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Governing Cities in the Coming Decade: The Democratic and Regional Disconnects

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## Governing Cities in the Coming Decade: The Democratic and Regional Disconnects

### Part II: The Future of Local Government

*How will cities be governed in 2020? The answer will depend to a significant degree on reducing two “disconnects”: one between municipal government and its citizenry, and the other between municipal government and its region. Elected, managerial, and intellectual leaders need to strengthen their understanding, capacities, and skills regarding public engagement and regional engagement across jurisdictional boundaries. Enhanced performance of these functions will improve cities’ ability to address problems and seize opportunities in the decade ahead.*

Two fundamental governance relationships—citizens with government and government with other governments in the region—have become salient challenges for municipal leaders. These challenges will be exacerbated by rapid and significant change in the coming decade—for example, as cities encounter continuing economic and fiscal turmoil and social and demographic change. Considerable experience has accumulated that can be drawn on to enable local governments to meet these two challenges. In order to successfully address the many policy and program issues that local governments will face, elected, managerial, and intellectual leaders need to strengthen their understanding, capacities, and skills regarding public engagement and regional engagement across jurisdictional boundaries. Enhanced performance of these functions will improve cities’ ability to address problems and seize opportunities in the decade ahead.

This essay begins by offering further analysis of the two governance relationships that require attention. There then follows a historical note and discussion of why these relationships are now paramount. Next, there is discussion of several illustrative changes in significant problem areas that are already burdening

local leaders and that highlight the need to improve the two governance relationships. The fourth section of the essay provides new research findings and further discussion that shed light on roles and skills regarding citizen engagement and regional engagement. The essay ends with a brief summary and concluding note.

### The Two Disconnects

City government can be most successful when its mission and methods are well adapted to its context. As both municipalities and their contexts changed and diverged over the twentieth century, the perceived success and legitimacy of municipal functions became less assured and more contested.

The result has been a substantial disconnect in each of the two fundamental governance relationships. At present, municipal government and the citizens of the city often fail to share the same assumptions about how democratic governance should function. We may call this the “democratic disconnect.” In addition, any municipal jurisdiction is now only one part of a greatly enlarged region; the many jurisdictions in a region too often fail to acknowledge and act on their shared situation and fates. We may call this the “regional disconnect.”

These disconnects affect different places in different ways. Especially vulnerable to the negative effects of the democratic and regional disconnects may be places that do not have a history of dealing with major change or new phenomena and thus lack relevant governance capacity. A current example is places that have received many new immigrants but have not been immigrant “gateways” in the past. Another example is smaller suburban jurisdictions with low staff capacity that are struggling with the effects of foreclosures.

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Given the current political turmoil around the economic and financial crisis and the prospect of other significant and difficult changes over the next decade, this situation seems about to get worse. Local governance will continue to be more fraught and difficult than it need be until cities can develop better democratic and regional relationships. On the other hand, the search for better techniques and mind-sets is already in evidence in much local practice; in the public administration, political science, regionalism, and democratic practice literatures; as well as in the offerings of trainers and consultants (e.g., Cooper et al. 2005; Dodge 1996; Foster 2001; Gates and Rubio-Cortés 2009; Leighninger 2006; Lemme 2008). Many ideas and tools for addressing the disconnects are already known to and used by local leaders, so the possibility exists that the situation could significantly improve by 2020. The outcomes and the nature of local governing processes over the decade depend importantly on the choices and actions of local leaders as they confront the challenge of forging stronger connections with citizens and with other governments.

### The Origins of the Disconnects: An Historical Note

Public and regional engagement too often are viewed as obstacles or deficits—extra steps that get in the way of real decision making and action in city hall. Municipal leaders will achieve stronger governance to the extent that they start seeing these forms of engagement as potential assets—as part of the solution. This, in turn, is most likely to happen to the extent that these leaders can appreciate the underlying necessity of addressing the democratic and regional disconnects.

Were these relationships ever more connected than they are today? The answer is yes. In *City: Urbanism and Its End* (2003), Douglas Rae describes a complex balance between city governments' missions and methods and broad acceptance of semipublic roles for residents and organizations. He defines "urbanism" as "patterns of private conduct and decision-making that by and large make the successful governance of cities possible even when city hall is a fairly weak institution" (Rae 2003, xiii). This once actual but now long-gone form of "urbanism" occurred in the central municipal jurisdictions that dominated their urban regions at the height of the industrial era, predominantly in the Northeastern and Midwestern regions of the United States. The connection between city hall and its civic and regional contexts diminished over the course of the twentieth century.

"[U]rbanism . . . emerged between the 1870s and the 1920s and . . . continued, *with increasing attenuation*, into the later decades of the twentieth century" (Rae 2003, 16–17; emphasis added). Rae cites the following as the key elements of urbanism, all of which lay outside of city hall:

- *Industrial convergence* ("large outward flows of products . . . creating the basis for a powerful stream of wages and investment capital to energize the city")
- *A dense fabric of enterprise*. ("illustrated by the many hundreds of tiny grocery stores, [it] provides a potent source of social cohesion, a localized network of relationships, and an important stream of income to proprietors")
- *A centralized clustering of housing* ("concentrating families of all classes and ethnicities in a relatively compact central city")

- *A dense civic fauna* ("organizations outside the business sector provided another layer of cohesion and governance")
- *A pattern of political integration* ("made possible by the concentration of leaders from business and civic organizations inside the city on a more or less full-time basis")

"These features imply no golden age," Rae states. The city in the years of urbanism was not altogether an attractive or healthy place, but it worked. Rae declares that "[t]here is no going back to this and I intend no sentimentality in writing about it" (2003, 16–19).

Each of these five elements has largely disappeared. One result is that the regional disconnect increased. Most central cities became much less dominant economically and politically in their geographic regions—as well as in the nation and the globe—than they once were. All jurisdictions in a region became a single part of an increasingly larger and more integrated whole, even as many of these jurisdictions continued to act as if they could function independently.

The democracy disconnect also increased. Corporate leaders, for example, withdrew from local civic affairs. As corporate ownership and top management moved away, local leadership regimes lost key members and capacity to guide, for better or worse, local initiatives. Hanson and colleagues recently summarized the literature and their own new research, concluding that "the institutional autonomy, time, and personal connections to the central cities of many CEOs have diminished and . . . the civic organizations through which CEOs work appear to have experienced lowered capacity for sustained action" (Hanson et al. 2010, 1). Equally important, the active networks of small business owners and the complex of civic organizations diminished, leaving in their place a dearth of what scholars now call social capital and trust (McGregor 2007; Prohl 1998).

The professionalization of local government over the same period probably was in part a response to the gradual disappearance of the supportive "patterns of private conduct and decision-making" that Rae describes. Professionalization enabled the efficient delivery of services and effective relationships with other professionalized institutions, but often focused city hall's attention more on its internal structure and functions and away from the connection of the city government to its public and regional contexts.

The reality of falling away from the historical form of urbanism—the "attenuation" of the pattern that Rae describes—created the frame for a deficit model of governance. In the view of many elected and administrative practitioners, neither citizens nor neighboring jurisdictions cooperate with municipalities in the way that they should. Professional responses, derived from hierarchical norms and an expectation of municipal corporate autonomy, exacerbate rather than overcome the disconnects.

Lacking these supportive and enabling connections, local governments will have a harder time addressing the changes and problems that present themselves in the decade ahead. The chore now is not to try to re-create the urbanism that Rae describes, but to build new sets of relationships with the region and with citizens, relationships that contribute to effective governance in the twenty-first century.

## Change and Governance in the Coming Decade

In 2010, we can already see the potential for major changes that will significantly affect cities and their residents over the next 10 years.

Readers of this journal are well aware of the potential impacts and imperatives connected to such things as technological change and the universe of issues related to sustainability, energy, and climate change.

The effects of these and other changes will dramatically alter the contexts for municipal decision making and action. These changes will present continuing and difficult local governance challenges, which, in turn, will exacerbate—and be exacerbated by—the disconnects described earlier. Responding effectively will require substantial amounts of trust building, deliberative processes, interlocal engagement, and hard thinking on the part of local leaders.

There is no need to inventory a long list of the major changes affecting cities now and in the future. A few examples will suffice in order to illustrate the relationship of policy and program choices to democratic and regional engagement and capacity building.

**Economic change.** The effects of the financial crisis, its aftermath, and the search for and implementation of mechanisms to render such fiascos less likely in the future will work out over more years than we may want to expect and in different ways than we are willing to imagine. Pundits and predictors are offering scenarios along the full range from gloom and doom to Panglossian. The key point here is that the crisis has been and will remain sufficiently huge and salient that it likely will be an important window through which municipal and intellectual leaders will envision the future and shape decisions.

For example, we can expect that there will be continuing struggles over who will “control the ‘commanding heights,’ the most important elements of the economy” (Yergin and Stanislaw 1998, 12). Which should dominate—the public sector or the market? Although such issues are often seen as the preserve of the federal government, many aspects of these struggles directly involve cities. For example,

- Every “public–private partnership” for a development project translates the “commanding heights” ideological tussle into practical, on-the-ground choices.
- City and regional leaders are circumventing national borders in order to elevate the prospects for success of their local economies in the face of global competition. A more insular citizenry and media frame these efforts as junkets.
- Competition for economic development to increase tax bases will become increasingly sharp.
- City governments will continue to explore the option of selling public facilities and privatizing services. Correspondingly, there will be a push against short-term revenue-raising or cost-reducing options from the perspective of alternative or longer-term ideas of the public interest.
- The devastation wrought by the foreclosure fiasco will bring new and heightened scrutiny to local practices such as building

codes, property tax circuit breakers, and service arrangements with banks.

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Municipal leaders might find themselves embroiled in major public controversies and intraregional conflicts over any or all of these kinds of issues. A capacity to create better connections with citizens and with other jurisdictions in the region will make it more likely that these difficult processes will produce constructive results.

**Fiscal change.** The direct effects of the recession and financial turmoil will dominate city budget making for several years (Hoene 2009; McFarland 2010). Local controversies over revenue increases and whether and what to cut from municipal expenditures, for example, have been exacerbated by charges

that choices were framed too narrowly or that issues were not presented with full information. The prospect of major reductions in mainline services or realignment of the tax base with the economic base—by taxing services, for example—will engender public debates that will require local leaders to exhibit considerable talent at framing issues and facilitating citizen involvement.

Local governments have already begun to seek citizens’ “ownership” of hard budget decisions. In 2009, one-third of city officials reported that their city carried out more public engagement processes around budget issues than in previous years because of the economic downturn (Barnes and Mann 2009, 1).

The local search for ways to balance budgets and yet meet service demands will also involve exploration of interlocal solutions. Shared delivery of services such as 911 or snow removal or reassignment of functions to counties or special districts have been widely used already, and this trend is likely to accelerate in the years ahead.

**Social and demographic change.** Assumptions and images about people shape the ways in which cities are regarded and the ways in which cities evolve. It is a staple of the urban affairs literature, for example, that whites’ flight from blacks motivated suburbanization. Native reactions to new immigrants and immigrants’ responses are affecting cities’ prospects in the early twenty-first century as much as they did a hundred years earlier. Neighborhoods of concentrated poverty are avoided by the nonpoor and present challenges for municipal services and for city and regional politics. For some people, the term “urban” carries a negative connotation, while for others, it conveys dense, heterogeneous excitement.

All of these categories are socially constructed. For our purposes, the point is that what is socially constructed can and will be socially reconstructed. For example,

- The underlying assumptions regarding what Americans call “race” have, in various ways and aspects, both changed and not changed over recent decades. The election of Barack Obama as president in 2008 occasioned many words of speculation and introspection—some premature and unrealistically

congratulatory—about whether individuals and the nation have moved to a “postracial” phase.

- Racial, gender, and sexual identities and roles have altered dramatically, but not completely. Issues arising from these alterations will present themselves to municipal leaders in terms of both programs and policies and internal human resources policies.
- In another current example, cities large and small that have not traditionally been immigrant gateways have had much more difficulty integrating new arrivals.

The nation continues to witness—with great variation across communities—a breakdown of some long-standing and rigid racial and other demographic identities, categories, and stereotypes. The strength of some of these might be reasserted. Or, they may be replaced by others, leading to new rigidities. (Who is an American? Who is a *real* American?) Or, a bewildering complexity may overtake the categories for a long time before a new pattern of identities firms up. All such tendencies will likely occur side by side and in different configurations across communities. These changes will take time. Over the next 10 years, the complications of a transitional phase, rather than a new clarity, will be dominant.

If we predict that the demographic ideas and assumptions of many citizens will be in flux, then the ways in which government, civic, and academic leaders articulate the topic and engage the public about race-related, immigrant, and other social/demographic topics will matter hugely as to how those ideas and assumptions will be reconstructed. Most of these topics will have different implications for the various jurisdictions throughout a region—and the degree of disconnect between governments and citizens and among governments in a region will influence the level of intra- and interjurisdictional conflicts around these topics, as well as the capacity of municipal leaders to respond.

### **Governing Now and in the Future: Diminishing the Two Disconnects**

Rapid and extensive change plus substantial citizen distrust of government and underdeveloped regional governance capacity will make for a challenging governance decade for city leaders and will require new capacities and skills. “Ensuring effective governance of the community—rather than simply running the local government—requires different skills and attitudes than the ones taught in most public administration schools” (National League of Cities 2004, 3–4). As the foregoing discussions about the kinds of problems and issues that will present themselves indicate, administrative, elected, and intellectual leaders will find it necessary to put more emphasis on two major roles and responsibilities: public engagement and engagement across jurisdictional boundaries.

To the extent that these functions are not carried out or are not performed well, the likelihood greatly increases of cities being beset not only by changes in the environment, but also by political and governance gridlock and turmoil that will make addressing problems and seizing opportunities much more difficult.

**Public engagement.** The disconnect between government and residents now presents a difficult quandary for local government

leaders. By highlighting the reality that achieving public purposes often requires action by many nonmunicipal actors, the emerging focus on “governance rather than government,” for example, reflects an effort to overcome the disconnect. We also now witness, in places across the nation, partly successful efforts to build “trust” and to “engage” citizens in public problem solving. On the other hand, the professionalization of local government management and service delivery continues to produce important positive results and provides mechanisms for effective collective action regarding many problems, from water supply to community development to public safety.

Summarizing much recent research, John Nalbandian reported in 2005 that “contemporary local government professionals work amid the conflicting forces of administrative modernization and civic engagement” (311). Both of these forces are important, and most important, he argues, is “building bridges” between the two because, in the early twenty-first century, they are so very different. Nalbandian’s analysis of conflicting forces dovetails with Rae’s description of the gradual separation of city hall from its context. These two powerful metaphors describe a problem, a sometimes painful reality, and a challenge for city leaders.

Matt Leighninger, in *The Next Form of Democracy*, focuses on “the fact that democracy is constantly evolving, right under our feet.” He sees the situation from a deliberative democracy perspective, as a movement rooted in many local actions and struggling to develop, in which residents “cast off the constraints of expert rule” and force governments to “become more inclusive and interactive” (2006, 22). Steve Burkholder, former mayor of Lakewood, Colorado, a large suburb of Denver, casts the historical situation in terms of a challenge to the electoral representation framework for democratic governance: “We seem to be moving toward a different kind of system, in which working directly with citizens may be just as important as representing their interests” (National League of Cities 2004, 3).

Leighninger’s and Burkholder’s views of a historical transition encompass Nalbandian’s analysis of the conflict between two “forces” and Rae’s sense of the separation of government from civic context. What will be the balance between administrative modernization and civic engagement by 2020?

A 2009 National League of Cities survey of municipal officials, both elected and managerial, can help us see how work in this field might develop over the next decade. It sheds considerable light on the knowledge and views of these officials about public engagement (Barnes and Mann 2009; Mann and Barnes 2010; the study was supported by a grant from the Rockefeller Brothers Fund).

On most questions, the responses of elected officials and managers did not substantially differ. There seems to be a shared set of views within city halls on this topic. Municipal officials reported that a great deal of public engagement activity already exists. Four out of five reported that their city or town uses public engagement processes often (60 percent) or sometimes (21 percent). And 85 percent said that their municipality does more public engagement than is required by federal, state, or local laws. Furthermore, 28 percent reported that their city has a specific plan or strategy for public

engagement. Nearly all of the survey respondents (91 percent) said that public engagement processes produce “useful” results often (38 percent) or sometimes (53 percent). Similarly, 95 percent said that public officials in their city value these processes to a great extent (58 percent) or somewhat (37 percent).

The survey also reveals that significant numbers of municipal officials have doubts about whether their city hall colleagues and residents of their cities possess the skills needed to participate effectively in public engagement processes. When asked whether most elected and appointed officials in their city have the skills, training, and experience to do effective deliberative public engagement, half (49 percent) said yes, and half (48 percent) said no, with 3 percent responding “don’t know.” Municipal officials were similarly split on the question of whether residents have the necessary skills and knowledge to do this work effectively: 43 percent answered yes, while 45 percent answered no. Responses to these questions from elected official and managerial officials were not significantly different.

The National League of Cities survey asked municipal officials to consider the obstacles to and risks of greater levels of public engagement. Respondents were presented with a list of 17 potential obstacles and risks and asked to select all that applied. Far and away, the most frequently selected item was “public apathy and/or ambivalence,” chosen by 69 percent of municipal officials. No other item was chosen by more than 40 percent of respondents. What is more, when asked to identify 3 of the 17 obstacles that are the “most difficult” to overcome, “public apathy and/or ambivalence” topped the list. It was selected by 58 percent of respondents; the next closest response was selected by 20 percent.

After public apathy, the second and third most frequently selected obstacles to and risks of public engagement were “media are not paying attention and/or are not fair and balanced” (chosen by 39 percent of officials) and “youth and other segments of the community are hard to reach” (36 percent). Interestingly, these top three responses all get at the responsibilities of nongovernmental participants in the process. By contrast, obstacles and risks having to do with government actors were selected infrequently. For example, “staff are not supportive” and “elected leaders are not supportive” were chosen as obstacles or risks by only 8 percent and 9 percent of respondents, respectively. Similarly, 13 percent selected “It is uncomfortable/takes public officials and municipal staff out of their comfort zone.”

The 2009 survey also documents that engaging the public is not viewed by municipal officials as among the most important functions of their jobs. The survey presented respondents with a list of nine job functions for municipal officials, ranging from developing policy and balancing the budget to mobilizing residents; the survey asked officials to rate the importance of each of these functions.

Officials most frequently identified those functions having to do with government operations as very important. The top three selections identified as very important were “balance the budget” (87 percent), “develop policy” (60 percent), and “make decisions about providing services” (59 percent). In contrast, responses having to

do with public engagement tended to fall in the middle or toward the bottom of the rankings. For example, 51 percent of officials said that it was a very important function to “get input from residents about issues.” (On this item, there was a difference between elected officials [60 percent] and appointed officials [42 percent].) And about one-third (31 percent) said that it was very important to “mobilize residents to devote some of their time and energy to community goals and problem solving.”

Looking forward into the next decade, these findings suggest that the disconnect between citizens and local government may diminish but will remain problematic, especially because the civic engagement framework, on the one hand, and the administrative modernization and electoral representation frameworks, on the other, constitute such fundamental challenges to each other. Attention to training and skill development could enhance local public engagement efforts. There is a foundation of experience and current activities to be built on, as many cities have pursued activities aimed at engaging residents more actively in governance. While this function does not stand high in the priorities of most elected or managerial municipal officials, their perception of its utility and the extent to which it is valued locally may provide a basis for moving forward. The 28 percent of cities that have a specific plan for public engagement may be a significant cadre of cities; perhaps there would be leverage in cities adopting a strategy or plan for which officials are accountable.

**Regional engagement—Crossing boundaries.** Over the next 10 years, jurisdictional boundary crossing will become essential to effective municipal governance. Some of this activity will be regional in scope, and much will be interlocal at smaller scales. At the same time, some local leaders will be resistant or indifferent to such activity. Some efforts, no matter how collaborative, will not achieve their goals. Whether they see the results as a glass half full or half empty, leaders will nonetheless increasingly accept these kinds of efforts as a part of the task of governing cities.

Some reframing of the discussion on this topic would facilitate the work of regional engagement. Greater clarity is needed about both the task at hand and the desired outcomes that are feasible in the next decade. It is time for local leaders to shift their attitudes toward regional engagement as a necessary, normal, and at least intermittently productive asset for governance (rather than an obstacle to the municipality’s autonomous operation). Finally, the efficacy of regionalism advocacy would be strengthened by diminishing the prevalence of “shoulds” and “oughts” and increasing attention to the difficulties of the challenge and the mechanisms by which some measure of success could be achieved.

It is useful to clarify the vocabulary on this topic. “Area-wide” is an older term, less used these days, but descriptive of the whole orientation toward the broader spatial context beyond municipal borders. “Regional” is close to it in its implications and similarly useful because it is flexible as to boundaries. “Metropolitan” is a subset, referring to the central city and suburbs configurations that are captured by the census category of metropolitan statistical areas. “Metropolitan regionalism” combines the two and describes the prevalent

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current focus, especially in the work of the Brookings Institution and the Obama initiatives, but it omits similarly important regional efforts outside metropolitan areas or in smaller or larger areas. “Regional” seems the best choice for the most general vocabulary.

A significant set of ideas and practice has gained visibility and efficacy over the past two decades around the region, especially the metropolitan region, as a useful way to approach interlocal problem solving. This development is the most recent iteration of an area-wide orientation that has a long history in urban affairs thinking, research, and practice.

In a potentially significant step forward in this tradition, candidate and president Barack Obama’s “urban policy” statements have been built around one version of this big idea. There is a “new metropolitan reality,” he said in 2008, “and we need a strategy that reflects that” (Barnes 2009; Berube 2007). The Obama administration has to date undertaken a few actions rooted in this perspective, including establishing a White House Office of Urban Affairs and an interagency working group. Incentives for regional collaborations were included in the second round of funding for the Neighborhood Stabilization Program. In addition, a partnership for sustainable communities among three federal agencies—the Department of Housing and Urban Development, the Department of Transportation, and the Environmental Protection Agency—has stimulated considerable attention to the interlocal dimensions of issues. Some of the funds for local entities in the fiscal stimulus act of 2009 may allow or promote regional approaches, although most of the money was funneled through existing program channels to state and local jurisdictions (Peirce 2010).

For our purposes, it is important to distinguish between Obama’s particular policy and program approaches, on the one hand, and the broad set of ideas about regions and metropolitan areas that constitute an influential underlying framework, on the other. Local and state efforts to take area-wide or regional approaches preceded the Obama initiatives and will continue even if the Obama administration were to be distracted from its urban policy promises.

A governance and problem-solving focus on the metropolis or the region contrasts with the central city imagery, definitions, and assumptions about urbanism, described earlier. Implicit in some aspects of the area-wide tradition is an agreement with the current White House declaration that we should “take a regional approach that disregards traditional jurisdictional boundaries” (White House 2010). This is potentially a sharp departure from frameworks that identify “cities” with precisely those jurisdictional boundaries. This difference is one of the major lines of contention that will shape specific policy issues in the coming decade.

There are at least two streams of thought and action in the area-wide tradition. For convenience, we can refer to these as the problem-solving and structural streams. The problem-solving stream starts with a focus on the nature and especially the spatial scope of the problem, challenge, or opportunity to be addressed. For subjects whose spatial scopes do not fit within existing jurisdictional boundaries, this approach urges governments to make arrangements so that they can address the matter. Such arrangements might lead to governmental consolidations, but more often result in special

authorities of various sorts and collaborations among local governments that range from ad hoc to institutionalized. This stream has widened and deepened in the past 20 years or so. It includes topics such as the local economy, economic competitiveness, transportation systems, and aspects of virtually any topic of concern to localities (Barnes and Ledebur 1998; Greenstein and Wiewel 2000).

A second stream within the area-wide orientation starts with a focus on the efficiency and cost of local governments. The argument is that there are too many governments, that none of them encompasses the scale of the full urban community, and that some forms of structural change are needed. The endpoint for this line of thinking is abolishing or consolidating existing local governments and creating a unit of general government that encompasses the entire area. This view dominated the area-wide tradition for decades and certainly is still very much present, though less dominant (Rusk 1993; Walker 1987).

Effective governance for cities in the decade ahead will require local leaders to find a way through the either/or polarizations of the issue into either regionalism or local government and either problem solving or structural change. It is time to get beyond the judgmental rhetoric that suggests, on the one side, that regional approaches are idealistic, unrealistic dreams or intrusive meddling and, on the other, that opposition to regional approaches is selfish or racist. Any or all of those accusations may be correct in specific circumstances, but verbal jousting as the default position can be a diversion from the hard work of bringing people to the table and can poison the well for future efforts.

The way through these false choices would be a less dramatic but more practical focus on governance capacity and process. Regional governance occurs in an area with multiple governmental jurisdictions working together on behalf of a goal or competing goals. Regional governance is not about making nice; it is about politics, working through agreements and disagreements on matters of mutual concern. Where there is a single unit of government that encompasses an entire region and only that region, there is no need for the interlocal engagement that is called “regional governance” or “regionalism.” Lacking a goal, there is no regional governance. The goal might be a policy outcome (such as affordable housing throughout the region), a structural aim (such as creation of a special assessment district for amenities), a process outcome (such as a region-wide discussion on economic competitiveness), or any other joint aim of actors within the region. (In a paper that is now in draft, Kathryn Foster and William Barnes offer an analysis of “regional governance,” including dimensions of capacity and experience and a means of measuring the complex concept.)

Thus, the presenting issue for people and groups seeking a particular area-wide goal is not a new form of government per se, but rather a marshaling of capacity to achieve the goal. That marshaling may sometimes result in new shared roles for existing governments and sometimes in new institutions. But the goal is to address the presenting problem or to seize an opportunity.

In short, the road to regional governance goes through existing governments—local, state, and federal. Effective governance requires both regionalism and federalism. The process and the results over

the coming decade may be messy. Muddling through seldom looks neat and tidy.

For local leaders, reducing the regional disconnect will involve increased attention to cross-boundary engagement and will draw on the skills and roles accumulated from previous experience. Those skills and roles may not be the same as those required to function well inside a hierarchically organized governmental institution. Performing effectively in interlocal and area-wide arenas may be more exposed, vulnerable, and risky and will demand talents for negotiation, collaboration, conflict, and competition all at the same time. In working across jurisdictional boundaries, city hall professionals will likely engage with other local government, business, and civic professionals, and thus the process will not fundamentally challenge their basic professional framework. On the whole, if the foundations built by previous regional work are expanded, and if local leaders give increased attention to this dimension of governance over the coming decade, then we can expect that, by 2020, the regional disconnect will be somewhat diminished and less fundamentally debatable. Regionalism, by 2020, could be normal.

### Concluding Note

This essay has argued that the effectiveness of city governance in the coming decade will depend, in no small part, on elected, managerial, and intellectual leaders working to diminish the democratic and regional disconnects that inhibit municipal governments' ability to address the major problems they face. Obviously, outcomes will also depend on the choices and actions of residents; business, civic, and other leaders and organizations; other governments in the area; and federal and state governments. The focus here has been on local, especially municipal, governments and their capacity to participate in governance beyond the defining box of the city hall organization.

The discussions in this essay will apply variously to the many and widely different communities and governmental entities that go under the rubric of "cities." Explorations of those variations would be important and useful.

As to the future of the two disconnects, the predictions tentatively offered here differ. Both seem likely to diminish over the coming decade. That does not mean they will disappear or that work in these two arenas will be easy. It does mean that such work will become more than occasionally effective and a more accepted and regular part of municipal responsibilities. On the other hand, regional engagement seems likely to reduce that disconnect more; public engagement and the democratic disconnect seem likely to remain more problematic. The element that explains the difference in this analysis is that city hall leaders' professional and electoral representation outlooks, norms, and expectations are less directly and substantially challenged by the regional disconnect than by the democratic disconnect.

By 2020, then, we may find that both public and regional engagement and the roles and skills required to carry them out—facilitation, negotiation, and collaboration, as well

as reflection and framing, for example—will appear more frequently in the job descriptions and performance expectations for managers. They also will more frequently come up as salient issues in campaigns for local elective office, and as presenting issues for scholarship as well.

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By 2020 . . . we may find that both public and regional engagement and the roles and skills required to carry them out—facilitation, negotiation, and collaboration, as well as reflection and framing, for example—will appear more frequently as parts of job descriptions and performance expectations for managers.

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