

Editorial statement, January 2017

Globally, local governments are struggling to tackle complex “wicked issues”, with increasing disenchantment and disengagement from traditional structures of representative democracy. Competing interests, frames and opportunities, as well as conflicting expert-knowledge, and the global dimension of many local issues, make the task of mayors, town councils, local experts, participating citizens, service delivery organisations ever more complex. In addition, in many countries, continued pressure on government budgets means growing service demands have to be met with constrained resources. These trends, are leading to a continued emphasis on innovation in: service delivery, administration and contracting-out (Bel, Brown *et al.* 2013); results-based management and procurement (Bovaird, Briggs *et al.* 2014); partnership and collaborative working (Coleman, Checkland *et al.* 2014); institutional reform and mergers (Drew, Kortt *et al.* 2016); and democracy, community engagement, empowerment and service co-production (Rolfe 2016). In addition, developments in e-governance and participation provide future challenges and opportunities for local governments and communities. These challenges, many of which continue from the previous *Editorial Statement* (Durose and Richardson, 2014) remain present and are in need of academic investigation and possibly solutions. *Local Government Studies* provides a leading, international outlet for insights into these challenges, and possibly solutions for practitioners.

Historically, with its roots in the Institute of Local Government at the University of Birmingham, *Local Government Studies* has produced high quality research on UK local government. The journal continues to reflect on the challenges to UK local government through high quality submissions, such as our recent symposium on austerity (Bailey, Bramley *et al.* 2015) and commentary from Lowndes and Gardner on the most recent rounds of reform, including the City Deals and “Northern Powerhouse” policies in Northern England (Lowndes and Gardner 2016). The journal’s international scope continues to increase, with scholars from Continental Europe, North America, South America, Asia and Africa increasingly joining the journal community.

A key challenge is maintaining a relevance to practice in local government, while the pressures on academic authors do not necessarily facilitate this. We maintain our commitment to empirical research about, and informing, practice as exemplified by the winner of the 2016 John Stewart prize for best paper *Regenerating the City: People, Politics, Power and the Public Sphere* (Bunyan 2016). Through our partnership with INLOGOV we are developing further channels to reach out to practitioners through blog posts supported by social media. This is supported by appointments to the Editorial Team and Editorial Board.

As an editorial team we welcome this increasing diversity. As Alan Cochrane in his famous 1996 book *Whatever Happened to Local Government* stated In relation to the UK, we also believe:

‘that local government – or, more accurately, local politics – matters and that what happens at local level cannot (and should not) be left as a secondary and marginal aspect of the British political system. On the contrary, not only (paradoxically) are local politics becoming more and more important, despite the decline in direct service responsibilities held by local authorities, but also local forms of political accommodation between key social groups are pointing to new styles of political practice which are of much wider significance.’

(Cochrane 1993: 5)

While the vote for the UK to leave the EU has focused British national politics on the supra-national, we believe Cochrane’s comments are as valid today as they were almost 25 years ago. So *Local Government Studies* will continue to be a diverse interdisciplinary journal, covering political science,

public administration and management, governance, policy analysis, urban studies, planning and social policy. It will use international, high-quality research to reveal what the “local” tells us about the “global”; and it will also advocate for the continued existence of a local government under increasing threat across the globe.

This editorial statement has been written with *Local Government Studies* continuing to strengthen as a leading international journal in political science, public administration and planning studies. As a new editorial team we are taking this opportunity to restate the aims and scope of the journal and consolidate. Now well into its fourth decade in publication, *Local Government Studies* continues to grow in importance as one of the leading journals on the politics and management of local and sub-regional government across the globe. This is in no small part due to the hard work of the previous editors, and we would like to take this opportunity to thank them publicly.

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