetic policy activity. It is a first critical take on this important policy development and is meant for both researchers and practitioners. The book is designed to give a sense of the kinds of activity occurring in the various Australian States, the sorts of theory now informing practice, and the key challenges being faced in policy research and action.

The book begins with a chapter by Mike Geddes on the international context. It is really quite remarkable how global the emphasis has become on the ideas and values of civil society, of localism, of citizen engagement and so on. Such a global emphasis is beyond the scope of this book, which is concerned to explore spatial and community-based policy in developed countries. But it ought to be noted from the outset that the World Bank has been extraordinarily influential in promoting notions of building ‘community capacity’ and creating ‘social capital’ as part of its seemingly ‘post-Washington consensus’ development formula for economies in transition. Of course, many are deeply sceptical of this formula and see the emphasis on community as no substitute for collective interventions expressed through the state. Parallel arguments apply in the case of the local governance initiatives promoted in the welfare states of developed economies. As Geddes shows, there has indeed been a neo-liberal tendency in much community-based and place-based policy in welfare states, but national and local politics still create significant variation. Whether these variations in the Australian case might point towards the emergence of a new ‘post-neoliberal’ policy regime is the central theme of this book.

Bringing some theoretical coherence to such a diverse policy realm is a challenge. There have been relevant emerging literatures in a number of disciplines. Seeking some sense of the realm as a whole, we were struck by the similarity of ideas in the three different but related perspectives afforded by social policy, economic policy and governance. Our book holds up for scrutiny the proposition that when put together these perspectives indeed suggest a new, emergent policy regime. Thus we point first to the emergence of ‘community’ and ‘social inclusion’ as key terms in new social policy frameworks which break – rhetorically at least – with the hyper-individualism of the neo-liberal regime. Second, in economic policy, through the influence of institutionalist and evolutionary economics on the ‘New Regionalism’ (NR), we show the parallel emphasis on the economic importance of the social dimension in the form of local networks and clusters – factors accorded no significance in economic rationalism. And third, in the ‘post-managerial’ governance approach to public administration there is the promotion of local modes of governance centred on negotiation, policy learning and networks rather than on hierarchical command or market relations. Here governments and communities seek new approaches and methods for citizen participation and more engaged policy processes. These three overlapping perspectives combine to suggest an emergent regime which might aptly be titled ‘associational governance’; a regime which, with its emphasis on the social dimension, moves beyond the earlier binary of state and market and could well

mature into a template for a new ‘post-competition’ regime in Australian locality-based and community-based policy.

Of course we would not suggest that the diverse group of contributors who have come together in the production of this book would be of one mind in regard to this proposition, or, indeed, would want to use as their own the term ‘associational governance’. As the reader will find, while all contributors acknowledge the policy trends described above, the trends are seen to be ambiguous and contested. Our task in the book has been to document the trends in policy practice as well as to present for readers an urgently needed critical guide to their interpretation and analysis.

Thematic structure of the book

The book has four parts. Reflecting the global reach of these developments, Part I provides an overview of the British and European Union experience. Part II offers highlights of recent Australian social policy initiatives oriented to ‘people and places’. Since it is unrealistic to try to represent the whole of the new Australian policy practice in this one volume, we have focused on overviews of policy developments in two of the key States, Queensland and Victoria; on studies of two of the most significant communities of interest, women and Aboriginal peoples; and on an examination of the crucial issues surrounding urban policy. Part III concentrates on developments in economic policy by providing an overview of the influential paradigm known as the ‘New Regionalism’, a case study of the same in the City of Playford in South Australia, and an account of community economic development. Part IV deals with issues of governance and administration generated by these policy developments. In this final section, two chapters discuss the theory and practice of ‘networked governance’; a third explores the personnel and training implications of the new administrative models; while the final chapter explains the implications for research of shifting the measurement of advantage and disadvantage from a ‘poverty’ to a ‘social exclusion’ framework.

Guide to the chapters

Mike Geddes’ chapter on the international context highlights the use of comparative welfare regime typologies in sorting through the global rhetorical sludge which has come to inundate the movement to local governance. He makes clear that terms like ‘local partnership’ and ‘social inclusion’ have very different meanings within different types of welfare state. Thus what we are calling community engagement in Australia appears to be much less a feature of what Gosta Esping-Andersen (1990)

calls the social-democratic and corporatist states. It is found to a much greater extent in liberal or residual welfare regimes in which the emphasis on local community action is often associated with neo-liberal efforts to reduce the role and size of government. At the same time Geddes observes that there is nothing about the current elevation of the role of local communities which necessarily implies that it takes the neo-liberal form. Add to this the ongoing diversity of regime types (in spite of the convergent tendencies associated with globalisation), and the clear social-democratic achievement of some of the social policies associated with New Labour in the United Kingdom, and you have the issue of the political colouring of what we are calling ‘associational governance’ left as an open question.

‘People and places’ begins with Paul Smyth, Tim Reddel and Andrew Jones’s tracking the resurgence in recent years of decentralised forms of social governance concerned with the spatial dimensions of disadvantage. The authors examine aspects of this resurgence in the Australian State of Queensland where, after the hasty birth of ‘place management’ in response to the rise of ‘Hansonism’, a plethora of ‘joined-up’ policy initiatives were undertaken in relation to the regional dimensions of poverty. These trends, the authors argue, reflect in part new ways of thinking about the spatial aspects of disadvantage which have emerged in recent years and which have the potential to take regional policy beyond the narrow confines imposed by neo-liberal economic orthodoxy. These new ways of thinking have arisen in social policy through the reframing of disadvantage in terms of social exclusion and in regional economic policy through the influence of the ‘New Regionalism’. The chapter shows how together these bodies of theory point us towards a new model of ‘associational governance’. This chapter reviews recent Queensland experience and indicates those features of ‘associational governance’ which have become characteristic of locality-based social policy aspirations in Queensland. The political and policy sustainability of these trends, however, is uncertain. Despite the inherent limitation of policy practice, it is argued that the emergence of the associational governance model marks a theoretical departure which offers new potential for addressing issues of spatial disadvantage.

John Wiseman’s exploration of the post-neoliberal tendencies of local and regional policy developments in Victoria makes for an instructive parallel with the previous chapter. We see a similar context of concern with issues of inequality and the environment, leading to a push for ‘triple bottom line’ public policy goals in place of simply ‘economic growth, profitability and consumption’. Networks, partnerships and alliances are also present as elements of an approach to government that

will overcome a fragmentation of constituencies and heighten the representation of the excluded. The Victorian experience, according to Wiseman, has been less optimistic and adventurous than that of Queensland. He highlights the need for significant capacity-building within government to turn around practices and institutions which became embedded in what was known as the 'Contract State'.

Brendan Gleeson and Suzanne Lawson describe and analyse the gradual shift by Australian State governments away from functional administration of services and policy towards new spatial governance approaches, especially within urban regions. This shift represents a rescaling of urban governance in Australia, reflecting a new emphasis on both multi-level rather than single (state)-level public administration and recognition that services and policies must be matched more carefully with increasingly divergent community needs. This chapter identifies the implications of this change for the governance of urban areas, especially in the context of social polarisation caused by market forces gaining the upper hand over public agencies in the planning process. A conceptual framework to identify the key causes of, and rationale for rescaling is proposed for broader theoretical consideration.

Our book is concerned with 'peoples', or communities of interest, as much as it is with communities of place. Sue Goodwin's chapter examines the current policy promotion of 'community' from a feminist perspective. Her overview of the rhetoric of community-based action from the 1970s and the 1990s reveals some striking similarities and differences. For example, the 1970s had a strong emphasis on redistribution and the democratisation of public institutions, whereas the contemporary 'mainstreaming' concern with ensuring that males and females are treated as 'equivalent' tends to cover over entrenched patterns of female disadvantage. A priority for new forms of associational governance in this analysis is the creation of 'sites of citizen engagement' where women can be 'present' and have a voice in policy discourse.

David Martin's rethinking of Aboriginal community governance acknowledges that there are aspects of the social inclusion framework, notably its emphases on the interlinked nature of disadvantage and the importance of spatially appropriate forms of governance, which resonate with Aboriginal issues. At the same time he alerts us to the assimilationist potential of social inclusion discourse. Many Aborigines, he points out, have no desire to join the wider society or adopt its values and lifestyles. Clearly, social inclusion must be on Aboriginal terms, and here Martin articulates the need for a 'social technology' which will enable a 'strategic engagement' of Aboriginal peoples with the wider society; an engagement which allows both for the distinctiveness of Aboriginal