
THE CASE FOR COLLABORATION: A ROAD-MAP BASED ON THE CARMELITE PROJECT IN ISRAEL AND SOME LESSONS FOR REVITALIZING DEMOCRACIES¹

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Abstract

The paper elaborates on the importance of collaboration in public administration and on its meaningful theoretical and practical advantages for modern societies. Our goal is to present a program on how collaboration can be implemented in local governance and integrated with the idea of urban democracy. It is argued that collaboration can and should be fostered as the new managerial and social paradigm in the years to come which may prove useful to the problematic Middle-East region. The paper focuses on the local government level and provides a useful map for increasing citizenship involvement in public projects. Based on a unique experience of citizenry involvement in one ambitious Israeli project we attempt to develop a broader theoretical framework on the idea of urban democracy and collaboration with public administration. We argue that such collaboration is possible and essential, and that it may revitalize urban democracy and trust among parties of modern society. Moreover, in the context of the Middle-East and following the end of the war in Iraq we further suggest that collaboration may have an even greater potential for rebuilding citizens' trust in governance and initiating mutual cooperation that crosses feasible and cultural borders. Finally, the paper summarizes lessons and implications of the specific project in the context of the more general framework and tries to provide a look into the future of collaboration and at the vision of better managing local-level and national-level partnerships in modern as well as developing democracies.

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Introduction

We live in an era of great challenges for modern societies. The 21st century will necessitate enormous changes in our conventional perceptions of governmental activities and responsibilities. It will similarly require reformation of the meaning of citizenship and a redefinition of the role of citizens, businesses and private sector firms, the third sector, the media, and academia. All these players, and others, will need to collaborate. Most importantly, they will need to collaborate with public administration as its impact grows, in order to provide the people with better services and high quality goods. They will have to collaborate since the economic, social, and human potential of “doing together” is much more extensive and profitable than the option of “doing alone”.

What is the meaning of collaboration? Theoretically, collaboration draws substance from various disciplines and fields of knowledge, wider even than those mentioned when dealing with the eclectic nature of public administration. Actually it would be unreliable and incomplete to treat collaboration solely from an economic, political, sociological, or even psychological point of view. Rational choice theory, the conflict resolution approach, communitarianism, and real-politics analysis provide additional theoretical tools that should be applied in a useful manner if one seeks higher understanding of the collaborative process as well as its chances to endure. The literature is preoccupied with close but different terminologies for mutual effort by social players. In this sense, collaboration is only one concept that needs to be assessed, in relation to others such as partnership, cooperation, integration, or joint ventures. Thus, and according to Cigler (1999) “collaborative actions involve strong linkages among stable membership in specific and often complex purposes, and usually are long term” (p. 86).

However, the most prominent questions in this regard are different: Could it be that we are presenting a utopian approach, unlikely to function in a competitive environment and a free-market society? Perhaps collaboration should be left as an unrealistic prototype for the ideal society we all seek, but can never attain? Frankly, I must admit that I have no definitive answers to these questions. Indeed, it is possible that talking about a “spirit of collaboration” in public administration will in the end remain an unreachable goal, at least in the near future. However, as will be demonstrated here, encouraging experiences of collaboration exist that have demonstrated a certain level of success. Since the goal of leaders and the leadership cadre in public administration is to create vision and pave ways, the idea of collaboration seems adequate for inclusion under the concept of vision. Hence, this paper will try to stimulate broad thinking on the meaning and potential of collaborative administration, and to illustrate its enormous potential in the local governance arena.

The idea of collaboration in public administration has close linkage with the New Public Management (NPM) doctrine or the “new managerialism”. This doctrine has put serious pressure on state bureaucracies to become more responsive to citizens as clients and to direct citizens’ lives with maximum sensitivity to the voices from the field. In many respects NPM has become the “religion” and responsiveness the “law”. Bureaucracies have also been urged to advance beyond responsiveness and engage in collaboration with other social players such as private businesses and third-sector organizations as well as citizens. Without doubt, these are important advances in contemporary public administration, which finds itself struggling in an ultra-dynamic marketplace arena. Like any other call for reform it

was caused by a necessary change in the minds and hearts of the parties involved. To bring collaboration into the corridors of public administration, many old perceptions and attitudes need to be revised and reframed.

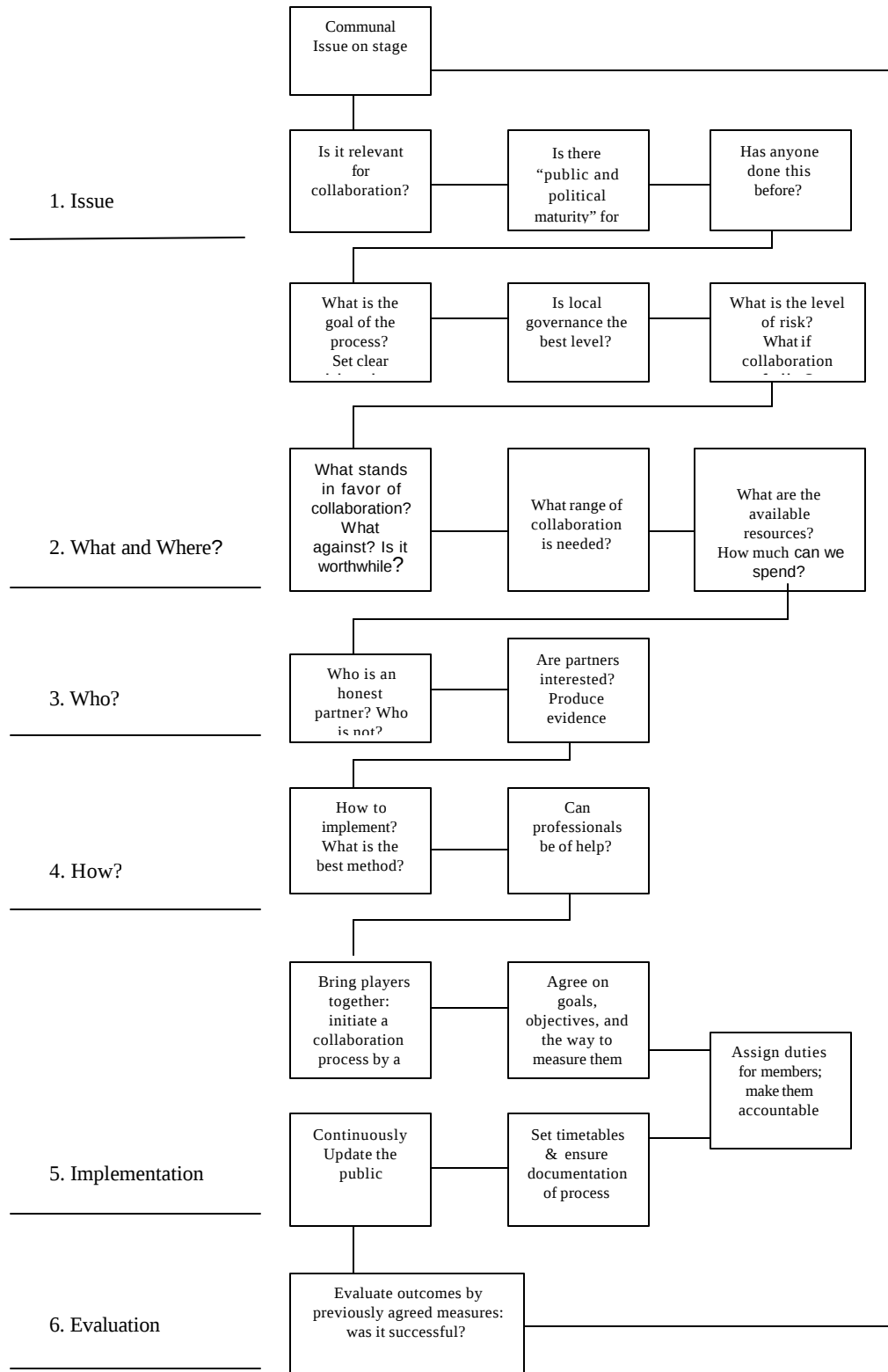
Despite its evident advantages, the idea of collaboration also attracts heavy fire from those who believe that it is merely a utopian idea with minimal impact on the administrative process. At most, opponents suggest that collaboration is a welcome change in theory building and in practical culture reconstruction, but they add that modern societies still encounter an increase in citizens' passivism; they tend to favor the easy chair of the customer over the sweat and turmoil of participatory involvement (Vigoda, 2002).

Revitalizing urban democracy: Towards a strategic process of collaboration in local government

Despite the growing number of collaborative ventures in government and the knowledge that has subsequently accumulated, only slight regard has been given so far to the need to develop a comprehensive strategy for collaboration in and around public administration. As suggested by Cigler (1999), collaborative actions frequently emerge from disastrous events that trigger fiscal stress or perceived stress. In light of this inconsistent approach to collaboration it is easier to understand why the literature lacks a more strategic orientation to the field. The potential advantages of collaboration as a strategic apparatus for public agencies are many. It can contribute to the mutual power of public programs, increase players' commitment to a specific idea or initiative, stimulate productivity and performance by people and institutions, enhance players' image and legitimacy of in citizens' eyes, augment trust in government, and secure democratic values (Nye, Zelikow, & King, 1997).

Like any other administrative or managerial strategy, our suggestion also rests on several assumptions. The first is that public administration, its agencies, and its personnel should seek higher levels of collaboration with other social players wherever possible and wherever the public interest may benefit. Another assumption, as will be explained below, is that the local government arena is a good habitat for such experiences, at least in their first steps. However, beyond the first two assumptions, which are normative, the third is much more realistic. It argues that rationalism as rooted in human nature permits collaboration only in a limited, albeit rising number of public ventures, and that collaboration is best described as a complex process with advantages but also drawbacks.

Figure 1: A strategic map of an effective collaboration process as demonstrated in the local government arena.



There are also several preconditions for a strategic approach to collaboration. Generally we adopt Cigler's (1999) suggestion of nine such preconditions: (1) a disastrous event, (2) fiscal stress or perceived fiscal stress, (3) a political constituency for cooperation, (4) supportive capacity building, (5) early and continued support by elected local officials, (6) visible advantages of cooperation for participating government, (7) existence of a policy entrepreneur, (8) early focus on visible effective strategies, and (9) emphasis on collaborative skill building. These conditions set the stage for a collaborative venture and make it a relevant mechanism to deal with a public issue.

A better understanding of the collaborative process is based on systematic analysis platforms. One such platform is presented in Figure 1, where a general map for collaboration between public administration and others in the local government arena is suggested. This map is based on five main stages and checkpoints in the process: (1) deciding on a fitting *issue* for collaboration, (2) characterizing the issue by "*what and where*" inquiries, (3) finding out *who* is involved, (4) finding out *how* to implement, (5) launching *implementation*, (6) *evaluating* the process. These stages are broadly developed below.

While collaboration can be analyzed from various perspectives, we decided to focus on the local government level. Beyond the global, regional, and even the national levels, a local governance view is the most applicable and realistic for practical and theoretical reasons. To date, most collaborative projects reported in the scientific literature have been conducted in this environment, so our present knowledge relies heavily on such experiences. Moreover, as suggested by Sobel (1993) and Etzioni (1994, 1995), the local/communal level is ideal for increasing citizens' involvement in government. It has the potential of bringing together individuals, groups of citizens, private and third-sector organizations, and public agencies, and helping them cooperate in a microcosm. The outcomes of collaborative programs in local government are manifested directly to the people. The results are more clearly observed by public stakeholders, who also develop a sense of attachment, concern, and criticism towards these programs. In the longer run these endeavors may evince relevancy and compatibility in national or federal domains.

Urban democracy in action: The Carmelite project as a model for regional collaboration across communities and religions

Background

The idea of urging deeper and more intensive involvement by citizens has taken an interesting course in the Carmelite project as planned in the city of Haifa. Originally this project was similar to many other local government/urban development programs in the sense that all of them were private ventures asking for the approval of the city authorities. The Carmelite project was suggested by private entrepreneurs and by the owners of a piece of land on the top of Mount Carmel in the city of Haifa. This area with its breathtaking view, which for many years was held by the IDF (Israel Defense Forces) for military reasons of air control, was released and returned to its original owners in the mid-1990s when spirits of peace and silence had woven in the region. The legal owners, namely the Catholic Church

and the Christian Carmelite Order, resolved to develop the area as a model for economic renewal and growth. They thus suggested a comprehensive plan targeted at building commercial centers, hotels, residential neighborhoods, as well as gardens and green areas, and they sought the formal approval of the city authorities. In an exceptional decision, supported by professionals and academics, the mayor of Haifa appointed a 12-member committee whose task was to initiate a unique public involvement process intended to probe residents' opinions of the project.

Moreover, the committee was authorized to suggest changes in the plan in keeping with the opinions of citizens and professionals. The entrepreneurs had to agree to this condition in order to move ahead with the formal request for approval by the city authorities. In any case, the entire public involvement process was designed to be activated and completed prior to the discussion in the regional Planning and Building Committee, whose task is to examine and formally approve or reject such plans. Note however that the public involvement process was not intended to replace or adversely affect the right of vested opposition by the public as sanctioned by the Israeli planning and building law (*The Carmelite plan*, 2001; p.7). The process was aimed at bringing citizens and city residents closer to decision-making centers on the local community level, providing them with the opportunity of sounding an organized voice, and stimulating a collaborative process among private, public, and third-sector organizations as well as individual citizens.

Steering committee and process

As noted, the committee consisted of 12 members who directed, supervised, and accompanied the public involvement process. Of these members five were municipal representatives from various relevant departments such as the city engineering branch, the mayor's office, and the ombudsman's branch; two represented the forum of environmental organizations, which are basically third-sector bodies; three were academic professionals in the field of urban planning; one was an independent architect; and one was a lawyer representing the entrepreneurs. Members of the committee were Jews and non-Jews who also discussed relevant religious-related issues of the project. In addition, two academic experts were involved in the active process of analyzing public opinion regarding the project. The committee worked for a year and submitted its recommendations to the mayor and the entrepreneurs, and also publicized the conclusions for the citizens of Haifa. All in all, the public involvement process included six major steps (*The Carmelite plan*, 2001;11-14):

- (1) Preliminary briefing: a step in which announcements were issued to inform to the public of the preparation of the Carmelite project and of the intended public involvement process. The announcements were published in several languages (principally Hebrew, Arabic, and Russian) in local and national newspapers and on local television and radio. The announcements were also distributed to neighborhood committees in areas located around the geographical borders of the Carmelite project. High school pupils assisted in this activity and did the rounds of placing the materials in residents' mailboxes. In addition, a detailed exhibition of the project was mounted in City Hall, with information on the public involvement process presented there and in some of the municipality's main departments. All the

information was also made available on a special Internet site created for this purpose.

- (2) Presenting the project to the public: two public meetings were held to present the project to the public. An open invitation was distributed to all city and non-city residents, and some 450 people attended both meetings. At these gatherings the project was presented by the entrepreneurs and by city officials, and feedback from the public was obtained and recorded. In addition, the public received information on the involvement process, its rationale, and its goals.
- (3) Feedback from the public: two major methods were applied to obtain feedback from the public. First, the comments, concerns, questions, and answers voiced during the meetings were recorded and summarized in a separate document. Second, a detailed questionnaire was distributed among all those present at the meetings. This questionnaire included two major sections, one referring to the Carmelite project itself and the other to the public involvement process, its strengths and weaknesses. It is important to mention that despite previous suggestion by the professionals, who were especially engaged to conduct the public opinion survey, the committee chose to use a convenient sample of residents rather than a more extensive and representative sample. As a result, many residents who were unable to attend the meetings for various reasons obviously had no reasonable chance to make themselves heard. Finally, a total of 145 completed questionnaires were returned and analyzed. The participants were also asked to indicate if they were interested in further discussion of the project in smaller "discussion groups".
- (4) Focus/discussion groups: An additional phase of hearing the public voice was accomplished through five discussion groups. These forums were composed of independent interested citizens, about 25 in each group, around a hundred in all, who had the chance to review the details of the projects, to ask questions, raise concerns, and suggest alternatives and emendations of various parts in the project. Note also that steps 3 and 4 were both managed by professionals and expenses were covered entirely by the entrepreneurs as well as being monitored by the steering committee. Participating citizens came from various religions and communities and represented the heterogeneous Haifa population that comprises of Jews, Moslems, Druze, and Christians.
- (5) A summary document of public opinions: the entire public involvement process, as well as public attitudes, questions, and concerns, were summarized in a comprehensive paper. This summary was brought to the attention of the entrepreneurs, who were asked to revise their suggestion in accordance with the recommendations. The summarizing document was also made public through the media and presented to the local Planning and Building Committee together with the revised Carmelite plan.

- (6) Response by the entrepreneur – feedback to the public: The entrepreneurs examined the possibilities of making changes and revisions in the project. They were also asked by the steering committee to present a document in which they would include comments on and responses to public concerns. This document was distributed to the public in ways similar to those described above.

Lessons

Most importantly, this final step closes a circle in the process of public involvement and collaboration among public administration agencies, private entrepreneurs, citizens, and third-sector organizations. It depends on the idea that the revised Carmelite plan will better meet the expectations of the city residents as individuals, interest groups of private or non-profit citizens, and the entrepreneurs. The process and its results are also expected to reduce the natural resistance to change in city urban planning and development. Being a first experience in the Israeli environment, this collaborative process is also expected to suggest a practical model and guidelines for future similar ventures and decisions on both the local and national government level.

The case study of the Carmelite project is thus an example of higher levels of citizens' involvement in the community, and of a potential step towards stronger urban democratic culture in our modern society. It may thus show the road to greater collaboration in and around Middle-East countries and especially calls for citizens' involvement in various policy decisions. All in all, the collaborative process has provided the following five advantages:

- (1) An increased sense of participation by city residents and by third-sector organizations (Green environment movements and other voluntary groups in the community). This is a symbolic contribution by the project but it is of prime importance due to the potential to increase citizens' trust and partnership with public authorities in similar future projects.
- (2) An early understanding by city authorities and by entrepreneurs about the difficulties that the program entails and about potential ways to adjust it to become more coherent with the public interest.
- (3) Better understanding by public officials that citizens are interested and willing to share knowledge, time, effort, and other resources for the purpose of building quality community life. This advantage contradicts common criticism on citizens' passivism and lack of interest in local-level and national-level affairs.
- (4) As a result of this, public officials identified considerably lower levels of resistance to change in city planning. The experience has stimulated a more effective and efficient managerial process of piloting a city construction program through the halls of bureaucracy and public administration.

- (5) Encouraging a more efficient strategy of policymaking and policy implementing based on relevant public inputs into the process from its very early stages. In this process, citizens of various religions and communities worked together to accomplish a collective goal of better quality of life engaged with higher economic development.

Conclusions and implications

The end of the second Gulf War in Iraq has brought the issue of collaboration to the front stage of our nations. No doubt that one of the regions that will need to face this challenge more actively is the Middle-East. This war was in fact one result of the simultaneous terrorist attacks on New York City, Pennsylvania and Washington DC on the morning of September 11th, 2001. It seems that a significant outgrowth of the September 11th events may turn out to be our views and perceptions of the need for better collaboration among various players in modern democratic societies. It is somehow a paradox that such a trend has been initiated when our world seemed to be progressing on the road to relative prosperity and international calm. The end of the cold war and the firm stand against terrorist nations in the Middle-east and elsewhere such as Libya and Iraq during the 1980s and 1990s were indeed encouraging signals of the strength of democracies. However, for many of us the challenge has come from an unexpected direction and by unconventional tools. High-level collaboration among many terrorist organizations and terrorist supporting states like Afghanistan, Iraq, Iran, and Syria, made the attack on the United States so effective and successful. The terrorists' best weapon was international cooperation, partnership, and cohesive action of various groups. They have also enjoyed favorable attitudes and popular support of the people in extreme religious countries and regions. Thus, it's possible that only a similar counter process of collaboration among democratic nations and among their administrative agencies can resist these threatening forces and safeguard the free world.

In this conflict, as in other socially oriented conflicts and dilemmas, it is public administration that has the prime role and responsibility to provide answers to the new needs. For this purpose, public administration means a vast collection of governmental agencies that take care of our internal and external security, welfare, economy, education, and other services that citizens of modern civilizations use. Today, more than ever before the most important goal of our governments and leaders is to enhance collaboration among various social players, and as all agree, to protect democracy by this mutual effort. We have always expected national and federal institutions to do so, and for many good reasons we expect them today to become even more energetic and involved in such trends and developments.

Today, there are several reasons for our ongoing dependence on the government and on its executive branches. First, we simply have no other institution or body to turn to when our basic rights and needs are endangered. Second, in the last century governments and the public sector have become larger than in any other time in the past, and they have heightened citizens' dependence on the services and goods they provide. Third, the public sector and its administrative heads provide more services and goods than ever in the past, and they do that for larger, increasingly demanding, heterogeneous populations. In sum, we lean on governments and on public administration bodies since we believe that they hold

the answers to our questions and the remedies for our needs. Putting it other way, citizens of modern states largely trust the systematic order and action of governments as well as their executive branches. If they can't do the right things for us, then who actually can? However, against the new and unconventional threats of terror, they need not be alone, but need to collaborate to as great a degree as possible. Collaboration is thus a political, social, and more importantly managerial craftsmanship that public administration needs to improve. It is an important tool that stands against brutality and extremism from the outside, but it can also be effectively used to fight internal fragility and intra-national social problems.

Hence, this paper creates fresh thinking on the potential of collaboration and the way to put it in the service of our states and communities, despite anticipated obstacles. Scholars' efforts should be directed at portraying a rational and realistic map that fosters collaboration among public administration and dominant social players such as the private sector, citizens (as individuals and as groups), media, and academia. Our map, as presented here, is only one way of responding to this challenge in the local government level. In our view, such collaboration should not be considered an option for our democracies; it needs to be our bright shining choice.

This paper contributes to the growing theme of collaboration in public administration, and possibly also a future collaboration among various Middle-East countries, by focusing on one example from the Israeli context. The Carmelite project and the method it followed are studied as one way of creating effective collaboration in the local government level. It is evident today that no renewal or real progress of a democratic nation, state, or society can be made without minimal level of collaboration among social, political and private sector parties. This paper has focused on the local level but in the same time it may serve as a good starting point for cultural socialization into the topic of collaboration that can latter be upgraded to the national and perhaps international level. However, one should bear in mind that the Carmelite project is only one case study that should be compared with other experiences from across the world. Like many other case studies it has its advantages (for example, pointing to a unique policy problem and the detailed way to resolve it) as well as weaknesses (for example, the problem of generalization and external validity to other cases, across time and cultures) and thus should be treated with caution.

Recent works on collaboration have encouraged public administration agencies and leaders to adopt new models of alliances among diverse groups and individuals in society. Similarly, collaboration has become a necessity in local governance owing to its growing responsibilities and the continuous devolution of central government, which transfers more tasks to local authorities. A process of reinvention in local government has thus been inspired by the increasing need to enhance collaboration. Alliances have become strategies for institutions of governance to do more with less, to create leadership systems based on steering not rowing, and to treat citizens as customers (Grubbs, 2000) or even partners equal to state and local authorities (Vigoda, 2000; 2002). It has been pointed out that the future of modern public administration depends heavily on joint forces and improved patterns of collaboration among various social players. Citizens' needs and demands, increasing complexity of public programs, and magnification of different social problems serve as main accelerators that bring citizens, public and private sector bodies, and third-sector/nonprofit organizations together. This process reflects self-derived interests but also a collective viewpoint of win-win alternatives.

For this purpose, a strategic agenda of collaboration needs to be rebuilt. Its power may draw substance from theory-anchored models and from practical and empirical experience as presented here. A core assumption of the strategic approach is that public administration can no longer settle for a limited level of cooperation among sporadic players, and thus tends to collaboration. Public agencies, both governmental-political and organizational-administrative, will need to adopt a culture of mutual effort and to put more energy into joint ventures that are inclusive and long-term. The strategic platform as presented in this paper may contribute to the development of such an interdisciplinary orientation and increase the impact of public-private-nonprofit alliances, both instrumentally and symbolically (Grubbs, 2000).

This paper also identifies a theoretical gap in contemporary administrative and political science literature, which frequently classifies collaboration as another technique of conflict management or conflict resolution programs (Fredericksen, 1996). The first goal of this paper is therefore to treat collaboration as an individual phenomenon, one that deserves its own theoretical attention separate from other writings on straightforward conflict management theory. We have argued that the option of collaboration is becoming highly relevant to public administration of our times, and that it proves useful in a number of local government issues. In line with this, our second goal was more clearly to set a strategy for collaboration, one that may serve as a road map for the future, both theoretically and practically.

The importance and relevance of collaboration for public administration and for citizens in our era are not disputed. While there are equivocal attitudes on the best way to implement collaboration there is consensus on its necessity. As it progresses, public administration will have to collaborate with a variety of participants and integrate various attitudes and interests to accomplish its future challenging tasks. Traditional, albeit effective techniques of participation in decision-making or negotiation management are expected to grow and mature into a more extensive strategy of collaboration. Ambitious projects and programs for larger groups of citizens will have to rely on collaboration and support the communal “we” rather than an alienated “they” spirit in society. This is a main track that can lead public administration on its way forward.

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