**Participatory Democracy and Collaborative Governance:**

**Can the Two Join Forces (Against the State)?**

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Abstract

The development, side-by-side of democratic theory beyond the representative institutional model and of collaborative governance seems to be cut of the same cloth; yet it might take the fashion of challenging the nation-state and weakening the role of the state and the civil service one step too far. In order to ensure the emperor is not naked under his new cloths, and that we still have elected representative of the public and not an emperor, a critique of the relationship between participatory democracy and collaborative governance is undertaken in this chapter. After analyzing the major models of democracy and transformations of the civil service/state relations, the chapter outlines some of the main challenges of injecting participatory means into the heart of the policy-making arena. Assessing the daring project of collaborative governance, the chapter both sets out the problems and put forward the hopes for enacting participatory models of democracy as part of evolving governance without weakening the role of the state and the representative system in the process.

Introduction

Democratic collaborative governance presents itself as a new model, even a new paradigm. Its conceptual roots can be traced to two separate corpora: the first is new developments in democratic theory, especially in the context of the criticism of representative democracy. The second is the search for alternatives to the model of New Public Management (NPM), specifically the endeavor to reintroduce public value as a parameter in the civil service. This chapter briefly introduces models of democracy, focusing on the incorporation of the civil service into democratic theory. It then critically examines whether participatory democratic theory converges with the idea of collaborative governance. Participatory democracy seeks to produce an involved citizenry, and hence primarily targets civil society. The singularity of collaborative governance lies in its attempt to democratize the very core of government, well beyond the domain of civil society. And yet this objective begs the questions: Does democratic collaborative governance reinforce the importance of the state in advanced democracies, or does it rather further delegitimize democracy? Can the admission of nongovernmental entities into decision-making forums reinforce or jeopardize public trust in democracy? And under what conditions would it be possible to rehabilitate public trust in the state, government, and the civil service through collaborative governance?

1. **Models of Democracy**

In order to map the critiques of representative democracy and its various suggested alternatives, it is useful to first briefly outline three main models of democracy. The first is Athenian direct democracy, which originated in the 5th century BC. This model was founded on two main principles: every citizen enjoys full equality before the law (*isonomia*), and as such is equally entitled to speak before the assembly (*isogoria*). A political individual partaking in his city’s governing system realizes his political rights through active participation in the public assemblies held in the agora, where he enjoys equality before the law and, as a speaker, before the assembly members. In addition, a citizen can be chosen for public service positions via a random ballot and may vote on the election of position holders such as military strategoi and parties.

In contrast, the representative model of today’s established democracies has its roots in the social contract concept of the 16th and 17th centuries. It was later enacted as a form of government, following the American and French revolutions of 1776 and 1789, respectively. This model shifted towards representativeness, with citizens electing their government representatives. Every person is free and equal to every other fellow citizen, resulting in voting equality in democratic elections. The public representatives who win the most votes form the elected government, which shapes, legislates, and executes its policies. Every few years these policies are put to the test in new elections.

The third model in democratic theory is the model of participatory democracy. The theoretical literature is saturated with analyses of deliberative democracy, reflexive democracy, grassroots democracy, discursive democracy, etc. Common to all of these models is the idea that encouraging activism in civil society supports the electoral process – representative democracy’s central feature – with public deliberation, civic engagement, and the shaping of public discourse and democratic practices. Civil society discourse highlights plurality rather than electoral voting.[[1]](#footnote-1) This entails the politicization of identity – whether local, cultural, gender-based, or regional – resulting in a plurality of positions, expressions, and forms of engagement. The flaws of the representative model – its institutionalism, minimalism, and preoccupation with ascendance and governance – find their opposite, and thus, presumably, their redress, in what civil society has to offer: beside political parties as the primary institution of established politics – a plurality of civic entities, organizations, and movements; beyond elections as an almost exclusive form of participation – diverse forms of political and social participation such as petitions, demonstrations, factions, memberships, local activism, etc.; rather than centralized government and agenda setting – efforts toward public engagement, voicing opinions, norms of discussion and deliberation, drafting position papers, and more. Normatively, then, civil society democracy complements and buttresses institutional rule, but also poses a challenge and alternative to its accepted norms of conduct. Engagement, volunteerism, and the promotion of a diverse, layered, inclusive, activist, and enabling realm of activity is then meant to enhance public trust in democracy and salvage it from its legitimacy crisis. The different models are outlined in Table I.

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| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Institutions** | **Principles** | **Time and Place** | **Democracy Model** |
| Citizens’ assembly in the agora, random ballots for public offices | *isonomia**isogoria* | Athens, 5th century BC | **Direct Democracy** |
| Elections, political parties, governments, autonomous courts | EqualityRepresentativeness [freedom, separation of powers] | 19th century onward, Europe and the West | **Representative Democracy** |
| Civil society: social movements, NGOs | ParticipationEngagementVolunteerismDecentralized decision-making | Theoretical literature, early 21st century | **Participatory Democracy** |

**Table I: Models of Democracy**

1. **The Public Sphere: Between Democracy and Governance**

The reevaluation of the model of democracy in the 21st century can be traced to the legitimacy crisis of representative democracy, a crisis whose articulation was conceptualized by Habermas’ framework. As early as 1973, Habermas wrote of a systemic crisis due to global capitalism seeping into the political-administrative and social-cultural structure.[[2]](#footnote-2) In order to understand the change Habermas advocates, it is useful to recall the foundations of liberal democracy. At the heart of liberal democracy stands the autonomous individual. This autonomy is manifest in two domains: first, the identification of the individual’s own interest and his or her personal fulfillment in the private sphere. In political thought, certainly since Adam Smith, this domain is considered economic – the individual, as an actor in the free market, promotes his or her own interest. The second domain is public: in order for the individual to be autonomous, he or she must be able to affect state policy. Hence, the individual as a political actor has rights in the public domain, including freedom of speech and association and the political rights of election and participation. Within the second, public domain, the individual is involved in decisions that affect his or her life – whether indirectly, through elections, or directly through various channels of political engagement. The core image, then, of this idea of democracy consists of two partly overlapping domains: the economic and the public. The main ideological contest between right and left in modern democracies is also derived from this image. Right-wing ideologies seek to minimize this overlap – that is, the state’s intervention in economic affairs – while the left advocates state intervention that would enable an economic safety net, reduce social gaps, and overcome market failures, as outlined in Figure I.



**Figure I: The economic and the political – and the ideological axis of 20th century democracies**

The representative model can be understood as the institutionalization of principles into a fabric of institutions enacting and enabling those principles. The principles of freedom and equality are translated into confidential, egalitarian, and universal elections for all. Democratic elections also create the sense – some would say the illusion – of forming the ‘will of the people.’ The individual (as a private person or as part of a group) chooses between political parties offering different political and ideological packages, which then form the state’s ruling government according to the majority vote. Within a system of checks and balances, the three branches of government ­­– the legislative, the executive, and the judicial – create an intricate web that prevents the tyranny of the majority and allows for criticism and inspection. And yet, the close correlation between social cleavages and the party system, whereby politics in established democracies has long been conceived, is in crisis.[[3]](#footnote-3) Representative democracy, with political parties as its defining feature, is undergoing a legitimacy crisis with manifold manifestations: a downturn in voter turnout and in party membership; the declining influence of the bigger parties; dwindling public trust in elected institutions and the civil service; an erosion of governing capabilities as well as the political system’s integration and aggregation capabilities; and diminishing consensus within the public. With rising voter volatility and plummeting public trust in democratic institutions, the data indeed point to a democratic crisis of trust.[[4]](#footnote-4)

As a means of addressing the legitimacy crisis, Habermas’s vision adds a new dimension beyond the public sphere and the political and economic domains: civil society. After World War II, civil society became a driving force of public protest, social movements, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), advocacy groups, etc. For Habermas, as well as other thinkers, civil society augurs the revival of public trust in democracy in that it provides what Tocqueville termed ‘schools of democracy.’ As such, it enables greater democratic engagement than the reductive form of participation permitted by elections. In this manner, this new understanding of the public sphere proposes a means of addressing the main criticisms levelled against representative democracy.



**Figure II: The Public Sphere According to Habermas**

In this context, Habermas proposes civil society as a possible realm for the revival of meaningful civic activism and social engagement, which would then rehabilitate trust in the rules of the game through constitutional patriotism.[[5]](#footnote-5) The emphasis on civil society – as conceived in the model of participatory democracy and in Habermas’s political thought – creates a sphere for a democratic, participatory, deliberative, and activist public discourse that encourages democratic fulfillment in the form of civic engagement, but also enhances general trust in the rules of the game and in fundamental democratic norms and practices. The third model overcomes the deficits of representative democracy by offering the diversification, pluralization, and enhancement of democratic participation. For the most part, engagement within civil society affects the political establishment by enhancing the public’s trust in its institutions. It does not, however, necessarily contribute to decision- and policy-making processes, or institutional change.

1. **The Civil Service and the State: Three Historical Paradigms –**

The Habermasian construct addresses the constitutional framework and trust in the system. However, the core of government – political parties and the civil service – are barely of concern to civil society theories. Rather, social activism often undermines public trust in formal institutions. While the scope of this chapter does not extend to the crisis of political parties, the transformation of the civil service – the executive branch of government policy – is crucial to the discussion on collaborative governance and democratic de-legitimation. The civil service, the professional rank providing services, implementing policies, and mediating between elected officials and the people – that is, the sovereign – has become the backbone of the contract between state and citizen in the modern state. As such, it also ensures governmental continuity in a democracy, as opposed to the changing positions of elected politicians. This notion of the vital connection between the civil service and democracy peaked in the golden age of the welfare state in the second half of the 20th century. But the current generation has lived through economic and political crises. Neoliberalism has succeeded the welfare state as the dominant ideology in the age of globalization. It introduced both economic theories and political practices. Nevertheless, global economic crises – most recently in 2008 – initiated a wave of protests against citizens’ vulnerability to market forces and the state’s eroded capacity to protect them. What, then, are the main tenets of the relationship between the the civil service and democracy? And what does collaborative governance bring to the table in the context of democratic theory in the 21st century?[[6]](#footnote-6)

The vital connection between the state and the civil service was already articulated by G.W.F. Hegel, who saw bureaucracy as the ‘general class’ representing universal altruism, that is, reflecting the concept of public interest and the evolution of *spirit* through history. [[7]](#footnote-7)

Max Weber identified the state as having a monopoly over the legitimate use of violence. Indeed, 20th century realism came to see the state as the primary actor on the international stage.[[8]](#footnote-8) While the army and police were in charge of law and order, the state’s civilian branch, its defining characteristic, was the bureaucracy. Thus the army, the police and state bureaucracy were the institutions most strongly associated with the state, along with their counterparts in the private sector, the factories that were at the heart of the industrial revolution, setting the stage for the growth engine of the modern world from the 19th century onward. They were all fashioned after the same design: they shared a hierarchical, pyramidical structure, where each elevation of rank brings with it an increase in professional experience, responsibility, prestige, income, and status.

Bureaucracy symbolized public interest, elevated above private affairs, personal connections, and social status. Together with the judiciary, it was able to offer an unbiased concept of equality before the law that manifested the contract between the state and its citizens.[[9]](#footnote-10) This idea of the civil service differentiates between the elected and the executive echelons: the former derives its legitimacy directly from the sovereign – the electorate – and therefore comes with a particular world-view, whose realization is then entrusted with the clerical, professional rank in public offices. The civil service, immune to bribery and political instability due to its permanence and professionalism, promotes the public interest while transcending the interests of any particular group, above all its own.

The golden era of this understanding of the civil service came with the affluent society of the Western welfare state following the postwar economic miracle: the civil service spearheaded employment, welfare, health, the civic minimum, public education, pensions, social security, and other state mechanisms securing the civil, political, and social rights of the citizen.[[10]](#footnote-11)

The welfare state’s status was eventually undermined by its own success. In the long-run, higher life expectancy and lower birthrates led to a shortage of workers in the economy and to the accumulation of pension debt by aging generations who were projected to be supported by the workforce for many years after their retirement. Contributing to this process was the rise of a new dominant ideology that denounced the oversized, mediocre state apparatus for stifling all private initiative, creativity, diversity, and singularity while smothering the private sector. This led to devastating criticism of the civil service, bureaucracy, and state mechanisms, coupled with the demand to repeal the welfare state and to unshackle the private sector from the constraints of government policy.[[11]](#footnote-12)

The New Public Management (NPM) approach arose as a neoliberal alternative. In the age of the global economy, neoliberalism announced itself as the leading recourse, introducing market principles into government: efficiency, competence, a consumer-based orientation, and an emphasis on customer service. At the same time, it dramatically downsized the civil service through privatization and outsourced a considerable portion of its responsibilities to executive agencies.[[12]](#footnote-13) NPM’s toolkit was managerial: performance-based evaluations, incentives for excellence, budgetary cuts, public administration reforms, and economic efficiency. This shift towards neoliberal economics, along with the crisis of trust in representative democracy, led to the decline of the civil service and to an ideology of privatization and minimalization of state mechanisms and ‘the bureaucracy.’ These were now branded ineffective, outdated, and incapable of inspiring innovation and growth due to over-intervention in the free market.

The legitimacy crisis, along with a distrust in and overall unflattering public image of democratic institutions – both elected and unelected, like the civil service – resulted in cutbacks to state apparatus. These were meant to make room for market forces to step in. The transition from an industrial society to a global economy introduced new limitations on governments’ capacity to determine economic policy. The economy was now subject to global developments as a result of the shift from heavy industry to a knowledge economy as the main growth engine, which now relied on computing, telecommunications, digitization, and hi-tech. These new enterprises were structured differently: they were flat, characterized by horizontal rather than vertical mobility, and dynamic, often decidedly disadvantaging experience and technological specialization. They favored instead the younger generation, which was constantly adapting to – and creating – new, fast-changing technologies, and proving mobile, accessible, and innovative under conditions of extreme uncertainty. In the face of unprecedented developments in the production process, the rigidity, cumbersomeness, and outdatedness of the civil service came to be seen as obstacles to be removed. This was achieved by transferring important part of government functions to private hands, subject to governmental or private monitoring and regulation. The state’s main function then became goal setting, monitoring, regulating, and inspecting – without executing as such. Citizens were now service consumers, customers of public service.

Yet, much in the same way that the crisis of the welfare state galvanized the rise of the neoliberal paradigm as its alternative, global economic crises over the past decade have reintroduced the question of state intervention. This pertained in particular to citizens’ exposure to the fluctuations and failures of the global market. Moreover, structural reforms in the training, evaluation, and organization of the civil service had delivered mixed results, failing to instill a new organizational culture. In any event, the prestige, professionalism, and image of the civil service suffered. Far-reaching civil service reforms in all advanced democracies, in the spirit of NPM and in the name of efficiency, competence, and serviceability, bore little fruit and created new problems.[[13]](#footnote-14) Most of all, the consensus over the state’s constitutive role was eroding, undermining the legitimacy of the civil service as a professional agency that shapes policy with an eye to the public interest. The result is a lack of trust in both professional and elected government entities. And yet, did a third paradigm of public administration and public service emerge, beyond Weber’s classical approach and NPM?

“New Public Management Is Dead—Long Live Digital-Era Governance,” wrote Dunleavy et al in 2005. “Is New Public Management Really Dead?” responded de Vries in 2010. For, in more ways than one, it was still very much alive.[[14]](#footnote-15) The debate over the paradigm shift and subsequent decline of NPM, thirty years after its ascent as the flagship of neoliberal economics, is now at the forefront of academic research among scholars of policy and public administration. In this age of a crisis of legitimacy, it places democratic governments before a pivotal crossroads: NPM was the product of the criticism of the welfare state, the overall conception of the state, and the emphasis on its role in representative democracy as the main institutional actor. It challenged all three, arguing that the state is by default less competent than the market in providing jobs and public services. Hence, it called to taper government functions, minimize bureaucracy, and introduce parameters of evaluation – efficiency, competence, serviceability – through privatization and outsourcing. It also incentivized public services that had long been considered, according to the previous paradigm, as self-evident state responsibilities. What new paradigm is superseding it today? Much as an administrative approach overemphasizing skill over value is too narrow, Dunleavy’s suggested alternative, digital governance, also stresses means at the expense of substance. How then is the state conceived in the 21st century? What is the public’s role within this conception? And what, thereby, is the desirable blueprint of the civil service – its objectives, functions, and methods?

The legitimacy crisis of democracy, along with the question of the state’s role in the age of globalization, poses a challenge to the reconceptualization of the civil service. Are the conditions indeed ripe for a new paradigm? Its cornerstones are governance, policy networks, and public engagement. Theoretically, the principal transition is from an institutional approach that features the government as the main actor, to a new institutional approach: not government, but governance; not a dominant player in the form of a centralized government, but a fabric of institutions – governmental, economic, social, both local and global – all doing their part; not top-down central policies prescribed by government, but policy networks involving different stakeholders and generating self-governance and collaborations between the public and private sectors and civil society.[[15]](#footnote-16) In face of the legitimacy crisis, the concept of governance offers greater public engagement, social activism, and social responsibility. It advocates an inclusive democracy that would allow affected citizens to partake in different levels of policy-making and implementation – and not only through political elections as the lone, if pivotal, act of political participation.[[16]](#footnote-17)

Thus, the key concepts emerging from the new paradigm – governance, policy networks, regulation, and participatory democracy – still lack an overarching, cohesive scheme. Consequently, they further widen the gap in the definition of a new public service paradigm in advanced democracies in the age of the global knowledge society. The result is a civil service following a collective and eclectic approach, with strong managerial tendencies and a commitment to privatization, outsourcing, and management efficiency. Lacking is an appropriate toolkit and a determination to develop a new model appropriate for a globalized, knowledge-based age. This version of the civil service is hence marked by a general disregard for the immense new challenges and future roles of public service in democratic states. It further fails to reconsider the role of the state, its responsibilities toward the public, and the concept of democracy with respect to the relationship between state and citizen. Table II outlines the main difference between the three paradigms.

**Table II: The evolution of the paradigms of the state, the public, and the civil service**

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| **Collaborative Governance** | **New Policy Management** | **Modern State: Bureaucracy** |  |
| New institutionalism | Neo-classicism | Institutionalism  | **Analytical approach** |
| Policy network dialogues | Personal interests | Elected officials | **Public interest** |
| Participating citizens | Consumers | Voters | **The public** |
| Enabling | Goal setting | Prescribing and executing | **The state** |
| Policy networks and cross-sectoral partnerships | Executive agencies | Hierarchical, pyramidical | **Organizational structure** |
| Multi-dimensional | Private sector & regulation | Government | **Accountability** |
| Deliberative democracy | Law and order | Representative rule | **Model of democracy** |

Adapted from Mark Bevir, 2012, *The New Governance and the Public Servant***.**

1. **Towards a Third Paradigm: Governance and What Else?**

What would the state look like according to the collaborative governance model? Is it a narrow concept that simply focuses on policy networks rather than on managerial skills? Does it merely improve governability, or does it also insist on a fundamentally new understanding of the state’s role in protecting its citizens and fostering their emergence as competent actors on the knowledge- and technology-based global stage? Does it have the capability to adequately address the legitimacy crisis, or only to face the limited challenge of designing public administration? And how does the third model, participatory democracy, correlate to the concept of collaborative governance? Do they complement each other by co-facilitating the neoliberal corrosion of the state by market forces, or by paving together a new pathway out of the legitimacy crisis? The governance paradigm can be embedded into three different models, each offering a different framework for answering these questions: monitory democracy, the enabling state, and democratic collaborative governance.

 Monitory democracy – This model shifts the focus of democratic theory from an emphasis on decision-making bodies and the public – as the electorate that appraises government performance every four years – to a model entailing the engagement of civil society, the media, and citizens as constituting democratic criticism and discourse. It thus shifts the balance between institutions within democracy, as well as transforming their roles. In addition to expanding the functions of the citizenry and voluntary entities, this model transforms the civil service from an executive body to a monitoring entity. As such, it monitors policy-making and implementation within different executive agencies, whether via the state or via independent professional organizations. We have here, then, a model of a monitoring and monitored democracy.[[17]](#footnote-18) The government’s role becomes monitoring, regulating, and coordinating policy, while the role of civil society organizations and the media focuses on criticism, serving as democracy’s ‘watchdog.’

 The enabling state – Adapted from Giddens’ *The Third Way*, this model renews the contract between citizen and state not by restoring the state’s role as provider of all services, but by facilitating partnerships between the three sectors – public, private, and civic – and enabling the involvement of stakeholders. Encouraging social involvement in a multitude of areas, it seeks to ‘democratize democracy’ and to expand the role of civil society. It does so by setting the foundation for community and state activities, and by strengthening the rule of law, solidarity, and citizenship.[[18]](#footnote-19) Giddens, followed by New Labour British prime minister Tony Blair, stressed the role of civil society in promoting democratization, engaging the public, and involving communities in local government. Similar to Habermas, the hope was that a democratic revival within the civil arena would enhance public trust in representative democracy and thus strengthen it. This model highlights the voluntarist aspects of public engagement and is based on the idea of liberal multiculturalism.

 Democratic collaborative governance – The third model centers on the legitimacy crisis and seeks to enhance public trust in democracy, not just by improving public services, but primarily by promoting civic engagement within the community, the region, and the state.[[19]](#footnote-20) Policy networks include citizens, not just stakeholders; public engagement is sought on a regular basis, not haphazardly or episodically; mechanisms of deliberative democracy – such as citizen committees, inclusion of residents in budgetary decision-making, and deliberative polls – become an institutional element of government. Through public engagement, they reinforce civil culture, while rebuilding public trust through the idea of participatory democracy.

**Table III: Models of governance within the third paradigm**

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| **Public Service** | **Public** | **Concept of the State** |  |
| Sets up monitoring mechanisms | Critical discourse | Regulates and monitors | **Monitory Democracy** |
| Serviceability, shared ethos, engaging with stakeholders  | Voluntary participation of stakeholders | Sets standards and norms | **Enabling State** |
| Public engagement through policy networks, accessibility, transparency | Active involvement of citizens and organizations | Determines the public interest together with the citizens | **Democratic Collaborative Governance** |

The model of monitory democracy is a minimal one. It mostly determines the rules of the game, providing a general framework whereby governance amounts to diverse channels of transparency, criticism, and monitoring. The enabling state model, on the other hand, offers engagement with stakeholders and greater accessibility to services and information for those seeking it. While the enabling state allows for public initiatives, it neither actively encourages civic engagement, nor introduces new forms of participation in decision- and policy-making processes. The third model, participatory democracy, is the most proactive, advocating citizens’ involvement in discourse, norm-setting, and public debate, but also in policy networks and in decision-making processes. The three models are not mutually exclusive but rather offer different formulations of public engagement and public service. This chapter’s main recommendation is to see ‘democratic participatory governance’ as the heuristic, normative horizon of the desired model of the state in the era of the knowledge society. At the same time, it advocates developing the capacities of public service according to the enabling state model, while gradually expanding on them toward participatory democracy. In a neo-conservative era, which views the media, academia, and intellectual elites as ‘deep state’ mechanisms, monitoring activities and criticism is crucial for fostering a democratic spirit. In order to facilitate a public service that is capable of bringing about such changes, enabling the establishment of policy communities, and serving as the primary catalyst in establishing cross-sectoral networks and platforms for public engagement, it is necessary to invest in different aspects of civic cooperation and involvement.

1. **Collaborative Governance – a Combination of Participatory Democracy and Engagement Governance?**

The basic tenet of the collaborative governance approach is the aspiration to include nongovernmental stakeholders in decision-making processes through a consensual process of shared policy-making.[[20]](#footnote-21) While participatory democracy functions primarily through civil society, collaborative governance attempts to create a discursive environment and to enable citizens to gain access to the core of the governmental policy community. What role could collaborative governance play between the corpora of democratic theory and the reconceptualization of public administration beyond NPM?

On one level, it seems there is indeed a convergence between the corpora. After all, participatory democracy seeks to promote the plurality, diversification, and inclusion of many different civil society actors, which is exactly what collaborative governance offers; policy networks allow for the involvement of diverse actors and underrepresented groups through debate and deliberation. Hence, we have here an interesting implementation of participatory democracy theory through collaborative governance.

In fact, it can be argued that participatory democracy has left the state’s institutional backbone – elections, parties, governments, etc. – untouched. It seeks to foster a civic environment that actively employs democratic means in order to generate public trust in state institutions. Most of the theoretical scholarship concentrates on the deficits of representative democracy: a lack of political engagement coupled with professionalist politics that excludes citizens from decision-making and from the institutional workings of parliamentary activity. Accordingly, civil society presents a civic alternative – social movements that enable activism, engagement, and representation, and establish discursive communities, debate clubs, civil forums, civil juries, civic committees, social protest and advocacy organizations, etc. And yet the dichotomy is preserved, with the political establishment continuing to make up institutional governance. Collaborative governance, in contrast, advocates something altogether different: it does not merely provide a participatory framework for the institutional core of government but aims to incorporate participatory processes into the very core of representative democracy: public policy and governmental decisions.

Presumably, one of the flaws of the participatory model is that most civil initiatives do not, in fact, bring about policy change. Collaborative governance, on the other hand, injects the lifeblood of participation directly into the decision-making process. Policy networks that include non-institutional stakeholders become full partners in policy-making.

Hence, collaborative governance goes beyond the democratization of civil society and the enhancement of public trust through ‘democratic education’ in extra-institutional areas: it seeks to achieve a more inclusive institutional setting that would serve as an interface between institutional and informal stakeholders as part of a policy network. Evidently, collaborative governance focuses on opening up the institutional arena to participation. It is therefore more radical than the theory of participatory civil society and is no longer concerned merely with rehabilitating trust in the context of the legitimacy crisis. Rather, it focuses on practices of democratization within the act of policy-making. Hence, collaborative governance takes democratic theory one step further – from a representative democracy with a politically engaged civil society, to a representative democracy that opens up the very heart of the establishment to multi-level participation.

1. **Participatory Democracy within the Establishment: Collaborative Governance under Democratic Criticism**

It seems that collaborative government synthesizes contemporary models, advancing them to the next level. Whereas the participatory democracy model relies on civil society to enrich, diversify, open up, and complement institutional democracy, collaborative governance attempts to incorporate these ideas into a new interface between the state (via the civil service), the public sector, and civil society. What Habermas tried to apply to formal democracy externally, through civil society, collaborative governance tries to incorporate into the heart of democracy’s decision-making establishment. Thus, Ansell and Gash’s definition implies decision- and policy-making processes in which government agencies engage with stakeholders and NGOs.[[21]](#footnote-22) Normatively, this notion is based on Bevir’s analysis, which argues for advanced policy networks that extricate the state from its omnipotent role as sole agenda setter, allowing for the inclusion of an array of new actors in the policy arena. Sørensen and Torfing argue that “deliberative theories perceive the state as one of many competing and overlapping points of political identification, and they regard the establishment of linkages and bridges between political identities, narratives, and communities as an important democratic task that post-liberal theories of democracy must take into account.[[22]](#footnote-23) Dryzek would therefore see this development of policy networks as the democratization of the process of government.[[23]](#footnote-24)

But does opening up the establishment to broad participation truly make for a better democracy? A worthier society? What are the immanent contradictions raised by this model and is it indeed effective against the legitimacy crisis?

First, public trust in representative democracy is founded upon the citizen’s choice between different political parties, with each offering its own ideology and policy package. How does collaborative governance enter this legitimacy equation? If a government was elected based on a certain agenda only to form its policy together with extra-institutional stakeholders upon its entry into office, it would either betray its original ideological position or profess no ideology to begin with. The deliberation process could thus lead to an outcome that does not conform, or is even diametrically opposed, to the party’s statements during the elections. In other words, collaborative governance entails an openness of the policy-making process that may clash with the election of a government based on a specific policy agenda.

Second, merely the act of determining who participates in the procedures of collaborative government and how – whether through hearings, consulting, involvement in decision-making, or bearing responsibility for the policies – is of critical importance. The latter option in particular poses a challenge to the elected government’s legitimacy: the worldview of collaborative governance advocates policy networks and a round table of stakeholders who together arrive at decisions, for which they then bear responsibility. But is it the elected government that is supposed to bear responsibility for policy-making? Whose performance will be judged by the public in the next elections?

Third, reliance on policy networks can signify a lack of trust in decision-makers, elected officials, and the civil service. Indeed, the NPM narrative, which argues that state institutions and the civil service perform poorly in management and decision-making, may come to dominate in collaborative governance, as it would explain the need to turn to outsiders for help. Collaborative governance can be viewed as the privatization of decision-making processes. Even if *de facto* both governmental and nongovernmental entities are involved, policy-making becomes a joint project of the state and of interested parties, whether from the private sector or from civil society, who are not elected and cannot be held accountable.

Fourth, inclusion in policy networks is offered to those who come with a pre-existing interest in the relevant policy area. Stakeholders are usually powerful market forces – financiers, commercial companies – but also civil society organizations that hold clear positions on specific policies. While general elections are meant to represent the public interest, those participating in collaborative governance are non-establishment entities that come with their own sets of interests. Those already with influence, access to the media, and clearly defined agendas, now gain direct access to decision-makers and become an integral part of policy-making in an area that directly pertains to their interests, economic or otherwise. This creates a cartel of political, economic, and other elites.

Fifth, collaborative governance can, in effect, exacerbate inequality. As is well known, those participating in civil society deliberation efforts overwhelmingly belong to the educated middle class and are socio-economically well-placed.[[24]](#footnote-25) Therefore, the main advantage of general elections – their equality and ability to accommodate broader economic perspectives – effectively goes down the drain. Collaborative governance significantly empowers the already powerful – stakeholders and interested parties – and can thus undermine equality.

Sixth, collaborative governance may include protest groups and underrepresented sections of society, thus voicing the concerns of those liable to be harmed by certain policies. But the question of representativeness here is crucial: when forming a policy regarding a certain ethnic minority – Ethiopians, for example ­– does one include the traditional leadership, such as kahens and other religious authorities; the radical leadership of protest organizers; or the charities providing assistance to Ethiopians? All of these exclude the voice of unorganized and unrepresented members of the community, such as women, or the overwhelming majority of the community that does not identify as religious, or may view the attempt of the self-appointed ‘leadership’ differently when it seeks to set up an educational or patriarchal system for dictating cultural norms. Government policy should be legislated to reflect the public interest. Providing a platform for a diverse set of organized groups is important for the process of understanding the field, its different problems and aspects. Determining policies together with organized entities, however, can undermine not only equality, but also the public interest itself.

Seventh, collaborative governance can significantly undercut the professional rank of experts and public service officials, who now come to occupy just another seat around the table. Collaborative governance can thus spawn populist policy-making processes that do not necessarily conform to the elected government’s core agenda and are skewered toward those whose prominence, means, or connections grant them entry. These actors have no public legitimacy, nor any of the political representation so central to democracy.

The legitimacy crisis of democracy manifests itself in the decline of public trust in those mechanisms meant to ensure equality, representation, and the promotion of public interest. The dominant paradigm in the age of globalization – NPM – additionally weakens public trust in the professional rank of the civil service, those certified experts and professionals entrusted with decision- and policy-making. Collaborative governance can intensify this lack of trust among the public, further undermining the legitimacy of representative democracy.

Finally, in terms of democratic theory, some authors have suggested that collaborative governance should be viewed as part of post-liberal democratic discourse: “In contrast to the liberal theories of democracy, post-liberal theories do not necessarily perceive the undermining of the traditional institutional borderlines between nation states, between the public and the private sphere, and between the legislative input-side and the executive output-side of the political system as a threat to democracy. In fact, they tend to see the blurring of these borderlines as a prerequisite for the democratic regulation of governance processes.”[[25]](#footnote-26) If this is the case, then post-liberal theories actually weaken the position of the state, the legitimation of representative democracy as well as the professionalism of the civil sector, reducing them to the flow of interconnected institutions and spheres, thus encroaching upon the normative foundations of equality and liberty at the heart of liberal democracy.

1. **The State, Public Service, and the Public in Democracy**

As our discussion has shown thus far, collaborative governance can, on the one hand, be viewed as a radical approach democratizing the core of democratic rule by incorporating public engagement and involvement into the decision- and policy-making process. It can also be understood as chipping away at the legitimacy of elected government, the civil service, and the promotion of the broader public interest. By enhancing the participation of certain groups and organizations, it permits access to the decision-making process regardless of public support or adequate political representation. Because collaborative governance aims to construct a paradigm that goes beyond representative democracy in political theory, and beyond NPM in public administration, it is important to identify the dangers inherent to the blueprint it proposes. This does not mean that collaborative governance will necessarily privatize policy-making, further empowering those who already have access to the political, economic, and media elites. It does mean that in determining the procedures of collaborative governance, it is necessary to form a clear conception of the state’s role, the mechanisms of representative democracy, and the civil service, so that collaborative governance will reinforce and uphold them rather than further aggravate the crisis of trust surrounding them. How could the state, the civil service, and the public be conceived within the collaborative governance model so as to reinforce the legitimacy of democracy?

1. Collaborative governance needs to create a public-oriented model of the state: the public interest and quality of service to the citizen will be at the core of this model, but they are not alone. Its other tenets must include building a dynamic, proactive, and creative civil service that can put processes in motion, plan for the long-run, and provide professional policy planning and implementation in pursuit of the public interest. This puts the advancement of the state at the forefront. The public stands at the heart of collaborative governance; the concept of the state and its design as a service provider are derived from an understanding of the contract between state and citizen. The citizen is autonomous in that he or she pursues his or her own fulfillment, but can also partake in decision-making, policy-making, and feedback – not just on election day but as part of a larger notion of civic engagement in public affairs. The citizen receives public services from the state, but also the opportunity for meaningful social engagement. The public interest is at the center of decision- and policy-making processes in advanced democracies. While politics relies on representation of the public at large, as well as on the representation of identity-oriented or particularistic groups, the civil service enables the adaptation and integrative formulation of the public interest. It understands identity politics and the ideological party system, and is also policy-driven and able to integrate the different voices within civil society and the political sphere of interests and decision-making.
2. The state is meant to provide facilities – physical, educational, economic, social, civil – in order to promote innovation, creativity, and civic solidarity and thus enable citizens’ self-fulfillment, personal development, and maximal autonomy. The state, represented by elected officials, sets goals, norms, standards, and an orientation for strategic planning in light of the public interest. Its role as a key player in the global knowledge society requires the state to qualify its citizens for future markets and to invest in skills, elevating civil capital by improving the quality of service and adapting it to a complex society. Finding creative solutions for separatist communities, developing civic strategies, and instilling trust in the rule of law, the civil service, and elected institutions, are all crucial to the prosperity of the democratic state in a changing world. Hence, processes of governance must be led and managed by the state. This would allow voluntary endeavors, which almost inevitably strengthen the educated middle class, to weave less privileged social strata into public engagement platforms and to articulate a shared public interest.
3. The civil service is the professional echelon involved in the strategic planning that determines long-, middle-, and short-term goals that are then translated into blueprints and budgets. One of the roles of the state apparatus is to provide universal social and public services. Another is to help manage regulation and shape policies that allot executive authority. At its core, however, the civil service establishes relevant policy networks for the planning and implementation of government policy that include experts, research bodies, and social and private organizations. As such, it generates public engagement and collaborative governance at relevant sites. In this respect, the civil service initiates, generates, and monitors the connection between different stakeholders participating in implementation: it is a hub around and within which services and policy implementation are administered.

**Conclusion**

Collaborative governance draws on two traditions – democratic theory and public administration. In democratic theory, collaborative governance in fact challenges the participatory democracy model, which views activism within civil society as supporting, and enhancing trust in the institutional core of representative democracy. Collaborative governance, in contrast, proposes a radical democratic theory that democratizes the institutional core itself, infusing it with public engagement mechanisms that introduce new democratic practices beyond the theoretical framework. Within the oeuvre of public administration, collaborative governance tries to outstrip NPM, advocating for the reintroduction of public values as parameters in public administration. Through the establishment of policy networks, collaborative governance facilitates dialogue and broad discussion on policy matters amongst stakeholders.

Yet collaborative governance also has its dangers – namely, the deepening privatization of policy-making processes and their resultant detachment from elected institutions, as well as the over-involvement of powerful stakeholders in policy-making. The stipulation of an ongoing, open policy-making process in which stakeholders carry equal weight can particularly aggravate distrust in representative democracy by undercutting the pre-articulated agendas of elected representatives.

Collaborative governance can be a successful paradigm only if it manages to generate new public value for the civil service, the state, and the public. How can the operating system of public service be transformed? How can it become a dynamic force that propels and manages complex planning initiatives and translates them into workable blueprints for policy implementation? And how can collaborative governance be leveraged to enhance public trust in representative democracy? The expertise of the civil service is in leading, consolidating, and implementing policy, while creating a common, transparent and accessible knowledge base for public service that enables organizational development across different offices and entities, as well as a system-wide perspective and process for incorporating lessons learned.

In order to achieve these goals, public service must instill a core ethic that is professional, service-oriented, and committed to the public interest. But it must also undergo a shift in organizational culture – from a compartmentalized system with many different sub-specializations, to a trust-based, collaborative approach that fosters inter- and extra-organizational dialogue and instills a sense of mission throughout the different stages of the policy-making process. Civil servants do not necessarily have to be the sole experts in their fields, but they should be able to summon and establish diverse, research-based, and innovative policy networks that look to the future. This would allow them to not only provide high-quality service, but also strategize and set up mechanisms for self-improvement, open criticism, and public engagement. The transparency and accessibility of knowledge, along with its original production, are central to building trust within and across different offices and sectors. Relevant sectors of the public should likewise be encouraged to participate in the utilization and processing of this knowledge.

The rehabilitation of trust in public service can be achieved through its transformation from an executive body to a leader of policy-shaping processes together with the political echelon. This transformation, which would facilitate engagement with relevant, as well as underrepresented, voices and stakeholders, has the potential to reconceptualize democratic collaborative governance as an important tool in the preservation of democratic legitimacy in the 21st century.

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