

Rhetoric and Reality in Municipal Amalgamations: A Comparative Analysis

Joseph Drew, Eran Razin, Rhys Andrews

Abstract

Amalgamation is increasingly being employed as a public policy intervention designed to arrest the decline in the financial sustainability of local government across the developed world. Municipal mergers are often controversial and may provoke impassioned debates. We apply Hirschman's (in Adelman 2013, p. 308) typology of public policy rhetoric to recent council consolidation debates in Wales, Israel and Australia to determine: (i) whether debates do in fact 'lumber predictably through set motions and manoeuvres' and (ii) whether the rhetorical argumentation is universally consistent across different countries. This leads us to note that an important line of argument is missing from the extant typology – specifically the argument that a reform should be pursued simply because it is 'merely good'. The merely good rhetoric seems to be consistent with idealised Aristotelian democratic deliberative inquiry and appeals more to reason and hope rather than fear and fatalism. We conclude with an assessment regarding the conditions which seem necessary for more deliberative debate on disputatious public policy matters.

1. Introduction

One of the defining features of a democracy is that public policy interventions are accompanied by at least some rhetoric as the political party executing the intervention seeks to justify same to their colleagues, political opposition or the public at large. Ideally, public policy is accompanied by deliberative rhetoric which 'makes people think...makes people see things in new ways...conveys information and knowledge, and makes people more reflective' (Chambers, 2009, p. 335). However, as we all doubtless recognise actual practice often falls well short of the ideal.

Colloquially, the term rhetoric is associated with language that lacks meaning or words employed to deceive listeners regarding an agent's true intent. This is 'mere rhetoric' which many of us tend to associate with politicians seeking to justify a decision or attack the arguments of a political opposition. However, in classical times rhetoric was seen to be an art whose 'function is not simply to succeed in persuading, but rather to discover the means of coming as near such success as the circumstance of each particular case allow' (Aristotle, 2012, p. 7). Its study and practice was encouraged and its scope was significantly broader than is understood colloquially. For instance, in addition to noting the saliency of context, Aristotle explicated at length on the three 'modes of persuasion', namely *ethos* (the character or portrayed character of the rhetorician), the *pathos* (the emotions of the listeners and

rhetorician) and the *logos* (the reasoning through speech required to prove a truth or apparent truth).

Modern scholars of rhetoric tend to adopt a narrower interpretation of the term as they seek to emphasise the salient aspects as they relate to a particular context. For instance, Booth in his seminal work arising from his case study of a student sit-in on the University of Chicago in 1969, defined rhetoric as a ‘a whole philosophy of how men (sic) succeed or fail in discovering together, in discourse, new levels of truth (or at least agreement) that neither side suspected before’ (Booth, 1974, p. 11). Here the emphasis was on the conciliatory power of rhetoric (and also how ‘impoverished notions of rhetoric contributed to our disaster’) (Booth, 1974, p. 10). An alternate emphasis made in McCloskey’s (1998, p. xx) well-known *The Rhetoric of Economics* defines ‘rhetoric [a]s an economics of language, the study of how scarce means are allocated to the insatiable desires of people to be heard’¹. In this case the major point is that the discipline of economics has a specific language, the recognition of which would improve the quality of discourse within the profession.

In similar vein, Hirschman’s (1991) *Rhetoric of Reaction* emphasises a specific aspect of persuasion in relation to a particular context: principally the *logos* employed in public policy debates of a disputatious nature. Hirschman (1991) is generally unconcerned with discovering new levels of truth or the language of expression – instead, Hirschman (1991) is intrigued by the history of ideas and how ‘discourse is shaped, not so much by fundamental personality traits, but simply by the imperatives of argument, almost regardless of the desires, character, or convictions of the participants’ (Hirschman 1991, p. x). Thus, Hirschman largely eschews the *ethos* and, to a lesser extent, the *pathos* in order to focus on the *logos* as it is employed for persuasive purposes in public policy debate.

Hirschman (1991, 1993) makes a number of important claims regarding the nature of rhetoric as it relates to disputatious public policy. First, Hirschman asserts that the proponents (progressives) and opponents (reactionaries) of public policy reform are associated with left and right political ideologies respectively. Second, Hirschman (1991) claims that the respective parties are almost impelled to follow the theses in rhetorical exchanges relating to disputatious public policy (Hirschman in Adelman 2013, p. 308). In addition, it is implied that the circumstances and context of the public policy debates – which lie at the forefront of Aristotle’s rhetoric – are largely irrelevant. Fourth, Hirschman (1993, p. 305) makes a somewhat feeble plea for each party to avoid these theses which he describes as ‘intransigent arguments [that] are “dialogues of the deaf”’, but has nothing to say about the form of his preferred rhetoric and appears completely pessimistic regarding the chances of more deliberative rhetoric emerging.

If the various claims made by Hirschman (1991, 1993) are true then the typology which he proposes is a powerful tool for both progressive and reactionary rhetoricians in an *ex ante* sense, and a helpful lens through which citizens might view debates in an *ex tempore* sense

¹ In later works McCloskey (2000, p. 287) broadened her conception and ‘define[d] the word to include all means to unforced agreement from mathematical induction to appeals to sympathy’.

(Drew, Grant and Campbell, 2016). However, if true the claims associated with the typology also paint a bleak picture for the institution of democracy and public policy innovation.

Consistent with Hirschman's (1991) study on the ideas which dominate debate on disputatious public policy (specifically the French and American revolutions, universal suffrage and the poor laws) this paper examines the often controversial and impassioned debates surrounding the public policy of local government amalgamation. Specifically, we compare and contrast the ideas used in debates surrounding amalgamations in Australia (where the progressive rhetoric has been largely unsuccessful (leading to forced amalgamations followed by de-amalgamations)), Israel (where progressive rhetoric has proved more successful in persuading citizens of the case for amalgamation), and Wales (where reactionary rhetoric continues to triumph over its progressive counterpart). By comparing instances of unsuccessful, partly successful and aborted amalgamation debates we hope to test the various assertions made by Hirschman (1991, 1993) regarding the nature of rhetoric associated with disputatious public policy debates.

The balance of this article is organised as follows. First we briefly review the remit of local government in each jurisdiction and the nature of recent structural reform debates. Next, we examine 'progressive' arguments in terms of the Hirschman (1991) typology and propose an important missing element of debate. Thereafter we explicate on the lines of 'reaction' with respect to our amended typology of progressive rhetoric. This leads us to form some conclusions regarding the sufficiency of the typology, the importance of context and circumstances, and the potential for democratic deliberative inquiry.

2. Comparative Perspectives

Hirschman's *Rhetoric of Reaction* (1991) is based on a number of historical case studies derived from Europe and America. The strength of this approach is that the theses were tested in a variety of contexts. However, the limitation of the approach is that contemporary debates and contexts outside of the north Atlantic sphere were largely ignored. We thus set out to correct these limitations by examining a single genre of disputatious public policy debates – local government amalgamations – from the perspective of three Westminster-style local government systems, with very different spatial structures and remits, which have experienced very different outcomes from amalgamation debates. To contextualise our analysis, we now provide a short account of local government amalgamation debates in each of the three countries.

Australia

Australia is a federation of six states (and two territories), which independently regulate their respective local government entities according to state legislation (the exception is the Australian Capital Territory which does not employ a system of local government). Local government in Australia has a limited remit relative to its peers in Israel and Wales – with a historical emphasis on the provision of road infrastructure, solid waste disposal and (in some instances) supply of water and sewer services. In recent times, the scope of Australian local government has been expanded somewhat to include important roles in economic

development, promotion of cultural cohesiveness and public order and safety. This increased scope of responsibilities has arisen as a combined result of higher tiers of government vacating important mandates, increased responsiveness to citizen demands and the need to address local market failure (Grant and Drew, 2017). Indeed, since the end of the 1993 financial year aggregate Australian local government spending has increased by an average annual rate of 8.68% p.a. (moreover, local government spending as a proportion of total government spending in the federation has risen from 2.24% in 1993 to 5.80% in 2014) (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2015)). Partly in response to the financial sustainability problems engendered as a result of rapidly expanding local government expenditure, successive state governments have proposed and executed a number of forced local government amalgamations (Abelson and Joyeux, 2015). Thus, in 1994 the state of Victoria reduced the number of councils from 210 to 78, in 2008 Queensland reduced the number of councils from 157 down to 73 and in 2016 the state of New South Wales reduced the number of councils from 152 down to around 128 (several proposed amalgamations have been temporarily stalled as a result of legal contest). For the purposes of our analysis of rhetoric we will focus on the most recent Australian amalgamations: specifically the New South Wales amalgamations prosecuted by the governing Liberal National party coalition which is situated on the right of political ideology. Because local government is not recognised in the Constitution it is generally held that State governments can force amalgamation subject to the constraint of the common law principle of procedural fairness (which is the essence of outstanding legal contests). However, it would be quite wrong to assume that the state governments have executed the local government forced amalgamations without consequences – Australia has experienced five cases of de-amalgamation (one in Victoria and four in Queensland) and more are likely in view of the promise of the political opposition in New South Wales to allow de-amalgamation if it is successful in securing power at the next state elections in 2019 (Grant and Drew, 2017). Moreover, the political parties executing forced amalgamations have suffered significant voter backlash – for instance, the incumbent government of New South Wales suffered a swing against it of over 20 per cent at a recent by-election (resulting in it losing the seat for the first time since World War II; Woodburn, 2016). Therefore, whilst State governments have encountered few obstacles in executing local government amalgamations, it can hardly be said that the amalgamations have proved to be an unmitigated success.

Israel

Israel is a rather centralized unitary state with only two levels of government: central and local. The share of local government in public spending is only about one-half of the figure for the UK. It is higher than in Australia, but the rest of public spending in Australia is split between state and federal levels whereas in Israel it is concentrated at the unitary central state. Local autonomy in Israel is also rather constrained – a legacy of the socialist roots of the state, the British colonial roots of local government legislation, and apparently also of the perpetual Israeli-Arab conflict. Economic stagnation and diminishing dominance of central state leaders led to de-facto political decentralization in the 1970s and 1980s, followed by reforms influenced by neoliberal conceptions in the early 2000s (Razin and Hazan, 2004).

The dependency of Israeli local authorities on self-generated revenues, particularly on the profitable non-residential property tax, grew immensely in the mid- 1980s, although central state grants and transfers remained close to 40 percent of local government revenues.

The establishment, abolition, boundary change and amalgamation of local authorities in Israel is the prerogative of the Minister of Interior, who only has to appoint a municipal boundary commission and study its recommendations before making the decision. Rulings of the High Court of Justice have practically constrained the absolute power of the Minister. Moreover, high political barriers for local government reforms are a product of centralization that diminishes the perceived urgency of reforms, the links between local and national politics in a multiparty coalition government structure and ethno-religious heterogeneity (Razin, 2004).

Municipal amalgamations has occurred occasionally on an ad-hoc basis since the establishment of the state in 1948. A reform discourse linked to rational comprehensive planning and welfare state logic evolved in the late 1960s, evident primarily in a failed attempt to establish an upper-tier metropolitan municipality for the inner parts of the Tel Aviv metropolis in 1973 (Razin, 1996). Neoliberal ideals of efficiency and reduced burden of a bloated public bureaucracy on the private sector inspired renewed interest in amalgamations since the 1990s. The economic crisis during the Palestinian *Intifada* (uprising) served as a window of opportunity for Israel's Ministry of Finance to implement long-pursued neoliberal reforms, among them a 2003 municipal amalgamation reform imposed – by the ruling Likud Party (which is situated on the political right) – through emergency legislation. The reform was promoted solely as an efficiency measure assumed to save a substantial amount of money to the public purse by reducing the number of local authorities from 266 to 150-200. The final move was modest, but still unprecedented, both in scope (12 amalgamations that involved 27 local authorities), and in the mechanism applied (legislation rather than a lengthy boundary commission procedure). However, the Knesset later on de-amalgamated four of the 12 amalgamated municipalities – all Arab and Druse ones – caving in to political pressures, bringing the number of local authorities in Israel to 257 in 2016. Evaluations did hint at modest cost savings (Reingewertz, 2012); nevertheless, economies of scale have been substantial in Israel up to a population size of between 7,000 and 10,000.

Amalgamation reforms occasionally resurfaced on the public agenda, the latest one triggered by the financial weakness of the city of Bat Yam (129,000 inhabitants in 2015). It led to the appointment in 2014 of a commission that recommended in 2016 to amalgamate Bat Yam with affluent Tel Aviv-Jaffa (433,000 inhabitants) to its north. No cost savings have been expected, perhaps otherwise, but proponents view the step as a solution to Bat Yam's chronic deficits, whereas opponents fear from neglect and the loss of autonomy and identity. Our examination of municipal amalgamation rhetoric in Israel will focus on the debates over the emergency 2003 amalgamations and on the Bat Yam - Tel Aviv case.

Wales

Since the mid-nineteenth century, the pendulum of local government reform in Wales has swung from the creation of a small number of county councils and urban boroughs

responsible for all local services in 1888, their replacement by a comprehensive two-tier structure in 1974, and back to the re-creation of 22 large unitary authorities during the 1990s (Chandler, 2007). During that time Welsh local authorities have seen many public functions come and go. For example, at one time or another during the past century, they were responsible for electricity, gas and water supply, personal health services and state-led higher education institutions (Byrne, 1990). These dramatic changes have reflected the unparalleled power of the British state to re-order the sub-national political structure of the country. Indeed, such is the power of the centre that “local government can be changed or even abolished at a stroke” (John and Copus 2011: 29-30). Nevertheless, although “local government can only act within the bounds set by Parliament” (John and Copus 2011: 29-30), it has retained a remarkable capacity for adapting itself to new circumstances (John, 2014). This applies to local government in Wales, as much as England.

Following devolution in 1998, a marked divergence began to emerge between the English and Welsh approaches to local government structure. In England, further municipal amalgamations occurred during the 2000s on a voluntary basis. By contrast, while there was a widespread perception that Welsh local governments were too small for the efficient and effective delivery of key strategic services, there was a reluctance to indulge in compulsory or voluntary reorganization. In part, this reflected a preference for shared services models (Welsh Government, 2004), but also the political dominance of the Labour Party (located on the political left) at the local and national levels.

While proposals for reorganization lay dormant during the first ten years of devolution, debates about the appropriate structure for Welsh local government returned with a vengeance in the wake of the global financial crisis. These debates initially resulted in a review of the local government system which suggested that a rationalization of the existing number of councils might be necessary (Simpson, 2011). However, rather than opting for a straightforward reduction in the number of Welsh councils, politicians in Wales initially chose to introduce regional delivery boards for the largest strategic services (education and social services) still under the sole control of local authorities. Nevertheless, calls for a reduction of the numbers of those authorities have persisted.

In 2013, a Commission on Public Service Governance and Delivery was convened to review the provision of local public services in Wales. The Commission recommended reducing the number of local authorities from 22 to 10, 11 or 12 through a process of voluntary and forced mergers (Commission on Public Service Governance and Delivery, 2014). Subsequently, in 2015, plans were developed by the Welsh Government to reduce the number of local authorities from 22 to eight. However, the difficulties the Labour Party experienced in forming a new government following the Welsh Assembly elections of May 2016, including the ousting of the public services minister of the time by the Welsh nationalist party, led plans for full-blown reorganization to be withdrawn. As a result, the preferred option for local government reform is currently the establishment of combined authorities, with provision for voluntary amalgamation in exceptional circumstances.

Some Initial Lessons from Our Comparative Approach

This brief comparison of the three nation's experience of amalgamation debate allows us to form at least one early conclusion regarding the claims associated with Hirschman's typology: specifically, we can now state that political ideology has no bearing on whether parties take on a progressive or reactionary position in relation to public policy interventions. Indeed, two of the local government amalgamation programmes were instigated by right wing political parties, whilst a single political party – Welsh Labour – prosecuted both progressive *and* reactionary arguments at the national and local level respectively.

It is also clear that our comparison nations conducted debates in very disparate circumstances. For instance, Israel is a politically and militarily contested nation in which the debate arose as a result of a localised financial crisis associated with civil unrest. On the other hand, the debate in Wales occurred in response to public expenditure cuts following the Global Financial Crisis, whilst the amalgamation proposal put forward in Australia occurred in a context of one of the strongest economies in the world. We are thus in a good position to assess whether public policy rhetoric does indeed occur in a predictable fashion irrespective of context and circumstances.

Our analysis revolved around a survey of newspaper articles and government promotional material (collected through an internet survey). The artefacts were coded according to the type of rhetoric employed (see tables 1 and 2 for definitions of the Hirschman (1991) rhetorical typology) and the major motivation for the article. We then constructed a ranking regarding the frequency with which the rhetorical positions were employed. This approach allowed us to compare and contrast how rhetoric was employed across the three countries.

3. Progressive Rhetoric

Hirschman (1991) in his seminal book devotes just one out of seven chapters to progressive rhetoric (indeed critics of the book have asserted that the inclusion of just a single chapter on progressive rhetoric was a 'base manoeuvre' which merely sought to establish impartiality (Hirschman, 1993, p. 306)). Whatever the motivation might have been for penning just a single chapter, the result was a very sketchy explication of progressive rhetoric. Moreover, the progressive rhetoric theses were developed by way of counter-propositions to the (intransigent) reactionary rhetoric theses which both motivated and dominated the book. The result of the methodology employed seems to be a rather contrived symmetry (indeed Hirschman (1988, p. 7) admitted to 'an inbred urge toward symmetry') that may have given rise to an oversight of important lines of progressive rhetoric. We briefly review the three progressive theses proposed by Hirschman (1991), before developing what we believe to be a missing thesis in response to the evidence afforded by our comparative study of local government amalgamation debate.

The Imminent Danger thesis emphasises the dangers of passivity in view of looming threats of one kind or the other. Moreover, the associated synergist claim asserts that the proposed reforms will complement past reforms (or indeed future reforms (Drew, Grant and Campbell, 2016)). It thus, suggests a progressive camp imbued with an inordinate degree of confidence – confidence in the ability to correctly perceive future challenges and confidence in the

efficacy of public policy interventions proposed. This line of rhetoric was only rarely used in Australia, Israel and Wales. The reason why this might have been the case is that the world has proved to be a very unpredictable place – certainly in a public policy sense – since the turn of the third millennium. For instance, few saw the effect that looser public regulation on the banking industry in the United States would have on the Global economy and even fewer perceived that the Arab spring would result in the rise of ISIS. Thus, it is likely that the progressive camp have lost the requisite confidence in the predictability of public policy, which forms a necessary foundation for prosecution of the Imminent danger thesis.

The second progressive rhetoric advanced by Hirschman (1991) was the Desperate Predicament thesis (and associated Fracasomania claim). Progressives wishing to employ this argument typically paint a grim picture of public affairs and use this as motivation for proposing drastic intervention. Moreover, it is argued that in view of the grave outlook immediate action must be taken, irrespective of possible unintended side-effects. Associated with this thesis is the idea of Fracasomania which appeals to a history of ineffective lesser reforms as evidence against implementing more measured and gradual reform. Notably progressives employing this argument demonstrate less confidence about the future and their ability to propose efficacious interventions, than do their political allies who might employ the Imminent Danger thesis. Moreover, in proffering advice to ‘progressives’ in 1993 Hirschman nominated this thesis as the most dispensable of the three extant theses, noting that it was both alarmist and likely to suffer from diminishing returns. Given our observations regarding the unpredictability of public policy outcomes this millennium it is no surprise that this thesis was favoured in the Welsh context, and performed an important role as catalyst for the Australian debates. If we might borrow from McCloskey’s (1998) conception of rhetoric as the study of how to meet the insatiable desire to be heard, then we can see that a desperate predicament argument lends itself admirably to getting the attention of the press. This was particularly important in Wales and Australia for generating political will and public appetite for renewed proposals for structural change.

The last progressive thesis developed by Hirschman (1991) was the Futility of Resistance argument. This argument asserts that history is both linear in direction and inevitable and therefore that attempts to resist the tide of change are futile and potentially knavish. Notably, whilst the Futility thesis shares with the Imminent Danger thesis a confidence in predicting the future, it eschews the idea that interventions can permanently alter the tide of history. Moreover, it differs fundamentally from the other two theses which present arguments to show that the public policy intervention is ‘necessary’ – instead the Futility of resistance argument asserts that the intervention is somehow ‘fated’. This is indeed a difficult argument to sustain in view of recent historical events. The thesis was not employed at all in the Israeli amalgamation debates – this may be due to the fact that the modern nation of Israel is relatively young and thus has little public policy history to draw on. Moreover, citizens in Israel tend to be imbued with a sense of self determination as a result of the political and existential uncertainty which has been a fixture of the modern State. By way of contrast, the Futility of Resistance thesis was drawn upon with relative regularity in Australia – here, the argument was prosecuted in terms of the continued waves of local government reform which

have seen the number of local governments almost halve from 1,067 in 1910 to just 537 today. In Wales, policy-makers have continually sought to convey a sense of the inevitability of reorganization, pointing, in particular, to the distinctive Welsh social and economic environment and a sense that local government in the country does not measure up to its counterpart in England. However, both these points have been strongly contested by the Welsh local government community itself, especially the notion that they do things better in England.

It could be argued that the first two theses appeal more to anxiety than reason, whilst the latter eschews reason entirely in favour of resigning to fate. This leads us to believe that there might be room for an argument based principally on reason, one which shuns anxiety in preference to hope and adopts a belief that the future is made, rather than pre-ordained. By examining the rhetoric surrounding local government amalgamations we have identified just such an argument – the thesis of which we shall call the ‘Merely Good’. Thus, in Australia it was argued that the reforms would be efficient and hence result in better services and infrastructure for residents – this ‘merely good’ rhetoric was employed more often than any other argument. However, by-election results and political failure (both the Premier of New South Wales and the leader of the National Party were obliged to resign as a result of the forced amalgamations) would seem to suggest that the volume of ‘merely good’ rhetoric failed to win reactionaries over to the public policy intervention. In similar vein, ‘merely good’ rhetoric dominated debate in Israel – and, once again, the emphasis was on the efficiency implications for improved local government services. In Wales, merely good rhetoric was the second most prominent line of argument and has centred on questions of efficiency, effectiveness and strategic capacity – with the implication being, yet again, the possibility of better services for residents.

Curiously, Hirschman (1988) seems to have flirted with the idea of ‘good’ (but perhaps not ‘merely good’) in his essay written for the *Atlantic Monthly* (which occurred part way through penning the book manuscript). This essay *inter alia* drew attention to Divine Providence and the Divine mocking the mere efforts of man. We cannot say why Hirschman elected to largely drop the idea of ‘good’ in his later book – however, we do believe that it might have been a mistake to do so, given that it largely points the way to the more deliberative rhetoric which Hirschman claims to favour (but fails to fully explicate). The thesis of the Merely Good requires a belief in the efficacy of public policy intervention, but does not rely on impending doom to make a case for acting. It is therefore unlikely to get the same sort of media penetration as the alarmist theses, and probably requires a more sophisticated audience – an audience capable of understanding the argument in the light of the common good and requiring relatively less motivation to act. However, the argument would not seem to be susceptible to diminishing returns (like the Desperate Predicament thesis), or to observations regarding the sometimes contrary nature of history (as are the Imminent Danger and Futility of resistance theses). Nor is the thesis of the Merely Good dependent on the circumstances surrounding its genesis – interventions which aim to improve matters for citizens can always be proposed, irrespective of extant public policy conditions. Thus, it is somewhat surprising that Hirschman (1993) failed to recommend the Merely Good

thesis as a way forward in contrast to the pessimism about the rhetoric of intransigence which occupies most of his work.

We now examine the lines of reactionary rhetoric which might be drawn upon in response to the progressive arguments.

Table 1 Progressive Rhetoric in Local Government Amalgamation Debates.

Progressive Position	Australia	Israel	Wales
<p><i>Imminent Danger Thesis and Synergistic</i> Emphasises the danger of passivity and the need to act to avoid impending disaster.</p>	<p>Example: “In the next 20 years a further two million people will make the city their home, and most of them will settle in Sydney’s west ... To cope with this growth and Sydney’s emerging role as a global city, we need a modern, more connected system of government” (Toole 2015, p. 3).</p>	<p>When one local authority provides free social activities for its residents, because it has the resources, while its neighbour’s welfare department collapses because of excessive demand and acute manpower shortage, it is hard to justify the opposition of the former to amalgamation (Rechter, 2003)</p>	<p>“We have a once in a generation opportunity to reform and reshape our councils. The old ways of doing things will not work in the future. Our plans are ambitious and we must make the most of this chance to change” (Welsh Government spokesperson, BBC interview, 14/06/2015)</p>
<p><i>Desperate Predicament Thesis and Fracasomania</i> The old order must be smashed and the new rebuilt regardless of possible consequences.</p>	<p>Example: “This is an incredible \$1 million daily loss for local councils...this cannot be sustained” (Hansard, 2014)</p>	<p>The extended family structure created a weak political system in which the mayor depends on families that threaten to leave the coalition if their demands are not met. The mayor is unable to expropriate land for the public good, to layoff unneeded employees or to recruit employees</p>	<p>“We are well aware that what we propose will incur costs, and will be disruptive and controversial - but we are convinced that doing nothing would be worse” (Williams Commission, 2014)</p>

		based on qualifications... In many municipalities expenditures on salaries amounted to 90% of the budget and no money was left for projects (Halabi, 2003).	
<i>Futility of Resistance Thesis</i> Appeals to the historical inevitability of the proposed reforms.	Example: “[M]any of our growing suburbs are constrained by boundaries that date back to the horse and cart days” (Office of Local Government 2014, p. 4)	None	“Change is inevitable and essential so that our public services can become more efficient, effective, accessible and responsive” (Carwyn Jones, First Minister of Wales, BBC interview 20/1/2014).
<i>Merely Good Thesis</i> (absent in Hirschman) This argument seeks to assert that the proposed reforms are merely good (as opposed to ‘necessary’ or ‘inevitable’ underlying the alternative theses). We posit that this type of argument requires a more sophisticated audience for penetration, and that it may not attract the attention of the media.	‘I encourage every council to back this program. It will deliver more resources to councils and create the efficiencies and economies that ratepayers deserve’ (Hansard, 2015).	Globally, large municipalities led by capable mayors provide better service than small ones. In large municipalities many of the resources are spent directly to the community, and are not wasted on unneeded jobs and cronyism, such as in many Arab municipalities (Asad, 2003).	“There is a real opportunity here for local government to make significant savings for taxpayers and if councils work together, plan well and involve their staff there is the opportunity for savings even greater than the £650m we have identified” (Leighton Andrews, Public Services Minister, Welsh Government, 24/11/2015)

Adapted from Grant and Drew (2017)

4. Reactionary Rhetoric

As we have noted, Hirschman's (1991) progressive rhetoric theses were developed as counterpoints to the various reactionary positions which both motivated and dominated his book. Table, 2 provides a brief description of each reactionary thesis, along with nominating the relevant progressive counter-position.

Hirschman (in Adelman 2013, p. 296 and in his Tanner lecture (1988, p. 9)) posits a *modus operandi* for the reactionaries which avoids a direct confrontation in favour of initially endorsing the progressive proposal 'sincerely or otherwise, but then attempt[ing] to demonstrate that the action taken in its name is ill-conceived'. This *modus operandi* was proposed in light of Hirschman's (1988, p. 8) determination that the modern era was of a 'stubbornly progressive temper'. Clearly this is not the case in 2017 – if there is a dominant temper it is probably one of 'tr[i]umphant' reaction. Nevertheless, the Jeopardy thesis – which is the counter-argument to the Imminent Danger thesis – does need to commence with an acknowledgement of at least some of the positive objectives for the proposed public policy intervention. However, reactionaries parrying the Imminent Danger thesis in this manner assert that the positive outcomes are not worth the side-effects which will be brought about by implementing the proposal. This line of argument was most popular in Israel where it was asserted that larger municipalities might well lead to corruption and large deficits. In Australia (where the thesis was also prominently employed), the emphasis was mainly on the loss of community voice following amalgamation – particularly where amalgamations occurred between local governments of disparate size. This argument was only occasionally deployed in Wales, where some commentators pointed towards the contrasting identities of the local authorities composing the favoured amalgamations of the Welsh Government.

By way of contrast, the Perversity thesis (which Hirschman describes as the foil to the Desperate Predicament argument) does not require any initial admission of likely positive outcomes arising from the proposed public policy intervention. Instead, the Perversity thesis draws on a world-view of an unpredictable and even chaotic future to suggest that the outcomes from the reform will be precisely the opposite of those predicted by the progressives. As such, the Perversity thesis plays to the powerful rhetorical trope of irony thus making it 'the single most popular and effective weapon in the annals of reactionary rhetoric' (Hirschman, 1991, p. 140). Indeed the Perversity thesis was the most common rhetoric employed in both the NSW debates (the argument being that it would generate diseconomies and thus erode sustainability) and Wales debates (where the rhetoric of perversity was deployed by drawing attention to the transitional costs of making reorganization happen, especially at a time when budgets were shrinking anyway). Notably, the perversity rhetoric was only used sporadically in Israel – probably due to the alternate

emphasis on Jeopardy and Futility arguments responding to a history of corruption allegations, along with racial and religious tensions.

The Futility thesis is the final reactionary thesis proposed by Hirschman (1991). Hirschman (1993) was at pains to note that the Futility thesis should not be seen as a watered down version of its more prominent peer: Perversity. Rather Hirschman (1993) emphasised that the Futility thesis was motivated by an alternate world view that posited history as determined by inviolable laws – the course of which man should not attempt to tamper with. Moreover, the fact that progressives might attempt to meddle in the march of history creates room for the suspicion amongst reactionaries that perhaps the intervention proposed is a mere smokescreen for an alternate and somewhat nefarious objective. The Futility thesis was only employed sporadically in Australia, where it was claimed that the amalgamations might be motivated by a desire of the state government to ingratiate itself with the developer lobby. The Futility thesis was a little more prominent in Israel, where once again, the suspicion arose that the government was attempting to promote the interests of developers. Futility arguments were the least prominent reactionary rhetoric in Wales (where opponents of reform asserted that plans for reorganization were an attempt to strengthen Labour’s local powerbase).

Given our development of the Merely Good thesis in section 2, we must also consider whether a specific reactionary thesis is required to be added to the extant typology. The claim that an intervention should be pursued merely because it is good, may not necessarily require the development of a specific reactionary counter-point given that all of the extant reactionary theses would seem to be suitable foils. For instance, the claim that amalgamation would lead to greater efficiency in Australia was, in fact, met with a counter-claim that the proposal would reduce efficiency (a Perversity argument). Similarly, Merely Good rhetoric in Wales (regarding the potential for savings) was foiled by Perversity arguments questioning projected savings and drawing attention to the likely costs of reorganisation, whilst Merely Good rhetoric in Israel (focussed on the potential for more capable leadership in large municipalities) was met with Jeopardy arguments regarding the potential for corruption. Thus it is clear that a specific counter-thesis for Merely Good rhetoric is not *necessarily* indicated.

However, if we wish to have more deliberative rhetoric – consistent with the Aristotelian deliberation which focuses on ‘the weighing of factors relevant for choosing a course of action’ (Chambers, 2009, p. 332) – then the intransigent reactionary rhetoric of Hirschman (1991), despite being effective for winning an argument, will likely leave us unsatisfied. Indeed, Hirschman in expressing a hope for more fruitful dialogue might well have considered the possibility of what we might call Merely Not Good rhetoric. This type of rhetoric would seek to discover ‘new levels of truth’ through subjecting *prima facie* good objectives to rational inquiry. For instance, the claim made in all three nations that larger councils are more efficient begs the question about whether efficiency is indeed an *ipso facto* good. When one reviews the rhetoric relating to efficiency one becomes immediately aware that efficiency is never an ‘end’ (in an Aristotelian teleological sense), but merely the means to achieving an ‘end’. For instance, in Australia, Israel and Wales, arguments asserting that amalgamations would be more efficient were invariably connected to the reasons for desiring

efficiency – to provide better services and infrastructure for residents. Thus Merely Not Good deliberative replies to the Merely Good arguments of enhanced efficiency would likely point to the fact that efficiency is little more than a means for obtaining wants and that these wants (better infrastructure and services) must be weighed against other wants specific to government services, such as equity, due process, and responsiveness (Goodin and Wilenski, 1984). In so doing, the debate would become more deliberative and cause people to reflect on what they really value in local government.

Table 2 Reactionary Rhetoric in Local Government Amalgamation Debates.

Reactionary Position	Australia	Israel	Wales
<p><i>Jeopardy</i> The program involves unacceptable consequences of one sort or another and is the reactionary response to the Imminent Danger thesis and Synergist claim.</p>	<p><i>Example: ‘we’ve found this an abhorrent thing for us to be forced to merge, it will have a huge impact on our community both in cost and in the loss of our community’s interest’ (Glanville, 2016)</i></p>	<p><i>Small municipality is not necessarily more wasteful. Small municipalities of less than 5000 inhabitants exist in other countries and are managed efficiently. Some large cities, in contrast, lack sufficient revenues and under incompetent and corrupt leadership created huge deficits (Golan, 2003).</i></p>	<p>“It’s the wrong time for a new map - we should be concentrating on services. How can we have one eye on shrinking budgets and another on re-organisation?” (anonymous Welsh Labour Paty source, BBC interview, 11/06/2015).</p>
<p><i>Perversity</i> Unintended consequences from reform including effects opposite to the proposed goal. This is the reactionary response to the Desperate Predicament Thesis.</p>	<p><i>Example: DEA evidence produced by Drew et al. (2015) to suggest that</i></p>	<p><i>Transition to “more advanced” party politics will make Arab society more</i></p>	<p>“How are we going to pay for this? There are quite a lot of upfront costs. The</p>

	<p><i>diseconomies of scale (and hence lower rates of technical efficiency) will result from proposed amalgamations</i></p>	<p><i>proactive, but in some localities kinship-based politics may be replaced by ethnic politics (religion-based conflicts) (Sweid, 2003).</i></p>	<p>work that we've done suggests something like £200m. Do we want to spend that £200m on reorganisation or do we want to spend it on services?" Steve Thomas, CEO of the Welsh Local Government Association, BBC interview, 21/01/2014).</p>
<p><i>Futility</i> Proposed reforms will not improve the circumstances at which they are aimed; they are a smoke screen for a political agenda. This is Hirschman's (1991) suggested reactionary response to the Futility of Resistance thesis.</p>	<p><i>Example: 'If the government could not cook the books to arrive at an impressive figure to demonstrate savings from merged councils, then it is fair to say that is not the reason they're being merged... This has created accusations that the process reflects a political gerrymander' (Saulwick, 2016)</i></p>	<p><i>Sometimes, an amalgamation justified by efficiency hides damaging improper motivations ... seemingly an efficient amalgamation of three small municipalities. Practically each can become more efficient by itself, but between them is one of the most beautiful areas in Israel that attracts real estate developers ... Amalgamation, they hope, would expedite the transformation of this agricultural little piece of</i></p>	<p>"Shoving together existing councils in a botched party-political stitch-up serves no-one aside from the Labour party" (Peter Black, Liberal Democrat Welsh Assembly Member, BBC interview, 17/06/2015).</p>

		<i>heaven, vinyards and wine, into a mass of concrete (Golan 2003).</i>	
--	--	---	--

Adapted from Grant and Drew (2017)

5. Conclusion

Our review of the rhetoric of amalgamation in Australia, Israel and Wales has led us to the point where we can assess the four claims associated with Hirschman’s (1991) *Rhetoric of Reaction*.

First, as we have already demonstrated, it is erroneous to associate progressive or reactionary rhetoric with a particular political ideology. Second, it is far from certain that political actors are *impelled* to follow the Hirschman (1991) theses: certainly our identification of Merely Good Rhetoric points to an important way that rhetoricians can attempt to depart from rhetorics of intransigence and engage in a more deliberative type of inquiry (however, we do concede that, all too often, opponents of reform do react along the lines of Hirschman’s (1991) theses of intransigence). Third, it is clear that the context of debate does have a strong influence on the theses which rhetoricians employ – for instance, we noted that the history and political context of Israel meant that the Futility of Resistance thesis is unlikely to ever play a prominent role in public policy debates regarding local government amalgamation. Moreover, the fiscal conditions faced by the respective nations were also important factors in providing impetus. Finally, we have identified the form of a more hopeful dialogue which Hirschman contemplates, but fails to specify: A deliberative rhetoric (captured by the Merely Good thesis) which stands in stark contrast to the largely plebiscitary rhetoric (words employed to win a public policy debate, with little thought for the merits of the argument or attempt to persuade) represented in the six Hirschman (1991) theses.

All three countries featured frequent attempts by progressives to convince local government stakeholders of Merely Good reasons for amalgamation. This is a rhetoric of hope rather than fear, of self-determination rather than fate. Merely Good rhetoric does not suffer from diminishing returns to scale and need not fear historical precedent. However, in the case of all three countries the Merely Good rhetoric, whilst reported by the media, largely failed to sway public opinion. Instead, reactionary theses – particularly Perversity (in Australia and Wales) and Jeopardy (in Israel) largely carried the day. The reason for this is best explained by McCloskey’s (1998) conception of rhetoric as the study of how scarce means are allocated to the desire to be heard – reasoned, deliberative debate is unlikely to ever be able to capture the attention of the media and its subscribers in quite the same way as plebiscitary claims and counter claims of doom and destruction.

Therefore, if we are ever to progress the state of democratic debate then it would seem that we will need to develop an environment which deters reactionaries from reflexively reaching for intransigent foils, no matter how expedient and devastatingly effective they might appear.

In this regard it would seem that a number of potential remedies may contribute to more deliberative rhetoric. First, the media might become more aware of the deleterious effect that plebiscitary rhetoric has on the nature of public policy debate. Perhaps it is overly optimistic to call for restraint in printing alarmist and intransigent rhetoric – no doubt it attracts an audience – but we might hope for a greater willingness for the media to interrogate the rhetoric that it reports on in an attempt to dispel misleading and unhelpful comments. In this regard, it would seem important for higher education institutions which train media personnel to give careful consideration to the idea of including more instruction on the study of rhetorics, both in the classical sense and more modern applications. It also seems to be the case that there is a need for more scholarly research into the area of public policy rhetoric – particularly, with respect to empirical studies. Moreover, greater scholarly attention might act to improve the communication between scholars and public policy proponents and thus, in time, improve the quality of public policy discourse. In similar vein, education in civics, rhetoric and political theory at the high school level would, in time, result in a population more likely to be receptive to reasoned debate which causes individuals to reflect and assimilate new information and knowledge (Crowley and Hawhee, 2012). In addition, the use of mini-publics – citizen juries and the like – which have a structure more conducive to dialogue have been suggested as an important way of achieving a higher standard of debate.

Finally, there is clearly an important role for the political class to play – first, in showing some self-restraint from pursuing opportunities to win debate at any cost by employing rhetorics of intransigence; second, in terms of calling out intransigent rhetoric as unhelpful to the democratic process whenever it arises. There are signs that politicians on the progressive side are open to prosecuting the Merely Good thesis, what would seem to be missing is the goodwill of reactionaries to reply in like kind. There seems to be a growing dislike of confrontational politics in many Westminster-style systems, and it may well be that political oppositions which embrace a more deliberative kind of rhetoric will be handsomely rewarded for their courage (Marsh and Miller, 2012).

References

Abelson, P., & Joyeux, R. (2015). New development: Smoke and mirrors – Fallacies in the New South Wales Government's views on local government financial capacity. *Public Money & Management*, 35(4): 315–320.

Adelman, J. ed. (2013). *The Essential Hirschman*. Princeton University Press: Princeton.

Aristotle (2012). *Aristotle: The Art of Rhetoric*. Collins Classics: London.

Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) (2015). *Government Finance Statistics, Australia, 2013-14*.

Booth, W. (1974). *Modern Dogma and the Rhetoric of Assent*. University of Chicago Press: Chicago.

- Chambers, S. (2009). Rhetoric and the Public Sphere: Has Deliberative Democracy Abandoned Mass Democracy? *Political Theory*, 37(3): 323-350.
- Chandler, J.A. (2007) *Explaining local government: Local government in Britain since 1800*. Manchester University Press: Manchester.
- Commission on Public Service Governance and Delivery (2014) Full Report. Welsh Government: Cardiff.
- Crowley, S. and Hawhee, D. (2012). *Ancient Rhetorics for Contemporary Students*. Pearson: Boston.
- Drew, J., Grant, B. and Campbell, N. (2016). Progressive and Reactionary Rhetoric in the Municipal Reform Debate in New South Wales Australia. *Australian Journal of Political Science*, 51(2): 323-337.
- Drew, J., Kortt, M. and Dollery, B. (2015). No Aladdin's Cave in New South Wales? Local Government Amalgamation, Scale Economies and Data Envelopment Specification. *Administration & Society*, DOI: 10.1177/0095399715581045.
- Glanville, B. (2016), Woollahra Council Loses Legal Challenge Against NSW Government Over Forced Amalgamation. *Australian Broadcasting Commission*, 20 July, 2016.
- Goodin, R. and Wilenski, P. (1984). The Logical Underpinnings of Administrative Principles. *Public Administration Review*, 44(6): 512-517.
- Grant, B. and Drew, J. (2017). *Local Government in Australia: History, Theory and Public Policy*. Springer Palgrave: Singapore.
- Hirschman, A. (1988). *Two Hundred Years of Reactionary Rhetoric: The Case of the Perverse Effect*. The Tanner Lectures on Human Values: April 8, 1988.
- Hirschman, A. (1991). *The Rhetoric of Reaction: Perversity, Futility, Jeopardy*. Belknap Press: Cambridge.
- Hirschman, A. (1993). The Rhetoric of Reaction – Two Years Later. *Government and Opposition*, 28(3): 292–314.
- John, P. (2014) The Great Survivor: The Persistence and Resilience of English Local Government. *Local Government Studies*, 40(5): 687-704.
- John, P, and Copus, C, 2011, The United Kingdom: Is there really an Anglo model?, in J.Loughlin, F. Hendriks, and A.Lidstrom (eds) *The Oxford Handbook of Local and Regional Democracy in Europe* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 27-47
- McCloskey, D. (1998). *The Rhetoric of Economics*. University of Wisconsin Press: Madison.
- McCloskey, D. (2000). *Knowledge and Persuasion in Economics*. Cambridge University Press: Cambridge.

Marsh, I and Miller, R. (2012). *Democratic Decline and Democratic Renewal: Political Change in Britain, Australia and New Zealand*. Cambridge University Press: Cambridge.

Razin, E. (2004). Needs and Impediments for Local Government Reform: Lessons from Israel. *Journal of Urban Affairs*, 26(5): 623-640.

Razin, E. and Hazan, (2004). Municipal Boundary Conflicts Between Jewish and Arab Local Authorities in Israel: Geography of Administration or Geopolitics? *Geografiska Annaler, Series B, Human Geography*, 86(2): 79-94.

Reingewertz, Y. (2012). Do Municipal Amalgamations Work? Evidence from Municipalities in Israel. *Journal of Urban Economics*, 72(2-3): 240-251.

Saulwick, J. (2016). There Are Reasons to Merge Councils, But Not the Ones Mike Baird is Using. *Sydney Morning Herald*, 17 May, 2016.

Simpson, J. (2011) Local, regional, national: What services are best delivered where? Cardiff: Welsh Assembly Government.

State Parliament of NSW (Hansard). 2014a. Legislative assembly 10 September 2014 [full transcript].

URL:

<<https://www.parliament.nsw.gov.au/prod/parlment/hansart.nsf/V3Key/LA20140910038>>.

Consulted 8 October 2015.

State Parliament of NSW (Hansard). 2014a. Legislative assembly 14 May 2015 [full transcript]. URL: <http://www.lgnsw.org.au/files/imce-uploads/127/lg-amalgamations-parliamentary-debate-extract-14.5.15.pdf>. Consulted 14 January 2017.

Woodburn, J. (2016). Shooters, Fishers and Farmer Party Claim First Seat in NSW Lower House After Orange Re-Count. *Australian Broadcasting Commission*, 21 November, 2016.