

# URBAN GOVERNANCE LEADERSHIP



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## Desirable Qualities

Local leaders - elected or appointed officials and municipal council members - play a critical role in setting policies and priorities and new directions for the future. Leaders are usually responsible for allocating resources and in maintaining the social, physical and environmental capital of a city. With variations on the theme, existing literature in the area of local leadership recognizes time-proven qualities or 'values' of good local leadership. These include the leader as a custodian, an arbitrator, a communicator, a manager, a person of vision and an agent of change, a public servant and an enabler, as well as a person of integrity. Each of these qualities takes on added significance in times of rapid urbanization and globalization and as cities become more complex in their social make up and cultural diversity.

## Custodian

The individual or collective leadership of a municipality is both the custodian of public assets and the arbitrator of how these assets are to be used. These assets include land and waterways, buildings, infrastructure, utilities, social, cultural and educational facilities, equipment and rolling stock. In many small and medium-sized settlements, these assets can represent the largest capital stock of the economy, surpassing the net worth of local private sector companies or enterprises. The management of these assets in times of relative economic and demographic stability appears to be quite straightforward. However, during times of rapid change, each of these assets has a tendency to become value-laden by different stakeholders and segments of the population. Such

'assigned values' differ according to age and gender, income and vocation, religious beliefs and cultural background, as well as the physical location of a given asset. Land constitutes a typical example where some groups may favour a use for green space while others would like to use it for commercial purposes. In times of rapid change, the custodian of such assets has the responsibility of forging a common and clear set of values that different stakeholders can adopt. These values serve as a guide in seeking cooperative means of meeting different needs and demands. Increasingly, these values also need to embody the principles of sustainability so that the allocation of resources and assets does not prejudice the ability of future generations to meet their needs.

## Communicator

Similarly, the mayor or municipal leader plays an important role as a communicator and must be able to articulate the concerns of the community and its various stakeholders, help shape these concerns into policy options and find the practical means for implementing them. Traditionally, local authorities have used a wide array of instruments for achieving this including town hall meetings, fora, focus groups, task forces, public hearings and meetings. Their purpose is to listen to people and foster dialogue to translate people's concerns into a commonly understood and acceptable set of issues and, in turn, to weigh different options for responding to them. While the ultimate decision lies with the political leadership, the transparency of the process leading to the final decision is of utmost importance and determines, to a large degree, the extent of trust that citizens will bestow on the mayor or the council. The emerging social and ethnic complexity of many cities, however, increasingly requires leaders to focus not only on transparent processes but also inclusive ones, and to give an effective voice to the disenfranchised and the poor. Representative democracy has proven in many places and on many occasions to be insufficient in this regard. On the one hand, minorities, recent immigrants and the urban poor, particularly women, may not be fully aware of their rights and may also be reluctant to exercise them for a variety of reasons. On the other hand, representative forms of governance also tend to cater to the most influential and vocal members and groups of society. Where political parties have a strong presence and expressed values, the political decision-making process is often subject to trade-offs or bargaining whereby initial issues may become obscured. In recent years, participatory democracy has made headlines in the media and in professional journals, as exemplified by the participa-

tory budget of Porto Alegre in Brazil. Other participatory instruments have also begun to make inroads, even in well-heeled democracies, such as citizen report cards, where the needs of people and the performance of government in responding to them are assessed directly by the people outside the electoral process.

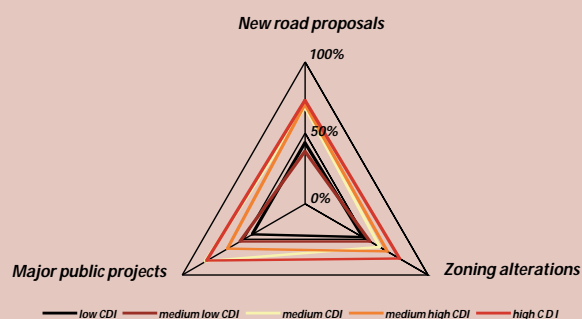
## Manager

Leaders are ultimately accountable for two things: responding to emerging issues, trends and the concerns of the people through effective policies and strategies, and ensuring that results are delivered using resources efficiently. While various legal and financial instruments have been used for a long time to help differentiate the role between the 'executive' and the 'administrative', this relationship can either be characterized by constant tension and misapprehension or by a symbiotic relationship of trust and understanding. Many local authorities have witnessed difficulties where newly elected mayors tend to perceive themselves as directly mandated by the people and that the administration is there to help them deliver their electoral promises. Education and training of elected officials are thus of critical importance to avoid such conflicts. In some countries, national policies limiting mayors to one term were put into place to avoid corruption and patronage, only to be subsequently changed to two terms to avoid the syndrome whereby leaders sought all 'legal' means to implement projects within a four- or five-year mandate. In some of the more mature cities and systems in developed countries, 'strong mayor' systems were introduced or re-introduced as a means of limiting the entrenched bureaucratic powers and red tape of local administrations. There are no perfect solutions. However, managerial qualities of local leadership are clearly required and need to be strengthened to strike an effective balance between the leader as a political spearhead and as the enabler and nominal head of a public service.

## Enabler

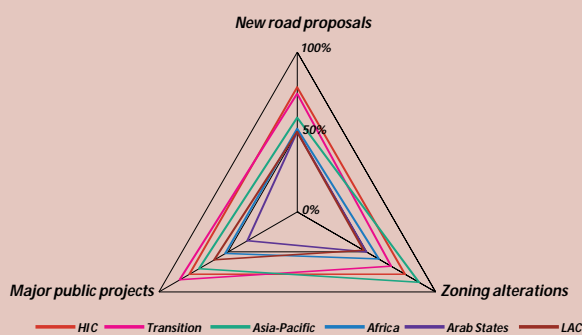
The opportunities as well as the impact of globalization and rapid urbanization require cities to forge a compelling vision of the future. While history provides cases of visionary leaders who contributed to the greatness of their cities and societies, the need for and capacity of local leaders to instill a shared vision for the future of their communities is increasingly apparent. Cities as engines of economic growth need to be increasingly competitive to attract investment, if only because citizens expect jobs and economic opportunity. At the same time, people are concerned with quality of life for themselves and their children and are increasingly pre-occupied with mitigating the negative impacts of production and consumption on environmental safety and health. An emerging trend in recent years is 'community visioning' whereby grassroots organizations, local industry and public authorities engage in a process of dialogue and concentration to define development priorities and action plans. An analysis of several hundred best practices in improving the living environment reveals that, when public authorities have supported and enabled community-based initiatives and interests, new forms of leadership have arisen, capable of mobilizing additional human, technical and financial resources and in leveraging existing ones. As much as central governments need to decentralize decision-making powers and resources to enable local authorities to provide responsive services to their citizens, the effectiveness of local leaders is increasingly dependent on their ability to empower others and to allow community and industry leaders to take the lead in local social and economic development initiatives and in playing a stewardship role in managing the urban environment.

### Citizen involvement in major planning decisions is more likely to occur in highly developed Cities



This graph shows to what extent cities involve civil society in formal participatory processes prior to new major roads and highway proposals, alteration in zoning and major public projects. A formal participatory process involves public announcement, processing of objections, public meetings and consultations, formation of oversight committees involving non-governmental organizations and public representatives. Highly developed cities (high City Development Index) show highest levels of participation. This result indicates that the level of participation and democratization in urban affairs is correlated with the level of city development.

### Citizen involvement in major planning decisions is more likely to occur in highly industrialized countries



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### Sharing real power in Porto Alegre, Brazil

The Porto Alegre Participatory Budget, involves civil society in a series of meetings designed to determine development priorities for poorer parts of the city. Organized by neighbourhood and by themes, citizens decide on the allocation of a portion of the budget of the city. The process also allows citizens to look at the previous year's expenditures and to review progress. While the municipal council reviews the proposals for overall planning and budgeting purposes, it cannot change the priorities nor the allocation itself. The participatory budget process was initiated by the mayor to promote a more democratic and inclusive city and as means to reduce corruption and the mismanagement of public funds.