

Debriefing paper of LORC after its visit to the UK (Liverpool and London)

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LORC team had a chance to visit England in investigating how LSPs work. Since the LSM manager in Liverpool had earlier visited LORC, it proved to be a very good learning opportunity for the LORC members to see what has been taking place on the ground with “our own eyes.”

Some of the major purposes of writing this debriefing paper is 1) to provide informally the overview by the LORC mission on how it viewed LSPs; 2) to provide the foundation on which further consultation between England stakeholders and LORC may continue.

This paper was prepared largely by Dr. Saito, and does not necessarily represent the consensus view of the LORC team, nor meant to represent definite conclusions. Instead this paper is meant for keep the consultation moving forward.

LSPs

There are two schools of thought on how to characterize the LSPs. The first camp primarily sees the LSPs as government-led initiative to improve inter-agency coordination to improve service delivery, which would become more responsive to the needs to citizens. The second position sees the LSPs primarily as an effort to regenerate local democracy because local election turnouts have been low and the extent of mandate that elected representatives enjoy is limited. These two schools are not necessarily mutually exclusive, and in reality economic and political aspects of LSPs are closely linked. Nonetheless, the first school emphasizes more on economic efficiency, while the second one relatively appreciates democratic values more than the economic rationale. Interestingly enough, even within the officers of the central government (ODPM), these two schools coexist.

Liverpool LSP

Applying these two schools is useful to examine the Liverpool case. Simply put, the evidence that the LORC team has gathered is strong to support the first school,

whereas evidence to back up the second school is relatively weak.

Rebuilding the city centre, improving the attractiveness of the waterfront, the paradise project to build a series of retail stores next to the waterfront, among others, represent that there has been a significant improvement of city's vital areas. Safety of the city has been significantly improved thanks to collaborative efforts of government agencies. The efforts to link variety of community groups have been initiated and 9 sub-groups are formed. But this networking remains probably relatively marginal in the overall LSP networks.

This situation probably signifies that the Liverpool case is an excellent example to improve the service delivery, while there remains a room for improving the democratic agenda. There has not been many examples in which the public, particularly the socially weak, had participated in public-policy making processes. Rather, it has been explained that their views were brought into the official decision-making processes by the LSP arrangements and some other mechanisms.

What enabled Liverpool to be successful?

There are a number of factors which made Liverpool exceptionally good as an LSP.

- good leadership to change the ways in which government agencies conduct perform their jobs:
- exceptional manager to connect diversified actors into a network:
- local politics in Liverpool being more tilted to the left, and are keen on social and environmental issues. (There are more Liberal Democrats than Labour representatives in the Local Council.)
- a significant number of citizens and community groups who are willing to partake in Liverpool LSP in order to improve the overall living standard:
- previous engagement(s) in similar partnership arrangement(s) generated useful historical experiences, which culminated in as LSP;
- EU funds provided to the deprived areas of Liverpool, and the funds enables the changes of Liverpool visible to the citizens:

Sustaining LSPs in the immediate future

A recent report, which was based on surveying all LSP managers in England, points out some issues which may affect the future of LSPs.

First, LSPs have been valued as a coordination body but has not started improving service delivery. The government officials and LSP managers appreciate that the LSPs have changed the ways in which government offices do their business. But what the public would like to see is not government reorganization per se, but its results. Fortunately, in Liverpool, there has been a series of tangible improvements that the public appreciate. However, unfortunately similar improvements have not reached many other areas of England. Thus, it may be said that Liverpool is an exception rather than a rule. This situation particularly makes the central government worrisome. Thus there are several important initiatives under discussion right now.

Second, training of stakeholders involved in LSPs have not been articulated, and filling this missing link is crucial to sustain LSPs. In many cases stakeholders, including local councilors, do not understand their roles adequately, let alone execute their functions effectively. Once again, Liverpool appears to be exceptional because the councillors seem to be reasonably comfortable with their roles, and collaboration between councillors and administrators does not seem to be problematic. In other places, this kind of coordinational relationship has not been generated. Thus, there is a growing recognition that training is indispensable to sustain LSPs.

Currently there are some training opportunities provided. LSP managers gather together and exchange their experiences. Some senior and more experienced LSP managers play a role of mentor to those with relatively less experiences. In addition, some organizations provide training to LSP managers and other stakeholders. For instance.

- Improvement and Development Agency (<http://www.idea-knowledge.gov.uk/>) hosts a variety of training programme for councilors and managers. Some of these include mentoring and exchange of best practices.
- Beacon Council also hosts some programme by awarding the best practice (annually?).
- There is a web-based learning for London LSP managers as well (<http://www.londonrenewal.net/>).

On the other hand, as some LSP managers and researchers agree, organizing what is required for LSP collaborators is far from easy. A new type of training is required to generate skills for councillors and/or LSP managers in understanding how each public, private, and community body works as well as how to negotiate agreeable outcomes in transcending boundaries of public, private and community spheres. This

kind of skills is learned usually from experiences and *not* easily transferable from books. Therefore academic institutions are not necessarily well suited to provide this kind of training. Instead, there needs to be a system to provide more practical training, some of which have already been initiated. It appears that this kind of new training emphasizes role paying, case studies, simulation and other methods in which participants are asked to make decisions in complex situations, which resemble as much as possible realities in LSP settings. ¹

Future of LSPs

Making LSPs statutory.

Since LSPs have been slow in delivering services, currently there is a plan to make LSP as a statutory body. There has been at least two statutory partnership arrangements in England, and LSPs may follow these precedents. This move may put the LSPs in an uneasy situation. On the one hand, the statutory status strengthens the authority of LSPs and may contribute to improve governance of LSPs themselves. Thus, the service delivery may be improved accordingly. On the other hand, powerful LPS organization makes the very notion of partnership at risk. The ethnic minorities and the socially weak participate in LSPs particularly because LSPs are voluntary and informal network of consultation. If LSP arrangements become coercive in enforcing agreements reached among the collaborators, then there would be a likelihood that some may no longer participate. This risk signifies that if LSPs pursue economic efficiency of service delivery, that can be achieved at the cost of ensuring the equal representation of socially weak groups in particular and local democracy in general.

Local Area Agreement

Since some LSPs are successful (such as Liverpool), a new idea to transform the current situation to what can be called Local Area Agreement (LAA) is parallel to the statutory issue. Under LAA, central and local governments agree on community development strategy, and central government provides funds for the local authorities which are in turn asked to deliver services. The LAA makes the role of nine regional offices in England more important than before as the main coordination bodies between the centre and local authorities. Essentially the same anxiety and dilemma of making

¹ Leadership Academy for local councillors would be useful for LORC for further review.

LSPs statutory applies here as well. LAA may makes LSPs more effective in service delivery but may endanger local democracy if not managed carefully.

Similarity between LSPs and PRSP/SWAP in developing countries

There is a extreme degree of similarity between LSPs in England and PRSP/SWAP in developing countries. The rational behind these ideas are essentially neo-liberal economics with a focus on institutional arrangements. The ways in which these are structured echo with other. And both aim for economic efficiency and to some extent democracy as well.

At the government level, ODPM and DFID (which are located next to each other in London!) are pursuing similar activities but their mutual dialogue appears to be extremely limited. In contrast, non-governmental organizations in overseas aid are conscious of making links between what they do domestically in the UK and in developing countries. For instance, Save the Children UK, address social inclusion and participation both in the UK and developing countries. This co-engagement at home and abroad enables them to consider these issues systematically. The same might be said for the government in the future, but the current situation needs a lot of rethinking.