



Chapter 1

After Neoliberalism? Community Activism and Local Partnerships in Aotearoa New Zealand

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Introduction: Partnership, Neoliberalism and Community Activism

According to a welter of rhetoric, policy documents and new initiatives, in Aotearoa New Zealand neoliberalism has been replaced by a new form of joined up, inclusive governance characterised by relationships of collaboration, trust and, above all, partnership. The new emphasis on partnership extends across economic, social and environmental governance ambits, and out into the very future well-being of the nation. A recent high-level policy document states:

Partnership is at the heart of the sustainable development approach. We want to engage with others who have a stake in the issues, and work together to develop and implement the programme of action. We want to build an innovative and productive New Zealand. The sustainable development approach will help us find solutions that provide the best outcomes for the environment, the economy and our increasingly diverse society. New Zealand's success in the modern world depends on this—so too does the wellbeing of future generations ... The government expects that others will recognise the partnership approach as our normal way of doing business. (Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet 2003)

The academic debate about the significance of the new partnership ethos, and its wider Third Way accoutrements, is much less conclusive. Indeed, there is acknowledged “methodological anarchy and definitional chaos” (Ling 2000:82) in this literature. Some see the rise of partnerships as an example of a “flanking compensatory mechanism for the inadequacies of the market mechanism” (Jessop 2002:455), whereas others venture that partnerships may represent a new form of social governance based on trust and collaboration (Clarke and Glendinning 2002; Newman 2001; Rhodes 2000).

Partnerships might signal a wider hybridisation process between markets and societies, wherein market competition and contractual obligations are “re-embedded” in an “inclusive” post-neoliberal consensus (Polanyi 1957; Porter and Craig 2004). Seen in this context, partnership could be part of the “roll out” of neoliberalism itself (Peck and Tickell 2002), the contested processes of experimentation through which various state agencies are trying to distance themselves from the more-market approaches of “roll back neoliberalism” and recreate conditions for social integration and the regulation of capitalism (Keil 2002:586). Or does partnership mark a return to a very old liberalism, the “positive” or “social liberalism” of enhancing capability, social investment and human capital stretching from J S Mill forward to Amartya Sen (1999) (itself powerfully implicated in the political legitimisation and accommodation of liberal market economics)?

National and regional differences further complicate the academic analysis of partnerships, just as they complicate and change our accounts of neoliberalism. Edwards et al, for example, stress that: “Partnership is neither a neutral term, nor one with a fixed definition; rather the meaning of ‘partnership’ is discursively constructed and contested through political rhetoric, policy documentation, programme regulations, and grassroots practice” (2001:295). Indeed, even in the United Kingdom, where partnerships have received considerable academic attention over the last decade, the discursive mobilisation of partnership is variously attributed to Thatcherism (Clarke and Newman 1997; Hastings 1996), the European Union (Edwards et al 2001:294), and Third Wayism (Newman 2001). Country-specific studies of the place of partnerships in restructured institutions, organisations and social relations also reveal significant differences. The Irish case, for example, is characterised by a neo-corporatist version of partnership that is the legacy of a national level tripartite agreement between sectoral interests (Walsh, Craig and McCafferty 1998), whereas in Canada the rise of partnership is usually attributed to the effects of neoliberal restructuring, the rise of contractualism, and the distancing of governments from direct service delivery (Brock 2002). More generally, there is also a long history of co-operation between public and voluntary agencies in the context of the “mixed social economy” of welfarism (Valverde 1995).

Seen collectively, these debates about the relationships between neoliberalism and partnership have the virtue of moving our understandings of neoliberalism well beyond that of a monolithic political project and the preference for a minimalist state. Further examination of this literature also suggests that strange organisational formations are emerging under the umbrella of partnership, and contradictory demands and tendencies are embedded within them. Indeed, as some

commentators have observed, the contradictory, historically contingent, features of partnerships may well be their most interesting feature—practically, politically and analytically (Clarke and Glendinning 2002:45). If so, understanding the specificities of partnership might help inform more adequate conceptualisations of neoliberalism, conceptions which are attentive to the contingency, political complexity and the different versions of neoliberalism found in different places (Larner 2000).

We ground our interest in these theoretical debates about the relationships between neoliberalism and partnership through an empirical focus on those people centrally involved in the creation and consolidation of local partnerships in Aotearoa New Zealand. To date, there has been analytic silence around the social characteristics, backgrounds and skills of the exponents and practitioners of partnership: those *working* the spaces of (and beyond?) neoliberalism. Rather, the “who” of partnerships has tended to focus on the different types of agencies and sectors involved, even though practitioner-oriented “how to” guides stress that “partnerships start with individuals, not organisations” (Wilson and Charlton 1997:25). Where particular social actors have received attention, it has tended to be in the context of demands for new skills. In the social policy literature, for example, it is argued that whereas earlier forms of social governance required managers with bureaucratic skills, partnership working requires management skills based on ability to network and promote change (Salamon 2002). In our research we have coined (or rather co-opted) “strategic brokers” (Reich 2001) as a new term for these people. But a new nomenclature still begs the question: just who are these so-called “partnership champions” (Audit Commission 1998)? What implications do their activities have for the forms local partnerships take in Aotearoa New Zealand? And what can we learn about neoliberalism from all this?

Our observation is that in Aotearoa New Zealand advocates of local partnerships are very often community activists who have been forced into, opted for, or been recruited into new “professionalised” roles in their efforts to advance social justice in a context marked by the legacy of nearly two decades of neoliberal experimentation, most notably (and locally) manifest in increased socio-spatial polarisation. Many see their current work as expressly about rebuilding the social links neoliberalism severed. As such, these new strategic brokers might be considered as prime exemplars of Polanyi’s (1957) “enlightened reactionaries” seeking to re-embed market society relations, or alternatively as pragmatic improvisers who unwittingly contribute to the hybrid, contested “rolling out” of neoliberalism. Their activities focus on “etho-political” (Rose 1999) forms of social governance, manifest in the re-territorializing, re-moralising emphases on

community, locality, civil society and family characteristic of “inclusive” liberalism (Craig 2003; Larner 2005; Porter and Craig 2004). Jessop (2002:461) associates this “neo-communitarian approach” with the “Schumpertarian Workfare Post-national Regime” (SWPR), which emphasises the contribution of the so-called “third sector” to economic development and social cohesion. He argues these efforts to empower community and citizen groups, which are focused on less competitive economic spaces such as inner cities, are “linked to efforts to manage issues of social exclusion and social cohesion at the urban level even in the most strongly neoliberal cases”.

In the discussion that follows we both historicise and politicise the rise of local partnerships and strategic brokers in Aotearoa New Zealand. In turn, this discussion complicates and nuances analyses of neoliberalism. We show that while efforts to develop partnerships were initially ad hoc and focused on bottom-up “grassroots” or “flax roots” initiatives, they have now begun to feed into new forms of local strategic policy making and co-ordinated service delivery. In turn, this has created a new role for community activists. One of the most visible signs of this new role is the formal identification by government agencies of “partnership managers” and “social entrepreneurs” as new types of networked policy and community actors. Both specifics and generalities of grassroots and wider politics enter the frame: we are particularly concerned that existing accounts may have overlooked the sheer hard work and long-standing efforts of social movements, community organisations and other grassroots organisations to make their voices heard in governmental processes (Brodie 1996a, 1996b; Larner 2000). In turn, these processes and features have implications for the specific forms local partnerships take in Aotearoa New Zealand. In the wake of profound neoliberal fragmentation, the complexity of the re-joining task is such that these agents find themselves palpably stretched, often carrying personally the enormous costs of reintegration. In this regard, the new strategic brokers appear not just to be governmentalised in their professional functions, but in their personal and political commitments too. If this is true, then the new form of governance being rolled out is not just embedded, it is also feminised and domesticated.

To substantiate these claims, we draw on the findings of a large project on local partnerships in Aotearoa New Zealand (see <http://www.lpg.org.nz>). We focus on developments at the national level and in Waitakere City, which is a key site both for the research project and for the development of local partnerships more generally. At the national level, we have examined 27 “headline” partnership programmes that bring together government agencies, local institutions and community organisations in new collaborative relationships. We have collated relevant background documentation, conducted key

informant interviews, and held two workshops in which our interim findings were shared with strategic brokers from central and local government. In Waitakere City, these more targeted exercises have been supplemented by extended participant observation and four “shared learning groups” that brought together academics, local politicians, policymakers and community-based practitioners. The findings from these exercises inform an analysis presented as follows. First, we overview and analyse the rise of local partnerships in Aotearoa New Zealand, identifying the role that community activists have played in shaping their distinctive characteristics. The following section shows that local partnerships are now being transformed from relatively ad hoc initiatives to formal governmental strategies. We identify and discuss the role of strategic brokers in this context, exploring the range of issues, including aspects of gendered professionalisation, that are arising as new positions are created for community activists in mainstream institutions. We conclude by returning to contemporary theorisations of neoliberalism and discussing the implications of our account.

Partnerships in Aotearoa New Zealand: History, Locality and Political Struggle

Aotearoa New Zealand is an ideal empirical research case from which to engage debates about the nature of neoliberalism, partnership and community activism. As a commentator observed in the late 1990s:

The neoliberal experiment in New Zealand is the most ambitious attempt at constructing the free market as a social institution to be implemented anywhere this century. It is a clearer case of the costs and limits of reinventing the free market than the Thatcherite experiment in Britain (Gray 1998:39).

Jessop (2002:457) also describes New Zealand during this period as the “least impure form of neoliberalism”. However, whereas during the 1980s and 1990s the policy emphasis was on marketisation, the “level playing field” and a minimal state, new issues have emerged as a consequence of sustained efforts to address issues of economic and social development in a context characterised by globalising economic processes, social polarisation and racialised poverty. Indeed, it can be argued that New Zealand’s neoliberal project has now been through three distinct “phases”: during the 1980s the state withdrew from many areas of economic production, while at the same time attempting to preserve—and even extend—the welfarist and social justice aspirations associated with social democracy; the more punitive phase of the early 1990s which saw an extension of the marketisation programme accompanied by the introduction of neo-conservative and/

or authoritarian policies and programmes in the area of social policy; a third phase in the late 1990s characterised by a “partnering” ethos and in which discourses of “social inclusion” and “social investment” sit awkwardly alongside more obviously neoliberal elements such as economic globalisation, market activation and contractualism (Larner 2003).

Partnerships have only recently explicitly entered into policy discourse in Aotearoa New Zealand and are most commonly understood to be an integral aspect of the third phase of neoliberalism: a response to the fragmentation of services associated with the earlier phases of neoliberal reforms. They are explained as effect of the efforts of the fifth Labour government to develop a local variant of “Third Wayism” (James 2002; Kelsey 2002). Certainly, there has been a great deal of inter-state policy learning with, for example, compacts between the government and the voluntary sector in Canada, the United Kingdom and New Zealand involving considerable consultation and mutual exchange amongst policy networks (Craig 2003; Phillips 2001). There is also a proliferation of pilot partnership programmes in which efforts are being made to link up central government, local institutions (including schools, hospitals and local government) and/or community and voluntary sector groups and Iwi/Maori groups. Our research has identified a wide range of these projects including community health plans; interagency well being strategies; Iwi and urban-Maori service delivery; full service schools; health and education action zones; safer community programmes; area-based employment and training projects and “one stop shops” for government services. In the most general terms, the aspiration is that these multi-level collaborative arrangements will meet local needs, solve seemingly intractable social problems, build community capacity and support local development efforts (Loomis 2002). We are calling these initiatives local partnerships in an effort to distinguish them from other forms of interagency and collaborative working.

Our claim is that these local partnerships have their antecedents in earlier periods. Specifically, many of the initiatives now called local partnerships have their origins in the long-standing efforts of local activists and community development advocates to resist policies and processes associated with the earlier versions of neoliberalism. We begin by observing that partnership as a principle of working in social services has a long provenance in New Zealand. For example, a prominent entry into policy discourse came in the 1970s when lottery funding allowed a plethora of so-called “non-statutory” (or voluntary) sector agencies with health, disability and welfare foci to take their place alongside more established community agencies such as the Intellectually Handicapped Children’s Association (founded in 1949) and the Marriage Guidance Service (founded in 1948, linked to Department of Justice funding since 1960). During the 1980s,

following the election of the fourth Labour government, there were partnership initiatives in housing (Housing Corporation of New Zealand 1990), employment training and work skills development, community welfare, day and foster care (Social Advisory Council 1986). Community development networks were actively promoted, sometimes from within offices of the Department of Social Welfare, and also in umbrella forums (McClure 1998:148). Perhaps most crucially, however, during this period the emergence of “partnership” as a core rubric in debates around the Treaty of Waitangi gave a particular urgency to the development of new relationships between government and community (see, for example, Ministry of Maori Affairs 1988; State Services Commission 1989).

Yet, despite these early examples of partnership working, by the late 1980s the dominant ethos was that of competitive contractualism, reflecting the sustained move towards managerialism in the public sector. This move was cemented by the introduction of the Public Finance Act (1990) and a new focus on output-based accountability regimes. It has been widely discussed how the shift to contract culture saw an expansion in the accounting and reporting infrastructure of community and voluntary organisations, with an associated need for staff to perform these functions (Conradson 2002). Not only did this see an expansion in the size and scale of many organisations, it also saw increasing professionalisation as volunteer’s roles were formalised with an associated increase in training and skill development. However, in contrast to other countries, in New Zealand these individuals were often self-motivated and self-funded (Wilson et al 2001). Increasing numbers of people within subcontracting agencies and organisations, including many with years of practical and political engagement, began (or were forced) to gain formal qualifications, as the new skills were required of them. A good example is provided by the workshops the Women’s Refuge ran on contractualism, based on a handbook produced for them by a legal academic (Seuffert and McGovern 2000). One consequence was that community organisations increasingly became a key site for de-centralised professional and technical capacity. In many cases this gaining of professional and technical expertise was complemented by hearty political engagement, powerfully motivated by anger over the impact of neoliberalism. As one interviewee emphasised:

You know, we grew our leaders through experience. Years and years of taking the hits, surviving the hits, and forming our views.

For many community activists the impact of competitive contractualism on existing collaborative modes of working was devastating. Explicit competition undercut trust, and contractual obligations narrowed operational focus to individual clients and specific objectives.

Community workers found themselves compelled to devote disproportionate time representing their work through reporting frameworks they found objectionable and alien. Client focus, teamed with a new emphasis on confidentiality, served to undermine day-to-day interagency practice. New providers entering the market profoundly and continually fractionated existing fields of working. Relationships with central government funding agencies were characterised by bruising and repetitive negotiations, and the emphasis on narrowly specified outputs submerged issues widely understood as needing more broad-based and longer-term interventions.

This new ethos also radically reconfigured public sector accountabilities, expressing them in objectified output terms that encouraged public servants to define and delimit their “core business”. New departmental demarcations and sharply focused job descriptions, developed in a context that expressly valorised competition and greatly impinged on the ability of public servants to work across departmental boundaries. Moreover, the new distinction between policymaking and service provision that arose out of the discourse of “provider capture” led to the “disembedding” of the content-based knowledge previously integral to the public sector. In management positions, actors such as medical directors and school inspectors were increasingly displaced and subordinated by those with more generic forms of knowledge (managers, accountants and auditors). One consequence was that many of those in the public sector with a political commitment to more collective modes of working found official agencies increasingly alien environments and exited—frustrated, even bitterly disappointed.

Despite, or perhaps because of, the hostile environment many contemporary partnerships have their basis in this period. For those in the social services, in part because of their “client” focus and basis in shared professional aims and practice, the high cost and destructiveness of competition was obvious. Among these actors, there was both an expressed preference to work in more collaborative ways, and a sense of relationships that might frame this action. Further, because competitive contractualism didn’t explicitly fund coordination, it created a vacuum into which agencies such as Barnadoes and Presbyterian Support Services could move in order to contest neoliberalism on the basis of a shared orientation to local issues. Indeed, it could be argued that their strong values and sense of common imperatives were actually sharpened by lack of funding, and by the seeming intransigence of central authorities in the face of local needs. Local collaboration, often on “the smell of an oily rag”, became a rallying issue for both organisations and professionals, an issue that sharpened their position and practice against prevailing winds seen as socially divisive.

During the 1990s a range of central government initiatives created new forums in which locally based skills in advocacy and contest could be further developed, including the establishment of locality-based social programmes such as Regional Employment and Access Councils (REACs), Social Welfare District Executive Committees (DECs), and the Community Organisation Grants Scheme (COGS). Later, short-lived area health boards offered local opportunities for community interventions around health. Local government reform also created territorial authorities with comparatively large resource bases and significant planning responsibilities. Reluctance on the part of central government agencies to devolve mandates or share revenue with these local authorities created a domain of contestation and some local councils began to adopt advocacy and coordinating roles around issues such as social well-being. Together, these initiatives further raised the prospect of an increasingly professionalised cadre of local actors who had advocacy roles linked to central government, relationships with other professionals and practitioners, and ties with community and voluntary networks. The story below is not unusual:

I had been involved in setting up a co-operative that was done in a very community development way. And then there was the establishment of a community initiative to address unemployment and self-employment issues. This small unit was the precursor to the current Community Employment Group so when that was set up and space was made for a 0.5 fieldworker, I became that. I was also on the REAC committee. Then the unit was amalgamated with other small units of a similar ilk. And the new boss, after a couple of conversations, said to me I want you to come and work in Wellington for six months. So I went to Wellington and was suddenly involved in developing and implementing funding programmes, writing briefing notes to the Minister of Finance, helping with the reorganisation and amalgamation process.

There was also a local dimension to these career trajectories, especially in greenfield suburban and urban fringe developments of the 1960s and 1970s, where social services were not yet well established, and activists were able to move up through voluntary organisations into senior roles. As one activist manager recalls:

... we strongly believed in the need to have our own identity, to be in control of our own destiny. People together making decisions for themselves—not being “done to”. We just did it. We had a strong belief in it and in our ability to do it. It was for the benefit of our children and we grew strong as a community from it. Playcentre gave me, and many other women in the community, the opportunity for

personal growth through the training programme. That was a major turning point for me and set me off on an unintended career path.

It is important not to underestimate the identity politics to all of this. Feminists and Maori (sometimes embodied in the same person) played central roles in these processes, as did locality-based solidarities. Thus, while these “social movements” had begun from grassroots struggles defined in opposition to mainstream institutions, during this period activists were more increasingly likely to engage from within these institutions. Nor is it coincidence that this was the period of mass participation in tertiary education. The increasing numbers of people entering into formal study, particularly in education, health and the social sciences, further fostered both the development of new professional capacities in social sector organisations (as the demand for contract managers and financial expertise continued to grow) and further professionalisation of community actors and activists. The story below is typical:

I moved from being a Mum, doing my training, and I went and worked at the HELP Foundation doing crisis work with raped, abused women. Then I became involved in a group that wanted to set up services in Waitakere ... What was a very organic community based service then grew from people getting together with the statutory agencies ... identifying the needs, going to the City Council.

Finally, these institutional developments had a symbiotic relationship with the rise of a new cohort of activists. In the context of growing inequality, and with the funding and professionalisation imperatives described above, some community groups began to refocus their efforts. Often these struggles involved efforts to embed policies and programmes in particular places and communities by emphasising the importance of local knowledges and local accountabilities. While the so-called “Maori renaissance” was a strong and leading case for this politicisation, with wider ripple effects, long-standing community development discourses were also central to these efforts. Although these were framed as the political claims of the flaxroots/grassroots, often key community representatives and NGOs found themselves cast in the position of “surrogates” for community voices. New types of community entrepreneurs thus began to play an important role in articulating the claims of a transformed grassroots that more fully understood the political significance of strategic networks and the reform of governmental programmes as a key aim.

Overall, therefore, the changes associated with earlier forms of neoliberalism involved an enormous shifting upwards of gears for

non-government service providers, community agencies and political activists. This provides a crucial context for understanding the rise of local partnerships in Aotearoa New Zealand. Many of these organisations and activists struggled for over two decades to maintain themselves in the context of competitive contractualism. In this process, they survived the thin promises and often frank duplicities of the neoliberal engagement with “civil society”. They also learned new ways of contesting policy agendas and how to position themselves in relation to local competitors, particular populations and local needs. Thus a crucial, yet unexpected, consequence of the earlier periods of neoliberalism was the emergence of community activists both as highly skilled and articulate organisational leaders and lobbyists. But should we think about these people in the “positive liberal” terms of newly capable, active liberal subjects working in new domains of empowerment, and doing the same by enabling their clients? To answer this question, we need to consider the wider context in which they now operate.

Governmentalising Partnership: The Rise of Mandatory Partnership Working

It was the election of the fifth Labour government that saw sustained efforts to formalise partnerships, manifest in the recent *Statement of Government Intentions for an Improved Community–Government Relationship* (New Zealand Government 2001), which expresses the desire to develop new relationships between national government, local institutions and communities. From the highest levels, partnership working is urged in normative terms. Policy makers argue that strengthening local communities through the mechanism of local partnerships will help New Zealanders to respond more positively to economic and social change. There is a broad consensus amongst politicians and practitioners alike that rebuilding institutional infrastructure through the fostering of collaborative relationships will allow for the sharing of “best practice” knowledge and practices, and more nuanced understandings of the local needs those practices must meet. In both economic and social arenas there is a marked effort to institutionally re-embed a wide range of activities that during the previous period were seen through “more market” lenses. In turn, this is giving rise to new hybrid forms of governance that fuse policy-makers and communities, and erode the purchaser–provider split that was previously so important in the New Zealand context. Nor is this simply rhetoric. Considerable resources are now being devoted to linking together various initiatives, encouraging mutual learning and identifying “best practice” partnerships.

It is in this context that local partnerships have come to the centre stage politically and practically. One consequence is a shift from partnerships as localised initiatives that emerge out of the activities of a group of like-minded individuals and/or organisations, to partnership working as a “mandatory tool” in the social sector. In other words, local partnerships are now being codified and made governmental (Larner and Butler 2005). Despite scepticism in the international literature on partnerships, and indeed amongst some of the players themselves, it is widely assumed that partnerships are mutually beneficial and that efforts to “join together” different organisations will create more than the sum of the parts. The ambition is that these partnerships will draw together the otherwise separate institutional worlds of central, local government and community organisations, and allow these to be more closely aligned with the needs of specific locales. Not surprisingly, given the context outlined above, this was by no means a one-sided, top-down development:

What happened out here—and it wasn’t a new start, what they did was build on what was already there—organisations got together. Those delivering either similar sorts of services, or services that could be running parallel or linking up in some way, and said Let’s plan *together*. So, for instance, in Mental Health Services, all the Mental Health organisations got together, *with consumers*, and that’s when “shared vision” was created . . . What they did was set up a way, that when they wanted to put proposals forward for funding, they actually got the mandate of the wider group. So in other words, they were working collaboratively in a competitive environment. The same thing happened with services for abuse and trauma, sexual abuse and so on. They’ve set up the best practice stuff. They’ve set up, too, a whole lot of networks. They’ve set up organisations and umbrella groups and networks.

This governmentalisation of local partnerships is embedded within distinctive policy rationales. In particular, the shift in policy documents from the discourse of community development to that of social capital is notable. Indeed, it is the strong influence of social capital discourse that underpins current efforts to map local services, measure community resources and create inventories of social service organisations and activities. In turn, this is reshaping understandings of community. Rather than “community” being a self-sufficient sphere separate from “state” and “market”, consider the following claim; “Communities are the point where the public sector, private sector and voluntary sector meet and interact” (Loomis 2002:6). Moreover, “strengthening” communities is defined as a capability/investment process. Not only is the “social capital” of different “communities” calculable (see Robinson 1997), so too can it accumulate and grow

through the mechanism of local partnerships. Moreover, the joining up of the etho-political domains of community under rationales of collaboration, consensus and partnership is at once de-politicising and embedding of previous disaggregations (Harriss 2001; Porter and Craig 2004). But from an “on the ground” perspective, community is also a natural, doable field of operations: a field that locally based brokers can mobilise:

We recognised it was really important to work with the really active groups that we had out here anyway, keeping *close* contact with environmental groups, ratepayer groups, particularly the key ones in those early days ... They were far more active in working with the other groups. Then there were key people in the community that also needed to be kept on board with it. So what we did, we made sure that we were actually involving them right from the very early stages with talking about what we might be doing. They could see that it wasn't our idea, that what we were doing was actually pulling together into a framework the stuff that they'd been pushing for, for so long.

The actual techniques through which local partnerships are being codified are varied. For example, government departments are supporting the construction of databases, searchable web pages, funding guides, checklists, and best practice manuals. As part of this process, partnerships are being increasingly delineated from other less formal forms of inter-agency working (such as alliances, collaborations, coordination, cooperation, networks, joint working, multi-party working groups).¹ There is a growing consensus that partnerships are characterised by formal agreements. At the same time, the new approach is understood to require ways of working that are more citizen focused, relationship based and collaborative. The most common solution to the apparently contradictory demands for both formal agreements and more consensual ways of working are Memorandums of Understanding, which establish the respective roles and responsibilities of the partners. In these highly aspirational agreements there is a strong emphasis on values as the basis for relationships between different levels of government and the community sector (keywords include honesty, trust, diversity, integrity, compassion and caring). Thus “relational contracting” is emerging as a key mechanism for government agencies, replacing the more hierarchical contracts that predominated in earlier periods.

Finally, as partnerships are being formalised and distinguished from contracts, consultation and collaboration, government departments are now starting to employ individuals whose task is to build partnerships and other collaborative relationships between government departments, non-governmental organisations, Maori, local

government and communities. These actors are focused on both growing local capacity and central government's new concerns to efficiently and effectively "join up" local services towards wider policy ends (Review of the Centre 2002). As we saw above, these changes have been driven in part by the rising capacity of professional activists and others at local and central levels. However, with the governmentalisation of partnerships, it is now the official discourses of partnership that nurture the expansion of partnership working. What implications does this have for the roles of the community activists? The next section focuses more specifically on the rise of "strategic brokers" and the new roles they have begun to play.

Strategic Brokers: Activism, Inclusion and Networks

Our argument is that, with the rise of mandatory partnership working, community activists have begun to take on new roles, wherein not just their professional skills and their relationships with civil society organisations are recognised, but also their "soft skills" and commitments: networking, relationship management, and local/sectoral activism. Most immediately, the governmentalisation of local partnerships is reinforcing the role of those strategic brokers who in multiple institutional and community sites emerged as advocates for both their organisations and more relational forms of practice during the earlier neoliberal periods. There have long been local network coordinator roles in community development and social services. These new roles bring not just all those responsibilities, but also an ability to articulate them into the multiple levels of governance now emerging as vital partnerships contexts. There is also a growing demand for what the social policy literature calls "partnership champions" (Audit Commission 1998) or "reticulists" (Challis et al 1988); those committed and charismatic individuals who can drive changes through organisations in a context where the role of key individuals, and the relationships between them, is understood as central to the successful creation of local partnerships.

It is widely recognised by both academics and practitioners that the most successful partnership working has strong leadership. Moreover "partnership champions" require a different skill set to that emphasised by competitive contractualism. Hudson et al. (1999: 251), for example, claim that their characteristics are likely to include not only technical or competency-based factors, but also social and interpersonal skills. Similarly, Rhodes (2000:355–356) notes that the attribute of "diplomacy" or "management by negotiation" lies at the heart of successful managerial strategies in the current period (he contrasts this with the "hands off" management or the arms-length

relationships associated with the “macho manager”). More generally, it is understood that effective partnership working requires the ability to build trust, reciprocity, understanding and credibility. In particular, the value of individuals who can work across boundaries is increasingly recognised, as are “enablement” skills required to engage multiple partners. It is these skills we recognise through our use of the term strategic broker:

Relationships are about personal management. The strategic broker is operating at both an organisational and individual level.

In the New Zealand context, at least two distinct roles have emerged for the new strategic brokers: “partnership managers” who are most likely to be located within government agencies, and “social entrepreneurs” who are more likely to be locally based in either territorial authorities or community organisations. In each case, however, these roles are now being formally identified in restructured institutional structures, policy documents and programme design. Moreover, in addition to the technical knowledges vital to both professional practice and wider policy strategy, these new institutional actors are required to have the new “soft skills” identified above. As one put it:

The difference between coordination and strategic brokering is that a coordinator just brings people together, yet a strategic broker brings them together and sees what needs to happen to take things further, and gets on and does it. They have the vision, the networks and the practical implementation skills to take things a whole step further.

“Partnership managers”, for example, must have not only sectoral and technical expertise, but also knowledge of government and community networks. Moreover, it is assumed they come with this knowledge rather than these being skills learned on the job. We note with interest that existing knowledge of particular networks is now being regularly written into job descriptions. The Partnerships Manager for Housing New Zealand, for example, is required to have not only “knowledge of third sector housing”, but also “excellent networking abilities” and fluency in Maori and/or Pacific languages is also identified as an advantage. Similarly, the Ministry of Education recently created a position for a Senior Partnerships Advisor focused on Iwi and Maori education partnerships. This position, which deals with issues of strategic planning, risk assessment and financial management, requires not only sectoral expertise, but also “an understanding of partnership and effective relationship management” and “the ability to operate effectively in a predominantly Maori environment”. As one relationship broker recently noted in a workshop, for the first

time her skills in maintaining quality relationships are being formally recognised in her national strategic partnerships role. As another put it:

There is a lack of boundaries, the expectations are ridiculous. There is a need for all sorts of things in the job, from multiculturalism to self-inspection/reflection.

In contrast to the partnership managers, those named as “social entrepreneurs” are more likely to be firmly rooted in the local or community context, often affiliated to voluntary or community organisations. Unlike partnership managers who are networked to other government agencies as well as their “partners”, the priority for social entrepreneurs is that they have local knowledge. “Social entrepreneurs”, says Loomis (2002) are “community advisors who empower, mentor and facilitate”. The Minister for Social Services explains: “By taking the same approach to risk, opportunity and innovation as a business entrepreneur, social entrepreneurs grow social capital in the same way those in the business world build their balance sheets”. He goes on to explain: “A key feature of social entrepreneurship is the use of partnerships” (Maharey 2001). As with the partnership managers, the once informal networking of these local actors is being increasingly formalised. For example, at the end of 2001 the first New Zealand Conference on Social Entrepreneurship was held (in the capital city of Wellington!). There is also a growing tendency for social entrepreneurs to be institutionally located because this gives them access to funding and resourcing. To give an example, the government recently committed three years of salary to pay for a social entrepreneur in Highbury, a poor suburb in a provincial town that had been experiencing gang-related issues.

In both cases, however, these “strategic brokers” spend a great deal of time building and maintaining relationships because no policy or strategy is now complete or legitimate without evidence of consultation and/or collaboration. In the broader strategic context it is also important to avoid overlaps, sort out niches, and create wider platforms to legitimate the work of their organisations. This is precisely the domain of their expertise: explicitly geared to *process* issues, they can facilitate, mediate and negotiate, nurture networks, and deploy cultural knowledge and local knowledge in ways that enable traditionally “silent” voices to be heard along with the articulate, persistent and powerful (Community and Voluntary Sector Working Party 2001:70). These skills are both embodied and deeply personalised, and rely on well-developed abilities to network; although, more recently, electronic means of consultation and strategy have been used, including the web pages and databases mentioned previously.

But these are not the only knowledges that strategic brokers require. The new forms of professional knowledge and practice require not only knowledge *of* communities but also knowledge *about* communities. Technical knowledges around emerging social issues are developing rapidly, including developments in population information (surveys, social mapping, area-referenced social deprivation indices) and public health information based on social epidemiology. While initially harnessed to neoliberal attempts to better target government resources, these tools are now being used to support the arguments for the redistribution of social services amongst local populations. While by no means uncontested by other modes of local political power (most notably, clinical medicine; see Tenbensel 2001), such information is being used by the strategic brokers to provide hard evidence of the misdistribution of services and resources, and the cross cutting aspects of social deprivation, health, well-being, safety, employment and education. All of these issues emerge as conspicuous within particular local places, strengthening the ambit of the brokers who are developing local partnerships to address social issues.

Thus, in the composite forms of governance emerging under the umbrella of “local partnerships”, new roles are being created for those who once understood themselves as oppositional voices. In turn, this marks a new phase in the professionalisation of community activists as once informal activities are increasingly formalised. This phase is being further facilitated by an increasing tendency for movement of personnel between government departments, local government and community groups, both through permanent movements and through mechanisms such as secondments. Inevitably, because of the mix of skills needed, those who fill these positions will not only be required to exercise new forms of leadership and management skills, they are also expected to introduce new cultures of working and learning into their institutions. Their positions involve commitment and enthusiasm, as well as ongoing attempts to link personal and organisational values. Of course, the demand for constant networking also often leads to over commitment and the intensification of labour. Finally, perhaps unsurprisingly, the vast majority of these actors are women:

Quite simply, women, often because they raise families, are the relationship builders and therefore it's not surprising that they are more process-oriented because they are used to looking after people, trying to look after their interests, hearing their voices, trying to work out ways of dealing with things.

All this could be cast in empowering, socially progressive terms. However, its gendered inflection also raises suspicions about the

broader implications of strategic brokerage. As Roelvink and Craig (2005) argue, women are not only charged with the usual double shift of professional earnings and homemaking/housework, there is now a new version of a third shift in which their domesticated duties and practices spill over into the “emotional labour” (Hochschild 1983) required by these new forms of governance. Given the enormous transaction costs involved in re-embedding economic and social activities after “more market” oriented forms of neoliberalism, this mobilisation of un- and underpaid labour, and the expansion of governmentalising ambits into feminised and domesticated realms, becomes perhaps a bit less surprising. Moreover, what is happening in this new form of governance is that local coordination (and strategic brokers) is compensating for the inability of government agencies to overcome a highly silo-ised, vertically accountable regime in an effort to achieve social change. While the shifting of responsibilities and shared accountabilities to the local level legitimates “after neoliberalism”, and may be seen to address the worst failings of earlier forms of neoliberalism, this it is not the same as government agencies and communities being jointly accountable for social outcomes.

Conclusion: After Neoliberalism?

We have emphasized how local partnerships in New Zealand depend on strategic brokers. These are often community activists whose role and function is now attaining more specific recognition within organisations and in job descriptions. However, the political context of their work remains fraught, with their activities directly linked to the politicisation of local issues, while at the same time they are increasingly required to make their political claims technical, or turn their contests into collaboration. Moreover, while their expertise in process often enables shrewd political positioning, the wider contexts of political contest, organisational pluralism, identity politics, as well as rapidly developing technologies of information, consultation and surveillance continue to stretch strategic brokers in their day-to-day practice. We have also emphasised that the emerging partnership ethos is profoundly gendered, with women disproportionately represented in these brokering roles. But what does this tell us about the broader, “post-neoliberal” political environment within which these partnerships and the strategic brokers are operating?

This process we have described could be interpreted as exemplifying increased state penetration into the community and voluntary sector by a state seeking partners with whom it can act out community consensus without reducing core market orientations. Here, the “shadow state” (Wolch 1990) is being given wider ambit, but with its increased political capability firmly channelled into minimising the

fallout from earlier phases of neoliberalism, which has barely had its core tendencies otherwise reined in. In this way, the neoliberal state gets to have its contractual cake, and eat it too, courtesy of the expanded domestic domains of feminised strategic brokers. Because there are no preconceived limits to the transfer of heightened transaction costs of joining up neoliberal fragmentation to strategic brokers, there are, therefore, no limits to the range of skills these newly engaged brokers will be asked to deploy. Whether all this adds up to a new partnering state that is substantively post-neoliberal remains to be seen. Plausibly, though, a complex, re-gendered re-embedding of state, community and market relations is emerging, with strategic brokers providing all sorts of legitimating, rejoining and realigning labour. In this configuration, basic neoliberal settings will persist, but in a new, itself shifting hybrid, based on expansion into previously less governmentalised modes of domestic and social engagement.

What this also shows is that wider neoliberal settings seem to require legitimation and embedding from less than neoliberal subjectivities operating in less than neoliberal local spaces and domains. What is not so clear, however, is the ability of would-be “post-neoliberal” activists and projects to reach up from these localised domains and colonise wider political and governmental projects to the point where key statutory and policy frameworks underpinning neoliberal settings are changed, and real post-neoliberal, territorial accountabilities for social outcomes are possible. For example, in New Zealand the Public Finance Act underpins a continued emphasis on contractualism and a narrow, market-contested output accountability regime. Strategic brokers are more involved in making up for the shared accountability shortcomings of the Public Finance Act than they are in designing its demise. This is not to say, however, that all this is merely co-option. As our research shows, many of these strategic brokers know exactly the kinds of unreasonable demands being placed on them, but are determined, against whatever structural constraints, to make the most of the new situation.

Finally, we argue that this case exemplifies an argument that neoliberal spaces and subjectivities are not simply imposed from above, nor is “resistance” simply a bottom-up political response to macro-level structural processes. Rather, new governmental spaces and subjects are emerging out of multiple and contested discourses and practices. Seen from this point of view, neoliberalism is likely to have many varied effects, and be subject to re-embedding contests in diverse, locally specific ways. Not only is neoliberalism a political-economic process that aspires to foster globalisation, marketisation and entrepreneurship, paradoxically it could also constitute a rallying cry for various sites of community. In this context, explicating further

the contradictory spaces and subjects associated with different forms and phases of neoliberalism, both in New Zealand and more generally, would make a major theoretical and empirical contribution to contemporary debates.

Acknowledgements

This research was funded by the New Zealand Foundation for Research Science and Technology Project UOAX0233. Earlier versions were presented at a Workshop on New Welfare State Architectures, Boston, 2002 and the Annual Meeting of the American Association of Geographers, New Orleans, 2003. Our thanks to the other members of the Local Partnerships and Governance Research Group for their intellectual engagement, to Megan Courtney and Maria Butler for their research collaboration, and to the referees and editors for their generous and constructive comments.

Endnote

¹ We are very conscious our project is also contributing to the broader process of naming, categorizing and constituting local partnerships.

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