Escaping Parochialism – Emerging Principles and Logics for Re-Membering Local Service Provision

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The discourse of the changing welfare mix is necessarily parochial expressing the specific vision and interests of the proponents of globalism and economic rationalism (whatever the current word is for new policy directions) even though these are presented as in the interests of humanity. The new local and global (dis)orders of this discourse have generated new territorial, organizational and political dynamics that are a direct threat to communities experiences of place and identity. This has prompted proposals/local dialogues that reflect the unique ‘cosmovision’ that defines, differentiates, distinguishes and re-members the culture of place.

Within this re-membering there is an increasing emphasis on collective, collaborative and sustainable ways of organising that rely on norms, structures and processes that are associated with the Third Sector. For each place, the global and local dynamics will play out differently in the development of idiosyncratic guiding principles and logics for local ways of organising based on the individual and often conflicting value-bases and visions of the community’s members.

There is a growing and significant literature on the theory and practice of collaborative and collective ways of (re)organising human service provision. Within this literature there is an enormous confusion about the language and ideas associated with approaches to collaboration and partnering. Many of the ideas are not new but rather have evolved over the past two to three decades and developed further with each ‘iteration’ of incoming governments. These new directions are considered ‘new’ ways of organising because of vastly different funding regimes and policy environs of the new (dis)order and not necessarily because they are using new models of organising. Policy initiatives and research have focussed on the state-third sector relationship at the macro policy-level and on articulating partnering at the micro service-level. While the basic mechanics of collaboration and partnership (stages, lifecycles, elements or necessary ingredients) are increasingly researched through analysis of collaborative outcomes or more generally breakdowns in collaborative endeavour there has been limited focus on the more nebulous collaborative action around meso-level multiple (and diverse) local issues and for multiple (and sometimes conflicting goals), that is, the re-membering of ways to (re)organise. To date there have been limited studies of principles and logics for building collaborative structures and processes to assist service providers at the local level increase the scope and effectiveness of their collaborative efforts in the changing human services environment.

This paper will report research findings on the principles and logics that played a part in community deliberations at one site (Cairns, Australia) on ways to (re)organise local structures and processes for collaborative action in the human services. This research project is part of a broader research program that aims to contribute conceptual advances on collaborative ways of organising in the Third Sector. Findings related to the second site in the program are reported in this paper (the process used in the first site was presented in a paper at ISTR 2002 Capetown).
The researchers are using a grounded theory approach in the overall research program. At each site, the researchers engage with an action learning group to identify and authenticate principles and logics of importance in local deliberations on ways of organising for collaboration. Action learning brings together a group of people with a shared concern for the purposes of reflection, learning and action. A process of reflection on existing practical cases of collaboration (non-local and local) and their potential use in the local context is used to stimulate dialogue about principles and logics that informed participants own re-membering and (re)organising. The emerging findings are providing a broader analysis of collaboration from a simplistic instrumental collaboration focus to transformational collaboration.