**Participatory Democracy and Collaborative Governance:**

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

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Democratic collaborative governance is being furthered as a new model, even paradigm. Its conceptual roots can be traced to two separate corpora: the first is new developments in democratic theory, especially in the context of criticism of representative democracy. The second is the search for alternatives to New Public Management (NPM), specifically the endeavor to reintroduce public value as a parameter in public service. This chapter will briefly introduce models of democracy, focusing on the incorporation of public service into democratic theory. It will then critically examine whether participatory democracy 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 governance, 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 rather further delegitimizes democracy? Can the admission of nongovernmental entities into decision-making forums jeopardize public trust in democracy? And under what conditions would it be possible to rehabilitate public trust in the state, governance, and public service through collaborative governance?

1. **Models of Democracy**

In order to map the critiques on participatory democracy and its various suggested alternatives, it is useful to first briefly outline three main models of democracy. The first is Athenian direct democracy, originating 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 participating in the city’s administration exercises his political rights through active participation in the public assemblies held at Agora’s town square, 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 strategists 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 representatives for government. Every person is free and equal to their fellow citizen, resulting in voting equality in democratic elections. The public representatives to receive the most votes form the elected government, which shapes, legislates, and executes its policy. Every few years this policy is put to the test of reelection.

The third model in democratic theory is the model of participatory democracy. By encouraging activism in civil society, it supports the election 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-related, 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 thence, presumably, their redress, in what civil society has to offer: in addition to 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, faction memberships, local activism, etc.; rather than centralized governance and agenda setting – efforts toward public engagement, voicing of opinions, norms of discussion and deliberation, drafting of 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 thus 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 Agora, random ballot of public officials | *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, whose articulation can be largely attributed to Habermas. 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 its 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/her own interest. The second domain is public: in order for the individual to be autonomous, he/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 political rights of election and participation. Within the second, public domain, the individual is involved in decisions that affect his/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 – whence the main ideological contest in modern democracies is derived. 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 legislator, the executive, and the judiciary – create an intricate web that prevents the tyranny of the majority and allows for criticism and inspection. And yet the close correlation between social divides 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: downturn in voter turnout and in party memberships; declining influence of the bigger parties; dwindling public trust in elected institutions and public service; decline of the mass parties; erosion of governance capabilities, as well as the political system’s integration and aggregation capabilities; and diminishing consociation 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’ 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 defined as ‘schools of democracy.’ As such, it enables greater democratic engagement than the reductive form of participation permitted by elections. This new understanding of the public sphere thus 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 involvement, 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’ 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 it. It does not, however, necessarily contribute to decision- and policy-making processes, or institutional change.

1. **Public Service and the State in Three Historical Paradigms – from Modern Bureaucracy, through New Public Management, to the Concept of Governance**

But what of the institutional aspect of representative democracy? The scope of this article does not extend to the crisis of political parties. The significant changes undergone by public service, however – the executive branch of government policy – are crucial to the discussion on collaborative governance. As the professional rank providing services, implementing policies, and mediating between elected officials and the sovereign, or the people, public service has become the backbone of the contract between state and citizen in the modern state. As such, it also ensures governmental continuity in democracy, as opposed to the highly impermanent elected rank. This notion of the vital connection between public service and democracy peaked in the golden age of the welfare state over the second half of the 20th century. But the current generation has lived through both economic and, as mentioned, political, crises. In economics, neoliberalism has succeeded the welfare state as the dominant ideology in the age of globalization. Nevertheless, global economic crises – most recently in 2008 – initiated a wave of protest 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 public 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 public service was already articulated by G.W.F. Hegel, who saw bureaucracy as the ‘general class’ representing universal altruism and reflecting the concept of public interest and subsequent unfolding of absolute spirit as the march of history. 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.[[7]](#footnote-7) While the army and police were in charge of law and order, the state’s civil branch, its defining characteristic, was the bureaucracy.[[8]](#footnote-8) The three institutions most strongly associated with the state, along with their counterparts in the private sector, 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. These enterprises stood at the heart of the industrial revolution, setting the stage for the growth engine of the modern world from the 19th century onward.

Bureaucracy symbolized public interest, elevated above private affairs, personal connections, and social status. Together with the judiciary, it was able to offer an unbiased, egalitarian conception of the contract between state and citizen.[[9]](#footnote-9) This idea of public 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 within public offices. Public 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 public service came with the affluent societies of the Western welfare state following the postwar economic miracle: public service spearheaded employment, welfare, health, the civil minimum, public education, pensions, social security, and other state mechanisms securing the civil, political, and social rights of the citizen.[[10]](#footnote-10)

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 working hands in the economy and to the accumulation of pension debt by aging generations now barred from the workforce. Contributing to this process was the rise of a new dominant ideology that denounced the oversized, mediocre state apparatus that were stifling all private initiative, creativity, diversity and singularity while smothering the private sector. This led to devastating criticism of public 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-11)

The New Public Management (NPM) approach was furthered as a neoliberal alternative. In the age of global economy, neoliberalism announced itself as the leading recourse, introducing market norms into government – efficiency, competence, a consumer-based orientation, and emphasis on customer service. At the same time, it dramatically downsized public service through privatization and outsourced a considerable portion of its responsibilities to executive agencies.[[12]](#footnote-12) 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 public service and to an ideology of privatization and minimalization of state mechanisms and ‘the bureaucracy.’ These were now branded ineffective, outdated, and self-conserving, incapable of inspiring innovation and growth due to over-intervention in the free market.

The legitimacy crisis led to a distrust in, and overall unflattering public image of elected institutions, particularly of the administration of public service. This resulted in cutbacks to state apparatus, 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, specifically a shift from heavy industry to a knowledge industry as the main growth engine, which now relied on computing, telecommunications, digitization, and hi-tech. This new enterprise was structured differently: it was flat, characterized by horizontal rather than vertical mobility, and dynamic, often decidedly disadvantaging experience and technological specialization. It 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 face of unprecedented developments in the production process, public service’s rigidity, cumbersomeness, and outdatedness came to be seen as obstacles to be removed. This was done by transferring an important part of government functions to private hands, under 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 resurfaced the question of state intervention. This pertained in particular to citizen’s exposure to fluctuations and failures of the global market. Moreover, structural reforms in the training, evaluation and organization of public service had delivered mixed results, failing to instill a new organizational culture. In any event, the prestige, professionalism, and image of public service suffered. Far-reaching public 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-13) Most of all, common understandings and consociation surrounding the state’s role lost their meaning, undermining public service’s legitimacy as a professional agent that shapes policy and determines 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 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-14) The debate on the paradigm shift and subsequent decline of NPM, thirty years after its ascent as the flagship of neoliberal economics, is now seething at the forefront of academic research among scholars of policy and public administration. In the age of the legitimacy crisis, it places democratic governments before a pivotal crossroads: NPM was the product of criticism of the welfare state, of the overall conception of the state, and of 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, according to these, is the desirable blueprint of public service – its objectives, functions, and methods?

The legitimacy crisis of democracy, along with question of the state’s role in the age of globalization, poses a challenge to the reconceptualization of public 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 featuring the government as the main actor, to a new institutional approach: not government, but governance; not a dominant field player in the form of a centralized government, but a fabric of institutions – governmental, economic, social – all doing their part; not top-down central policies prescribed by government entities, but policy networks involving different stakeholders and generating self-governance and collaborations between the public, private, and civic sectors.[[15]](#footnote-15) 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 – beyond political elections as a lone, if pivotal, act of political participation.[[16]](#footnote-16)

Thus, the key concepts emerging from the new paradigm – governance, policy networks, regulation, participatory democracy – still lack an overarching, cohesive scheme. Consequently, in the global, knowledge societies of advanced democracies, they cleave the gap opened by a new public service paradigm yet further. The result is public 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 in a globalized, knowledge-based age. This version of public service is hence marked by a general disregard toward the new challenges it faces and toward its own future role 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 paradigms of the state, the public, and public 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** |
| Enables | Sets goals | Prescribes and executes | **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 sort of state does collaborative governance stipulate? 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 to protect its citizens and to foster 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 government? 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 entities and on the public – as the electorate appraising government performance every four years – to a model entailing the engagement of civil society, the media, and citizens as constituting democratic criticism and discourse. In addition to expanding the functions of the citizenry and voluntary entities, this model transforms public 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-17) 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*, it 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-18) Giddens, followed by New Labour British prime minister Tony Blaire, 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 multi-culturalism.

 Democratic collaborative governance – the third model centers on the legitimacy crisis and seeks to enhance public trust in democracy, not just by improving government services, but primarily by promoting civil involvement in the community, the region, and the state.[[19]](#footnote-19) Policy networks then 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 opinion 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** |  |
| Instates 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 monitory democracy model is minimal. 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 initiatives of public engagement, it does not actively encourage civic involvement, nor changes the way in which public engagement is incorporated into 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 aspired state model in the age of knowledge society. At the same time, it advocates to develop the capacities of public service according to the enabling state model, while gradually expanding on them toward participatory democracy. In order to facilitate a public service capable of bringing about change, 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 civil 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-20) While participatory democracy functions primarily through civil society, collaborative governance attempts to create a discursive environment and to gain access for citizens into the heart of government agencies’ policy community. Between the corpora of democratic theory and formulations of public administration, where can collaborative governance be placed exactly?

At first glance, 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 may be argued that participatory democracy has left the state’s institutional backbone – elections, parties, governments, etc. – untouched. It seeks to nurture a civil 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 civil alternative – social movements that enable activism, engagement, and representation, and establish discursive communities, argument clubs, civil forums, civil juries, civil committees, 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 heart of representative democracy. 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 ‘democracy 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. It appears that 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 participation.

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

It seems that collaborative government synthesizes contemporary models, taking them further. 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 public 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-21) 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. Dryzek would see this development of policy networks as the democratization of the process of government.

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 appear that it holds no clear position. 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 danger to the elected government’s legitimacy: the worldview of collaborative governance advocates policy networks and a round table of stakeholders that arrive at decisions together, bearing responsibility for them. But it is the elected government that is supposed to bear responsibility for policy-making, and 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 state service. Indeed, the NPM narrative, which argues that state institutions and public 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, which are not elected and cannot be held accountable for policies.

Fourth, inclusion in policy networks is offered to those who come with a ready-made 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 set of interests. Those already with power, 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 other. 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. 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 that does not identify as religious when it comes to setting up an educational or patriarchal system for dictating cultural norms. Government policy should be legislated to reflect 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 public interest.

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 granted 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 public service, those certified experts and professionals entrusted with decision-making and policy-making. Collaborative governance can intensify this public lack of trust, further undermining the legitimacy of representative democracy.

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

As our discussion shows thus far, collaborative governance can, on the one hand, be viewed as a radical approach democratizing the heart of hearts 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, public 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 when laying out the procedures of collaborative governance, it is necessary to form a clear conception of the state’s role, the mechanisms of representative democracy, and public service, so that collaborative governance would reinforce and uphold them rather than further aggravate the crisis of trust surrounding them. How could the state, public service, and the public be conceived within collaborative governance so as to fortify the legitimacy of democracy?

1. Collaborative governance needs to create a public-oriented model of the state: the public and quality of service to the citizen will be at the core of the model, but not only. Its other tenets must include building a dynamic, pro-active, and creative public 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/she pursues his/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 involvement in public affairs. The citizen receives public services from the state, but also the means 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 the representation of identity-oriented or particularistic groups, public service enables the adaptation and integrative formulation of the general interest.
2. The state is meant to provide facilities – physical, educational, economic, social, civil – in order to promote innovation, creativity, and civil 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 skill, improving on the civil capital by improving the quality of service and adjusting it to a complex society. Finding creative solutions for isolationist communities, developing civil strategies, and instilling trust in the rule of law, public service, and elected institutions, are all crucial to the prosperity of the 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 admit less privileged stratas into public engagement platforms and to articulate a shared public interest.
3. Public 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 state apparatus is to provide universal social and public services. Another is to help shape policies that allot executive authorities and to manage regulation. At its core, however, public service establishes relevant policy networks for the planning and implementation of government policy that include experts, research bodies, social and private organizations. As such, it generates public engagement and collaborative governance in relevant intersections. In this respect, public 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 core establishment of representative democracy. Collaborative governance, in contrast, proposes a radical democratic theory that democratizes the core establishment 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 value as a parameter in public administration. Through the establishment of policy networks, collaborative governance facilitates dialogue and broad discussion on policy matters amongst stakeholders.

Yet collaborative governance 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 allows public service to generate new public value. 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 of implementation? And how can collaborative governance be leveraged to enhance public trust in representative democracy? The expertise of public service is in leading, consolidating, and implementing policy, while creating a common knowledge-base that will render its services transparent and accessible. This entails organizational development across different offices and entities, as well as a system-wide perspective and learning curves.

In order to achieve these, 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 compartmented 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 different stages of the policy-making process. Public service officials do not necessarily have to be the sole experts in their field, but 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. Transparency and accessibility of knowledge, along with its original production, are central to building trust within and across different offices and sectors. Relevant sections 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 to a leader of policy-shaping processes together with the political echelon. This transformation, which would facilitate engagement with relevant, and 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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