

The shift from the third way to neo-liberalism: An analysis of the 2010 Amendments to the LGA

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Abstract Template

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In 2002 the Labour-led government put in place a number of reforms to the Local Government Act placing councils in a position where they could develop specific regional and community based approaches to social problems. A core part of how these changes were put in place was through the legislation's emphasis on community and the requirement to publically consult to a much greater extent. These reforms were consistent with the application of third way principles incorporating aspects of social democracy and neoliberalism. In 2010, further amendments were made by the National-led government which undermined local government's capacity to provide policy based on social inclusion. For example, the language of community was changed to region and the requirements for public consultation were lessened. Using a case study of local government provision and sale of social housing, we have demonstrated that since the 2010 legislative changes, there have been alterations in some local government organisations' relationships with, and response to, their communities. In particular, local government has reduced services, replacing their focus with debt management in line with austerity principles. In this paper we use this public policy reform to argue, notwithstanding the retention of different pieces of legislation, that the 2008-National-led government has pursued an agenda of reform much more closely aligned with neo-liberal and conservative values than the third way. We further argue that these changes have lessened the capacity of local government to respond to regional issues in a socially responsible way, lessening local government's engagement with civil society and hampering a regional approach to policy development.