**Civil society organizations in collaborative governance systems:**

**Cross-sector partnerships as a test case**

**Michal Almog-Bar**

Abstract

Cross-sector partnerships, a distinct type of collaborative governance, have in recent years attracted increasing attention from governments, civil society organizations, foundations, philanthropists, and business organizations. Such partnerships are perceived as a key means of solving social issues and promoting innovative social initiatives, as well as a necessary and desirable strategy for dealing with complex public challenges.

This chapter examines, from the perspective of civil society, the status and roles played by civil society organizations in cross-sector partnerships and the relationships that are formed between these organizations and governmental bodies within the framework of cross-sector partnerships. It will present and discuss the findings of research on the activities of civil society organizations in cross-sector partnerships conducted in Israel in recent years.

**Civil society organizations in collaborative governance systems:**

**Cross-sector partnerships as a test case[[1]](#footnote-1)**

**Michal Almog-Bar**

Introduction

Cross-sector partnerships, a distinct type of collaborative governance, have in recent years attracted increasing attention from governments, civil society organizations, foundations, philanthropists and business organizations. Such partnerships are perceived as a key means of solving social issues and promoting innovative social initiatives, as well as a necessary and desirable strategy for dealing with complex public challenges, including increasing social needs, reduced resources for addressing those needs, and the growing complexity of various social problems and phenomena (Almog-Bar and Zychlinski 2010; Talias et al. 2010; Bryson et al. 2006).

Research literature offers various definitions of the term “cross-sector partnership.” Broadly speaking, however, it may be defined as an organizational framework (formal and/or informal), within which ongoing reciprocal relationships and exchanges between two or more sectors (government, third sector, and the business sector) take place, with the aim of achieving a result with added value that is unobtainable through the activity of one sector alone (Babiak and Thibault 2009; Bryson et al. 2006; Gazley and Brudney 2007). Within the context of such cross-sector partnerships, the partners share resources, responsibilities and costs, as well as decision-making processes and execution, so as to enjoy the added value that cannot be generated through the activity of just one sector. The partners in such a relationship are supposed to maintain their primary identity, their autonomy, values and vision, but they work together towards a common goal. While some definitions of governance include various types of partnership arrangements, in this chapter I will distinguish between collaborative governance, in which the status and responsibility of the public agency is central, and one or more public agency (state, government ministry, government authority, local authority and the like) engage directly with non-governmental interested parties (Ansell 2012; Shar-Hadar, Lahat, and Gal-Nur,), and cross-sector partnerships, where the aim is a more equitable status for all participants. In collaborative governance, the public agency promotes activities aimed at advancing public goals or providing public services, and is usually the agent directing and holding power in the process. In cross-sector partnerships, in contrast, there is an emphasis on a less hierarchical and more equitable sharing of government authority, responsibilities and activities with the civil society organizations and the business sector. Such partnership aims to include the active participation of all organizations (governmental and non-governmental) in setting policy and its implementation, together with joint responsibility for the outcomes of the partnership (Coston 1998). Cross-sector partnership, then, is distinguishable from other forms of collaboration, cooperation and participation, in that the mechanisms for governance and decision-making are joint and actively involve elements from different sectors, and also aspire to be less hierarchical and more equitable in decision-making processes and execution (Almog-Bar and Schmid 2018).

The emergence of cross-sector partnerships on public issues and the growing interest of academic research in this subject are the result of significant social and economic transformations that have taken place in Western society over the last three decades. These processes have changed the relationship between the three sectors comprising society: the government, the business sector and civil society, as well as the traditional division of labor between them. This change is described in the literature using the concept “new public governance,” which describes an alternative model for political and institutional organization based on governance composed of a network of partner institutions - governmental, social and economic - working together in policy networks that involve the various stakeholders and create collaborations between the public sector, business sector and civil society. New public governance offers greater public participation, social activism, public responsibility, and participatory democracy, which involves the citizens concerned at different levels of policy-making and implementation (Osborne 2006; Talshir and Tsur 2013). Cross-sector partnerships are seen in this approach as a key tool for solving complex social challenges facing countries and addressing large-scale social problems. Cross-sector partnership is perceived as a tool that can better address the failures of each sector, allowing for flexibility, inclusion and better adaptation to changing situations, among other things, because of its ability to response rapidly in comparison with cumbersome bureaucratic solutions provided by the public and government sectors (Bryson et al. 2006).

The two types of reasons for choosing a cross-sector partnership as a tool for dealing with social challenges are: Firstly, the **utilitarian**, which focuses on the contribution of the partnership to the quality of services, their efficiency, their effectiveness and their adaptation to the target audience; the state often uses these arguments to justify partnerships. And, second, the **normative**, which justifies the selection of a cross-sector partnership as a form of action based on values such as fairness, social capital and the inclusion of the target audience in the decision-making process. From the normative point of view, partnership is a goal that serves civil society organizations (Gazley and Brudney 2007).

This chapter seeks to critically examine the status and roles of civil society organizations in cross-sector partnerships that constitute systems of collaborative governance, as well as the emerging relationships between these organizations and governmental organizations within the framework of the inter-sector partnerships. It will present and discuss the findings of research conducted in Israel in recent years on the activities of civil society organizations in cross-sector partnerships.

The chapter will begin with a presentation of transformations in civil society over recent decades and of the changing context of government and civil society relations centered on the rise of the partnership paradigm. Then, it will present key issues regarding the activities of civil society organizations in cross-sector partnerships that have emerged in recent studies conducted by the author in Israel. Finally, it will discuss the status and roles of civil society organizations in cross-sector partnerships, the emerging reciprocal relationships between these organizations and organizations from the governmental sector, and the implications of these arrangements for civil society organizations.

Civil society in collaborative governance frameworks

Over the past three decades, civil society[[2]](#footnote-2) has become an important arena in which organizations external to the state or the free market operate, provide social services and promote disadvantaged and marginalized populations (Lorentzen 2010). Civil society is perceived as an alternative public sphere in which various actors can collectively address issues of common interest, initiate new policy solutions, act to advance common goals and influence public and state affairs (Cohen 1995; Edwards 2004). Participation in civil society is based on the concept of citizenship, whereby citizens of a democratic regime are entitled to rights such as freedom of association and freedom of expression, which enable them to act, organize, and be involved in various ways in shaping society and its institutions and in determining public policy. Therefore, civil society activity is also an expression of participatory democracy (Mutz 2006).

Although civil society encompasses various forms of activity, established organizations are a central and active part of it. These organizations, called ‘third sector organizations,’ are formally organized, with a certain degree of institutionalization, order, stability, and continuity. They are institutionally differentiated from the public sector and are not subordinate to any units of government. These organizations do not distribute profits. If any profits do derive from an organization’s activity, they are re-invested in the organization towards achieving its goals. Such organizations have independent management mechanisms that are not controlled by the free market, and furthermore, they enjoy inputs from volunteerism and contributions (Salamon and Anheier 1997). From a legal standpoint, in Israel such organizations are incorporated as non-profit organizations, public benefit companies, and trusts (philanthropic foundations).

Civil society organizations play a diverse range of roles, including the provision of services, political advocacy, civil and political engagement, promoting initiatives to change policy, social entrepreneurship, and promotion of values and beliefs (Anheier 2004). The social mission of these organizations includes the advancing of social visions aimed at promoting justice, equality, and well-being of individuals, groups, and communities. Their work entails the active and significant involvement of volunteers, friends, and customers, and a democratic and participatory organizational structure (Yacovitz and Katan 2005; Zychlinski 2010). Finally, civil society organizations are characterized by their ability to generate social capital, defined as networks of cooperation and trust between citizens (Putnam 2000).

Israeli civil society is among the largest in the world in terms of the number of registered organizations per number of residents, as well as in the scope of their economic activity. In 2016 there were 43,000 registered organizations in Israel, compared to 17,000 in the early 1990s. Over the past decade, some 1,500 to 1,700 new organizations have registered in Israel each year. However, only 20,000 organizations submitted their annual reports to the Corporations Authority in 2016 and are considered active. The share of civil society organizations in Israel’s gross domestic product and the rate of salaried employees in civil society organizations out of all employed persons are relatively high in international comparisons (Salamon et al. 2013).

**The rise of the collaborative paradigm: The changing context of the government and civil society relationship**

The growth and expansion of the activities of non-profit organizations that gained momentum in civil society in most countries during the 1980s and 1990s occurred alongside the rise of “new public management,” a public policy approach whereby lacks in the activities of public services could be overcome by adopting the approaches and style of business management, such as strategic planning, goal-oriented management, performance measurement and the development of incentive-based reward system in the public sector, reduction of the public sector through privatization, and preference for outsourcing government services to NGOs through contracts (Lane 2000). In light of critiques of the new public management approach, which emphasized the inapplicability and inefficiency of business practices in the implementation of public policy and the provision of public services (Flynn 2002; Rhodes 1997), a new approach, the “new public governance,” emerged in the early 2000s.

New public governance focuses on inter-organizational networks and on the role of the government in managing a wide range of third parties, while emphasizing service efficiency and the results arising from interactions between public service organizations and their environment (Osborne 2010; Salamon and Toepler 2015). In contrast to the new public management approach, which emphasizes reliance on market mechanisms to carry out functions previously performed by governments, the new public governance approach emphasizes the advantages of civil society organizations (and of business organizations in certain circumstances) in the design and delivery of public services (Salamon and Toepler 2015). These organizations are considered to have significant advantages compared to other types of public service providers. They have unique knowledge as a result of their proximity to specific groups of customers, they are better able to design and adapt holistic services to customers’ needs; and they are characterized by flexibility and innovation, by expertise in recruiting volunteers, and by identifying philanthropic resources. Furthermore, they have an advantage in promoting important social values ​​such as diversity, community resilience, and civic activism, as well as the ability to contribute to the democratization of public services through customer inclusion (Bode and Brandsen 2014; Pestoff and Brandsen 2010). For these reasons, the new public governance approach calls for partnerships between the government and relevant organizations outside it, particularly in civil society, in the provision of public services and the promotion of public goals (Salamon and Toepler 2015).

With the rise of the “new public governance” approach, there has been in recent years a growing perception in many places around the world of relations between civil society and the government as a partnership. Since the early 2000s, this partnership approach has become the favored model for relations between civil society and the government in developed countries, linking the government to civil society organizations in a wide range of areas (Bode and Brandsen 2014, Salamon and Toepler 2015). The partnership approach emphasizes the interdependence between the state and various social actors, including civil society organizations, and the emergence of extensive, diverse patterns of cooperation, collaboration, and coordination between them in the provision of services and in policy-making. In the inter-sectoral encounter that is part of cross-sector partnerships, there is a high probability of conflict and/or competition between values ​​and institutional logics that are derived from differences in the fundamental values that underlie the activity of each of the sectors (Bryson et al. 2006).

One of the central issues in ensuring the development and success of a partnership is the nature of governance in the organization that manages it (Almog-Bar and Zychlinski 2010). This very issue creates considerable tension in cross-sectoral partnerships. Common governance undermines the traditional concept of government governance and necessitates a paradigmatic change among both government authorities and civil society organizations. This change is reflected in the transformation of public responsibility into part of the general civic culture. What were previously uncontestably viewed as the government’s responsibility are now seen as general social problems that can be solved by political institutions, but also by actors from other sectors. These changes are not easily assimilated and are accompanied by resistance among all three sectors. This resistance can produce over-rigidity that heightens the differences between sectors rather than the partnership between them (Klijn and Teisman 2004).

Choosing partnership as a strategy for action exposed the partners to both advantages and disadvantages, risks and benefits. Some of the main advantages and benefits of cross-sector partnerships are: the ability to deal with common problems more effectively than their handling by a single sector, reducing environmental uncertainty (strategic and economic), reducing overlaps and duplications, potential for cost savings, better utilization and leveraging of resources, organizational learning, high quality service or final product, access to new skills or markets, strengthening the sense of community/social belonging, promotion of issues and processes that otherwise would not be expressed in the public sphere, and promotion of public responsibility and reducing the risk entailed in one body acting alone.

The disadvantages and risks include: blurring of the differences between sectors, a reduction in their autonomy, the time and financial resources invested in the establishment and maintenance of the partnership, the costs of investment in oversight and maintenance mechanisms, the reduction in the public responsibility of the government, harm to quality of service, equality of service, and even to democracy itself since partners in shaping policy include actors who did not receive a public mandate (Gazley and Brudney 2007; Person et al. 2009). Moreover, the power gaps between civil society organizations and government organizations raise concerns that the involvement of civil society organizations in the design and provision of public services will lead to their over-dependence on the government, to changes in the unique role they play and the contributions they provide as part of civil society, and to the bureaucratization and over-specialization of civil organizations (Furneaux and Ryan 2014; Phillips and Rathgeb Smith 2014).

In general, research from around the world shows that the main advantage of cross-sector partnerships for civil society organizations lies in access to financial resources, the expansion of their activity, and integration of new knowledge that contributes to the development and improvement of communications systems, management processes, and services (Alexander and Nank 2009; Simo and Bies 2007). However, civil society organizations that worked within the scope of cross-sector partnerships felt that they must operate in complex, multi-player environments that required a change in the way they acted vis-à-vis the environment (Gazely and Brudney 2007; Stone 2000).

While the new public governance approach and the cross-sector partnership policy derived from it have been adopted and expanded in many countries in recent years, the results and implications of this policy are not yet clear. There is limited empirical evidence of the effectiveness of this policy in the provision of public services or of its contribution and benefits to public policy or civil society (Pestoff and Brandsen 2010).

Key issues in cross-sector partnerships in Israel

In order to examine the unique involvement of civil society organizations in the cooperative governance arrangements, this section will present findings regarding the patterns of activity of civil society organizations in cross-sector partnerships, which have emerged from research in this area in Israel in recent years (Almog-Bar and Schmid 2018; Almog-Bar and Zychlinski 2010; 2014; Schmid and Almog-Bar 2013; 2016a; 2016b).

In accordance with the definition of cross-sector partnership presented above, these studies examined cross-sector partnerships that were initiatives, projects, or programs with active participation of representatives of organizations from at least two sectors (government sector, civil society, and business sector). Partnerships were selected in which an active and long-term joint governance mechanism was identified with the active presence of representatives of organizations from different sectors, who are responsible for decision-making for the partnership and its management. The partnerships studied had a history of at least three years of cooperation in order to ensure that this was an active partnership over time.

The establishment and development of cross-sector partnerships

The studies reveal that in the cross-sector partnerships that have been studied in Israel, civil society organizations are the primary initiators of inter-sectoral partnerships. In contrast, government and business organizations were less prominently involved in initiating the establishment of cross-sector partnerships (Almog-Bar and Schmid 2018).
The main considerations driving civil society organizations to establish or join cross-sector partnerships are ideological, professional, and financial.

Ideological considerations: Cross-sector partnerships and inter-sectoral action are perceived by civil society organizations as a means of advancing and implementing broad social changes at the national level, such as creating diversity in the Israeli employment market or changing perceptions of people with disabilities in Arab society. Cross-sector partnerships are perceived as a unique tool that enables the enlistment and leveraging of the significant resources and forces that are fundamental to the enactment of large-scale social changes, as well as a means of crafting better quality services for their clients.

Professional considerations: These include improving coordination, working together, and reducing competition between organizations operating in similar fields, improving organizational reputation, increasing the visibility of organizations and enhancing their access to financing entities, as well as conserving time and resources, improving organizational capabilities through learning from other organizations, and generating public discourse on topics that may otherwise be lacking.

Financial considerations: Younger organizations attached great importance to financial considerations, indicating the importance of partnerships as a tool for developing and pooling resources for young organizations that are generally less financially sound. Other prominent motives driving organizations to cooperate include the drive to gain access to centers of decision-making and distribution of resources and to leverage this for the purpose of raising resources. Cross-sector partnerships seem to be a particularly important source of resources for civil society organizations operating in an environment characterized by a lack of funding. It seems that inter-sectoral partnerships are a channel for increasing and securing government funding for the activities of civil society organizations.

Research literature reveals that the non-governmental organizations consider the government to be a major player without whom it is not worthwhile promoting social projects. Cross-sector partnerships require financing for the operating costs of budget-intensive national level social projects, which civil society organizations cannot afford to finance on their own, hence the need to engage the government in these systems has increased. Studies have also revealed that it is necessary to partner with the government just so that it will not wriggle out of its social responsibility to promote welfare and social projects, and to forestall a situation in which civil society organizations and business organizations have to replace the government in its social functions. Furthermore, the government is seen by representatives of civil society organizations as helping in the enlistment of businesses to cross-sector partnerships, because it enables them to meet and establish close relations with government representatives thereby advancing their agendas.

The studies reveal considerable differences in terms of organizational culture and work processes between the civil society partners and partners from other sectors. The government was perceived by civil society organizations as conservative, slow and cumbersome, dealing mainly with ongoing affairs, and therefore less available to develop new initiatives. In order to deal with these gaps in organizational cultures and work processes, representatives of the three sectors agreed that clarifying and discussing as early as possible any differences and gaps in cultures, perceptions, and work processes is critical to building cross-sector partnerships and removing barriers to future collaborative work and maintaining it over time. Preliminary meetings of the heads of the organizations, and workshops and conferences held prior to entering into partnership were found to contribute to creating trust between the partners and to achieving the partnership’s goals and outcomes. The process of socialization also affects the willingness of the partners to share information, resources, and organizational and professional abilities. The research reveals that the process of preparation and creating the will to enter into partnership relations is critical to their success and the achievement of the partnership’s goals.

Considering the differences in perceptions, cultures, and work processes, civil society organizations have pointed out the importance of intermediaries in processes of building and maintaining partnerships between the government, civil society organizations, and business sector organizations. These intermediaries were usually veteran and influential civil society and philanthropic organizations that enjoyed good relations with the government and the business sector, and were perceived as reliable by government agencies based on previous cooperation experience, such as JDC-Israel and the Sheatufim organization. Intermediary organizations played a significant role in helping make the initial connections between civil society organizations and government agencies, in intervening and mediating when gaps and disagreements arose, and with funding and assisting in the establishment of mechanisms for managing and operating the partnership. The involvement of intermediary organizations was also perceived as helping position the joint project externally. In the case of one particular partnership, the non-profit organizations involved stated that the involvement of the intermediary organization, a key civil society organization, was important in recruiting additional organizations for the project promoted by the partnership. This was because other civil society organizations view it as a source of resources and connections to the government.

All the same, there is a limited number of civil society organizations that mediate partnerships in Israel. Some of the civil society organizations that took part in cross-sector partnerships have raised questions about the central role played by a small number of intermediary organizations in Israeli partnerships. They argue that the close ties with government and the concentration of money, power, knowledge and experience in setting up and managing partnerships in the hands of just a few civil society organizations, make it nearly impossible to promote national level projects with the government without one of these organizations being involved in the partnership. This situation can be difficult for smaller organizations seeking to promote partnerships at the local and national levels, who feel they must first connect with one of the intermediary organizations in order to create cross-sector partnerships.

The structure and governance of cross-sector partnerships

Another significant issue that has emerged from research on cross-sector partnerships in Israel is the structure and legal status of the partnerships. In the absence of a clear legal mechanism in Israel to regulate the activity of cross-sector partnerships, it usually takes quite a while to find the appropriate legal structure and arrangements for the partnership, as well as to build the appropriate governance mechanism.

Contracts: In some cases (for example, the Guidestar Israel initiative) a contract was signed between civil society entities and the government as part of a “joint venture” (which requires exemption from a tender and equal co-financing). The advantage of this arrangement lies in the fact that a “joint venture” based on a clear contract between the government and civil society organizations allows for a clearer structuring of the governance mechanisms, the roles of the involved parties and of the joint work, and creates a more egalitarian relationship between the partners from the different sectors. However, such a legal arrangement is possible only when the civil society organizations are able to raise significant funds constituting at least 50% of the cost of the joint project, so as to match government funding. In many cases, civil society organizations are unable to do so.

Outsourcing: In other cases, the partnership was set up as a contractual relationship between the government and civil society entities that provided services to it, although it included the structuring of joint governance mechanisms. The advantage of this arrangement stems from its formal nature, which regulates, to a certain extent, the financial relationship between the parties and ensures the project’s continuation for the duration of the contract. However, in the case of a partnership where government financing is regulated by a contractual arrangement in the form of outsourcing (a contract for the provision of services), the joint governance mechanism is necessary to compensate for the financial inequality and customer-service provider relationship. All the same, even in the case of outsourcing, it is possible to create a formal arrangement through joint steering committees, structured work procedures (some of which are anchored in the outsourcing contract) and monitoring of the work plans’ implementation.

Informal arrangements: The third format through which partnerships were organized was carrying out joint activity by actors from different sectors under a “coalition,” “forum” or “partnership” arrangement, without a clear and regulated contract between the partner organizations. Such arrangements offer the advantages of flexibility in decision-making and activity, but the parties also revealed an obvious lack of commitment to the joint activity, and the lack of governance mechanisms and clear rules distributing work among the partners involved hindered the activities of the partnership.
Evidently, a clearer and more regulated legal structure of cross-sector partnerships would have facilitated processes of partnership building and clarified the form of governance, division of labor, and relations between the partners.

**Governance mechanisms and managing the partnership**

Research findings from Israel show that the creation of joint governance mechanisms in cross-sector partnerships based on the distribution of power and cooperation is quite complex. Although all the partnerships included steering committees with representatives of the three sectors, there were problems with the activities of the steering committees and there was a fear that they would transform from the partnerships’ strategy-setting and trail-blazing bodies into mere formalities. Civil society organizations often felt that the steering committees served primarily as forums for updates and exchanges of opinions in order to “rubber stamp” the activities carried out by the organizations constituting the core of the partnership, without there being any substantive discussion that actually affected the conduct of the partnership. In some of the partnerships it emerged that there was fairly limited involvement of the various partners in the partnership’s governance vis-à-vis a limited core of active partners that functioned as the permanent body. This was explained by the high level of trust in the hired teams that actually manage the partnerships, together with a policy of granting autonomy to professionals. However, this situation raises questions about the actual functioning of the steering committees as the central decision-making body in a partnership. Furthermore, respondents pointed to difficulties linked to the unequal involvement of the partners in the steering committees. This kind of difficulty arose especially in partnerships where there was a relatively large number of partner organizations and in situations where the commitment of organizations to the partnership and its goals was problematic, as well as attempts by various organizations to advance their own agendas and programs. Respondents also pointed to the awkwardness and difficulty of governance mechanisms that include a large number of partners and indicated that it was easier to conduct partnerships in which a relatively small number of organizations are involved. It is argued that the broader the partnership is in terms of the number of organizations involved, the more difficult it is to focus, since it is necessary to answer to a wide range of interests and it is hard to promote a clear agenda. Ensuring that everyone’s interests will be addressed required considerable energy investment and comes at the expense of more focused activity.

Difficulties also emerged in the functioning of partnership mechanisms over time, and in maintaining the role and participation of key partners. In many of the partnerships studied, there were no clear rules regarding the activities of the partnership’s governing bodies, and there was a lack of clarity regarding the division of labor and roles among the partners, as well as an absence of rules that define and regulate the nature of the partnership between the organizations. Such situations hindered the construction of joint programs and arrays.

For example, in one partnership regulated through an outsourcing arrangement, the national steering committee was initially the center for decision and policy-making, starting with determining the budgetary model of the project, through identifying issues and targets for the work of the entities involved, and setting the rates charged for the activities. After the initial period, however, the national steering committee gradually became a body with no essential role in determining and shaping policy. Members of the steering committee meet only once a year, at a ceremonial gathering. Beyond that, there are only a few consultations with individual steering committee members (rather than all together), and only around specific issues where the organization that operates the partnership project believes that it is possible to use the “services” of the various government ministries involved. Thus, the main task of the national steering committee is to maintain the visibility of the project vis-à-vis the participating government ministries. As the project and the partnership stabilized, there were changes in the nature of authority and responsibility and their distribution among the participants. If, at the outset, the cross-sector committee representing all partner organizations was the entity that managed the project, as the partnership stabilized, its management in practice shifted into the hands of the civil society organizations and the professionals in the field. This situation was perceived as problematic by the government’s representatives, who felt that their voice was excluded from the partnership’s decision-making processes.

**Trust and interpersonal relationships as key components of cross-sector partnerships**

One of the most crucial and significant factors affecting the success of partnerships is building trust among partners (Alexander and Nank 2009). Studies of cross-sector partnerships in Israel similarly found that trust is a key factor in establishing, building, and operating partnerships. Research clearly shows that the greater the trust among the partners, the greater their openness and willingness to cooperate, and barriers are removed alongside the fear of exposure to the other organization, its staff, and its customary work processes. Trust has a positive impact on the partners’ willingness to share information, knowledge, and resources. Trust is the basis upon which the partnership rests and when it absent, the partnership is very difficult to maintain (Schmid and Almog-Bar 2016b).

Trust between partners in Israeli cross-sector partnerships is revealed to be based primarily on familiarity and prior collaboration. Civil society organizations prefer to form partnerships with organizations and people with whom they have prior professional and personal experience, and whom they perceive as reliable. The prior acquaintance between the partners contributes to the creation of a common language, a common definition of the problem the partnership is addressing, and guidelines for its solution.

A central factor seen to increase trust is the knowledge, professional experience and professional authority of the civil society organizations. The higher the professional status of a given organization, the easier it was for government officials to develop relations of trust with it. Moreover, the fact that civil society organizations are perceived as professional bodies that are usually devoid of political or economic interests and are committed to providing optimal services to their clients also encourages trust towards them.
The high level of interpersonal trust between position holders in partnerships was a prominent finding of the research in Israel. Similarly, there was an emphasis on the personal dimension and the importance of interpersonal relationships and ties, or in other words, an emphasis the personal characteristics of specific persons who were perceived as important in the development of a partnership. For example, one of the interviewees, a representative of a civil society organization, said that from his extensive experience in cross-sector partnerships, “everything ultimately succeeds or fails based on people” (Schmid and Almog-Bar 2016b). Good interpersonal relationships, and the commitment of the position holders to the project and to each other, were perceived as a central factor in helping establish trust and develop the partnership. It is clear that a significant part of a partnership’s trust-building processes involved the development of positive and friendly interpersonal relations between the representatives of the partnership organizations. Although trust-based interpersonal relationships are noted in the research literature as an important component of partnerships, it appears that, in Israel, the emphasis placed on specific individuals as key factors in a given partnership’s activity and success is far greater than in other countries (Gazely 2010). Nonetheless, the research also reveals that there are risks entailed in establishing partnerships based on personal relationships and ties. Changing jobs, lack of empathy based on differences between people, and difficulties in creating positive interpersonal relationships may harm partnerships over time.

**Power relations between civil society organizations and the government in cross-sector partnerships**

Alongside high levels of interpersonal trust, striving for collaborative work, and the distribution of resources, knowledge and power, cross-sector partnerships in Israel are characterized by complex and delicate relations of power among the partner organizations (Almog-Bar and Schmid 2018; Almog-Bar and Zychlinski 2010; 2014; Schmid and Almog-Bar 2016b).

Beyond the natural competition between organizations with different interests when they join together in a collaborative venture, research reveals complex relationships between civil society organizations and the government in cross-sector partnerships, especially in cases where the government is the primary provider of funding in the partnership and civil society organizations are the executing or operating agent of the public service. The very fact that the joint project is based on government funding is a significant source of power for the government. In such situations, the status of civil society organizations as partners is undermined, and it is not clear whether their status is one of partners or service providers to the government. In these cases, the relationship is one in which civil society organizations depend on the government for the continuation of the joint project, and their ability to function as independent professional organizations may be compromised. In addition, the government sometimes adopts an ambivalent attitude towards civil society organizations. To the government, the organizations are partners in everything related to the design of the service and the management of the project vis-à-vis the local government and the field. However, in all that relates to ownership of the project, the government views itself as the sovereign and the civil society organizations as service providers only. The fact that civil society organizations do not structurally share the economic burden of the project encourages government partners to view them as “service providers” rather than equal partners.

It should be noted that in some cases, government representatives expressed resentment that civil society organizations were accumulating much power in the partnerships by virtue of being the entity that operates the project or service. In their view, when a project’s management becomes the responsibility of civil society operators, the government’s dependence on them increases, they are less likely to make decisions in cooperation with government ministries, and consequently the government ministries’ ability to influence and their sense of being part of the partnership is compromised.
Furthermore, among respondents from both civil society organizations and the government, the perception was that cross-sector activities were more suitable for well-established civil society organizations with considerable resources, patience, tolerance, the capability for long-term planning and vision, and familiarity and experience working with the government. Such organizations, it is argued, are able to stand up to the government, understand its constraints, and conduct negotiations with it based on an understanding of both its own and the government’s power and limitations.

Partnerships naturally require time and patience, since they involve the creation of something new by several actors. The parties must have patience, they are required to learn and teach a new language and to conduct themselves in a dynamic that is unfamiliar to them. This is especially true when working with government ministries; they are large-scale entities that the organizations usually have to adapt their discourse to. Therefore, partnerships with the government require much time and resources, and third sector organizations lacking economic backing and facing demands to show immediate results will find it difficult to allocate. These conditions highlight a lack of knowledge, financing and mediation infrastructures that could aid and provide tools for civil society organizations interested in developing partnerships with the government and creating relationships that will endure over time.

**Products of cross-sector partnerships: added value?**

The studies whose findings were presented in this chapter examined the perception of representatives of Israeli organizations from the three sectors who participated in cross-sector partnerships regarding their goals and the extent to which they were achieved. In general, despite the challenges involved in the operation and functioning of the partnerships studied, they reported a high level of achievement of the partnerships’ objectives (Almog-Bar and Schmid, 2018; Schmid and Almog-Bar, 2013; 2016b).

As seen by civil society organizations, cross-sector partnerships have the potential for significant broad social impact. The organizations viewed cross-sector partnerships as a means of promoting and implementing comprehensive social change at the national level and these were presented as a unique tool that enables the mobilization of new resources, as well as the pooling and leveraging of resources and forces at the significant scale that is a basic condition for enacting broad social change. Cross-sector partnerships were perceived by civil society partners and the government as a means of acquiring professional knowledge and new methods for work and management, improving customer service, improving customer status, promoting and developing services for excluded populations, strengthening organizations’ reputation, and changing partners’ attitudes towards new programs and initiatives, which helps to raise issues on the public agenda, create a new discourse and a common professional language between organizations from different sectors. The ability of cross-sector partnerships to strengthen and improve inter-sectoral work has also increased. These outcomes are part of the results that appear in the research literature as the impact of the highest-level partnerships, including social change, the establishment of new social norms in dealing with public problems, and the creation of new forms of discourse. They are also generally considered more difficult to achieve and require more time for joint activity (Brinkerhoff and Brinkerhoff 2002; Bryson et al. 2006)

**Discussion**

Recent years have seen increasing use of cross-sector partnerships in the development of public services and the promotion of social programs, as part of the expansion and consolidation of collaborative governance and new public governance concepts, which include a variety of actors in public policy-making processes. Partnerships between society’s sectors are perceived as a necessary and desirable strategy for coping with complex public challenges, including growing social needs, the reduced resources for coping with them, and the increasing complexity of social problems (Almog-Bar and Zychlinsky 2010). Such partnerships attract growing interest from governments, civil society organizations, and business entities. All the more so, professional literature as well as governments and philanthropic foundations and other funding agencies recommend, encourage, and sometimes even require civil society organizations to join cross-sector partnerships as a condition of support. This is how the “collaboration halo” emerged: a tendency spanning sectors and states which views partnership as a positive, vital, means of realizing public policy (Prentice and Brudney 2016). The message implicit in this halo highlights the benefits and advantages and sees partnership as an end in itself for organizations. On the one hand, evidence of the difficulties and challenges of creating and maintaining partnerships is increasing while there is little empirical testimony to the effectiveness of such partnership. On the other hand, researchers and professionals present partnerships as a panacea for a range of social ills, as well as a tool for promoting civil society organizations. Partnership is celebrated as an end in itself and not as a means to achieve other goals. These assumptions at the basis of the “collaboration halo” guide governments $‒$ and even more so civil society organizations that are required to do so $‒$ to work in partnerships. This is not necessarily because partnership is a good way to achieve their goals, but because partnership is perceived as an appropriate course of action at the present time, and because there is an ideological commitment to joint activity by the three sectors.

Cross-sector partnerships are organizational arrangements in which representatives of two or more sectors conduct ongoing interactions and exchanges in order to jointly reach a result with added value that cannot be achieved through the actions of one sector alone. Cross-sector partnerships are distinct from other forms of collaborative governance in that they seek to expand beyond the practices of integration (or cooperation) through which the government integrates or includes non-governmental actors in the design and delivery of public services (Ansell 2012), and develop initiatives with less hierarchical and more egalitarian governance mechanisms policy processes in which partners from various socio-economic sectors actively participate in the design of public services while sharing responsibility. Cross-sector partnerships thus present a different model in the sense that it does not grant the government a senior status, but seeks to create greater equality between the government and non-governmental actors in public service systems. The non-governmental actors are seen not only as efficient and cheaper service providers, but also as knowledgeable, capable and potentially significant contributors to public services. They are perceived as partners in policy-making processes and not merely as elements that the government chooses to engage (Ansell 2012).

In Israel, civil society organizations are usually the initiators and active force in the design and delivery of services in these partnerships, more than the government and organizations from the business sector. Therefore, cross-sector partnerships have, for them, become a central arena of activity. Research reveals that the conduct of these organizations within the partnerships is complex and requires significant investments of time, energy, organizational resources, and careful political conduct vis-à-vis other civil society organizations, and especially vis-à-vis the government and the business sector. Moreover, the desire for continuity and sustainability of partnerships requires ongoing investment of resources and joint maintenance of relations with the various elements involved in order to create and retain trust. These challenges raise the question of whether cross-sector partnership, which is usually presented as the most advanced model of relations government and civil society could be engaged in, is indeed the most effective and useful way of promoting initiatives and changes in public policy that governments and civil society organizations should pursue. It is quite possible that cross-sector partnership is not necessarily the best way to advance the goals of each sector (Person et al. 2009) and therefore it is necessary to carefully examine whether it is worthwhile investing so much effort in establishing it.

Several questions arise from the perspective of civil society: What do cross-sector partnerships contribute to civil society and its organizations? Are the arrangements for cross-sectoral partnerships helping organizations in advancing their goals and expanding their potential for making an impact? Do they empower civil society as a free zone of action that contributes to the expansion of public discourse and the development of alternative approaches to policy and services?
Research from Israel demonstrates that cross-sector partnerships can help organizations develop new avenues for action and new spheres of influencing for effecting broad social change. However, it seems that these possibilities are open to a relatively small number of organizations; usually organizations with considerable resources, intimacy and prior acquaintance with the government. In contrast, the small and medium-sized organizations that make up the majority of organizations active in civil society find it difficult to join and operate within the framework of cross-sectoral partnerships. This is because they lack the acquaintance with the government, the knowledge, experience and resources required to work in cross-sector partnerships. Thus, collaborative governance structures and cross-sector partnerships appear to be less accessible to most civil society organizations, particularly small ones, thereby limiting their potential contribution to the design of services and public policy. This is why such partnerships find it difficult to assist civil society in fulfilling its functions. The lack of a clear legal structure to enable the building of cross-sector partnerships between the government and organizations that cannot contribute at least 50% of the financing for a joint project, as well as the lack of adequate infrastructures of knowledge of about building and managing cross-sector partnerships, likewise make it difficult for small and new organizations to enter the partnerships arena.

It is worth asking further whether activity within the framework of cross-sector partnerships expresses and promotes democratic processes and promotes public values. Attempts have been made within the partnerships themselves to develop participatory, democratic management, decision-making and decision-making processes that express the voice of the different partners from various sectors and organizations. However, there were many challenges in managing these processes. In some cases, the steering committees, which constituted the central governing and decision-making body through which the partnership was supposed to be shaped, became a merely symbolic entity that did not express the voices of the various partners. Furthermore, even if there ostensibly are methods with the appearance of sharing, including information transfer, steering committees, and consultation, this does not necessarily mean the sharing of power and joint decision-making. Moreover, in partnerships based on an outsourcing arrangement between the government and civil society organizations with government funding, there are in any case large power discrepancies that preserve the financer-supplier relationship between the government and civil society, which exist in any case in the context of the privatization policy of recent decades. Even if this were a case of division of labor, where one party finances the service and the other provides it, it is difficult to see it as a partnership in a deeper sense; one in which power is divided along with responsibility and actual participation in decision-making. The fact that the partnership arrangements are accessible only to a small number of organizations that are endowed with money and connections also makes it difficult to see them as contributing to democratic processes.

Finally, we turn to collaborative governance, democracy and civil society. Our discussion here cannot be separated from the political context and the policy environment in which collaborative governance takes place. In Israel, the adoption of the “new public governance” approach and the emergence of a policy of collaborative governance has developed alongside a policy of stricter regulation and supervision of civil society in general, and a segregating and restrictive policy towards a specific group of organizations. It has taken place whilst weakening civil society organizations and marking organizations worthy of participation and voice, in comparison to organizations that are undeserving of having voice in the governmental and public spheres. This policy makes it difficult to implement democratic processes that include civil society within the framework of collaborative governance.

In conclusion, this chapter sought to examine the roles and activities of civil society organizations in collaborative governance systems such as cross-sector partnerships. Although definitions of collaborative governance emphasize values ​​such as participation, partnership, collectivity, deliberation, and strengthening trust, the research is as yet unclear, it is still unclear about the extent to which these values ​​are expressed in real and significant terms in the relationships that develop in cross-sector partnerships with civil society. Although inter-sector partnerships have great potential for the development of innovative public services and the strengthening of deliberative and democratic processes while giving expression to civil society, there are many challenges and complexities in the development and operation of effective partnerships. These challenges are worthy of discussion in the emerging discourse on collaborative governance and its effects.

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2. Civil society is defined as follows: “an independent space including institutions, organizations, social networks and individuals (as well as their values), existing between the activities of the family, the state and the market, and characterized by an array of civil rules, within which people associate voluntarily in order to promote their common goals and interests” (Anheier 2004, p. 22). [↑](#footnote-ref-2)