
Preface

We have been genuinely interested in questions related to local, regional and city development for a long time now. Some 20 years ago, first independently and later in close collaboration, we became more and more convinced that leadership plays a central role in the transformation of localities, cities and regions. We also saw how a lack of leadership or bad leadership hampered many promising efforts, or how a leadership vacuum left places locked into their past. Simultaneously, we have read numerous books and articles concluding that it was leadership that mattered – helping some places thrive, while the absence of leadership condemned others to decline. All this left us longing for both theoretical and empirical studies focusing explicitly on leadership. Since then we have been filling the gap and identifying new challenges.

After meeting first time at a highly successful event for Australian regional development policy makers and practitioners in Port Macquarie in 2010, organised by Andrew, we have published several journal articles on place leadership together. On many occasions we have met with colleagues to discuss leadership in city and regional development. It has been an enjoyable journey, not finished yet, and whenever we have come up with something, we have encountered several new issues and research questions, as well as new colleagues to work with.

Editing a cutting-edge Handbook with so many prominent scholars and several future stars has been a Herculean but enjoyable effort. We are hugely grateful to all the contributors for their time, thinking and patience. We wish to thank all the reviewers for their invaluable comments to improve the individual chapters. We want to express our special gratitude to the Regional Studies Association (RSA), especially Sally Hardy. The RSA has encouraged us not only in spirit but also financially, by providing funds to organise several sequential research networks to think collectively about leadership in cities and regions. This Handbook is only one of the many contributions of RSA research networks on leadership. We have met hundreds of colleagues as well as practitioners in several countries and appreciate all the discussions and comments on our work, both doubtful, critical, analytical, encouraging and the ones that make us glow. In combination, they keep our feet on the ground and indicate the spaces for improvement. We are painfully aware of everything not pondered yet; we are always on the lookout for gaps in our thinking.

In addition to the editors and authors writing individual chapters, compiling a Handbook requires several highly skilled professionals to launch the project and to finalise it. We wish to thank from Edward Elgar Publishing Stephanie Hartley, Sarah Brown and Sarah Cook.

Our home institutions and the many funding agencies deserve our gratitude. They have made it possible for us to dig deeper into the secrets of place leadership. Markku wishes to express his gratitude to Tampere University, Finland; Länsförsäkringar

Alliance Research Foundation, Sweden (grant number: 2017/01/011) and the Nordic Green Growth Research and Innovation Programme and NordForsk, Nordic Innovation Research (grant number 83130). Of course, the friends and colleagues of ReGrow and GONST projects are worthy of many thanks for their excellent research work, the many discussions and apt comments.

Andrew would like to thank his colleagues at the University of South Australia, especially Professor Marie Wilson for the supportive environment she has fostered, encouraging research and scholarly activity in every sense. He also thanks those colleagues he works with on a day-to-day basis across multiple research challenges – Ms Cate McKenzie, Mr Jacob Irving, Ms Sandy Horne and Mr William Veitch. Their support and encouragement are warmly acknowledged. Special thanks need to go to Sandy in particular as her skills in illustration and graphics have made this Handbook visually better.

When putting final touches to the individual chapters, a piece of shocking news reached us. Professor Paul Benneworth, one of the authors, a great colleague and friend, had passed away suddenly and untimely. We shall miss him enormously. We shall miss his significant scholarly contributions but especially his warm personality; razor-sharp mind accompanied by wit and acuity. We dedicate this Handbook to his memory, and we can only hope it is worthy of his enormous contribution to the regional studies literature.

In Tampere and Adelaide, August 2020
Markku Sotarauta and Andrew Beer