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Collaboration in the Political Environment

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Abstract

Collaboration and networks are the current trend. Western society is ever increasingly developing into a juxtaposition of highly specialized systems and organizations. This differentiation is particularly noticeable in the field of public services. Utilities and other services previously provided directly by government agencies are now made available by a wide range of outsourced and independent organizations.

This paper focuses on the theme of the tense interdependence between political/governmental organizations, government-related, outsourced organizations and organizations in the non-profit sector in the context of collaboration. The central substantive study focus is on the importance of policy for collaboration. An attempt was made to identify the needs, impact and practical implications of collaboration, where particularly the three aspects of politics, space and the role of consulting were considered. Using a practical case study based on this interdependence, the importance of politics as well as the spatial aspect and the role of consulting were observed.

This paper summarizes the initial results of these observations.

Keywords

Collaboration, Public Goods, Politics, NGOs, Space

For about two decades in Europe, profound transformation processes and political restructuring have been observed which affect society as well as individual nations to an equal degree. This development was triggered by the ending of the international system maintained by the Cold War, with its stabilizing power balance of political forces between East and West.

Due to the sudden termination of the political status quo that had lasted for decades, not only political but social change dynamics were liberated, which caused the opening of a broad range of transformation processes (almost obligatorily) and impacted the prevailing classical (rigid) organizational structures and forms of the affected nations. Also driving this trend was the intensified substantive and territorial unification of the European Union. The actual paradigm shift first occurred when the implications of increasing economic globalization as well as the dynamics of information technology were identified and the tension between “global” and “local” problems started to become evident, to which classical political and social problem-solving approaches would become no longer able to provide an answer. Predominantly socio-economic, ecological and social problems made it necessary to create supranational, overseeing as well as trans-local organizational structures, digressing from traditional nationalistic structures, in order to be able to react to the new problem scenarios.

Against this backdrop, it has been observed that the classical model of political order in the 20th Century – the Western (European) nation-states – is increasingly losing the ability to meet current challenges through classical functions, and is progressively either subordinate to or superimposed over new policy structures. This takes place one way by formally controlled outsourcing of formerly classical government functions to state-based organizations, and alternatively by way of a steadily growing “Third Sector” that provides services for the private sector and the non-profit-oriented sector of society.

We therefore live in a world of organizations in which the capacity of being able to manage social problems is determined by the performance of organizations and organizational networks. For this reason, societal reform should be implemented as organizational reform (Grossmann 2005).

As a result, a variety of topics ranging from the field of economics, politics, science and health to everyday life and family were included in the overview of organizational tasks.

This brings organizations into the positive situation of being able to free up a dynamic that moves, opens and interlinks the rules and boundaries of political and social aspects, and to make them negotiable and configurable.

The classical institutional policy of the state therefore does not become functionless in any way or is simply replaced by the organizations of the “third sector”, but rather, both sectors enter into a tense interdependence with one another (Grande 2004).

If we apply social questions and problems in this context, we face a plethora of problems with which modern Western society is confronted, now more than ever: unemployment, poverty, environment, education, development, restructuring of health care –to mention just a few.

The solution and processing of such problems is obviously a complex and highly demanding task that is only made possible through the involvement of very different social factors and sometimes even exceeds the possibilities of individual nation states. It is therefore not possible that individual governmental or NGO organizations have the expertise to face these challenges alone (Grossmann/Lobnig/Scala 2007). The cooperation among several organizations – locally, nationally and internationally – has developed into a central and basically vital aspect for social problem-solving – both in content as well as economically.

This initial situation finds government organizations and NGOs in mutual interdependence on each other: NGOs seek contact to governmental organizations for a variety of reasons – be it to obtain financial resources or because the administrative organizations still play a central role in solving societal problems. For the same reason, state organizations tend to promote their contact with NGOs. The proximity of NGOs to the social base is an almost inevitable, valuable contribution to the successful implementation of government-planned social development goals.

“For both public and voluntary sector organizations, working with and through other organizations is no longer exceptional; for most it is the norm” (Huxham/Vangen 1996: 6)

This interdependence between the different organizations – whether they be governmental organizations, NPOs, clubs, or traditional-profit organizations in this field – socio-economic, social and sustainable aspects must be managed.

One option of organizing this tense interdependence would be collaboration between organizations.

But where does the need for collaboration relationships specifically for political organizations originate?

The classical dichotomous boundary between state and private/public sectors became penetrable due to the global development in the past two decades, and is no longer so easy to locate. This blurring is not a purely theoretical problem, but quite specifically concerns all organizations that meet their responsibilities in this “gap” (“Zwischenraum”) for the society.

In this respect, problems arise that have today's political organizations dealing with globality and the resulting problems thereof, where there is an “inability” to respond to the growing number and forms of “ambiguity” (as opposed to understanding clear boundaries and areas of competence).

Therefore, today's society should be grasped with an alternative point of view especially rather than with an “either-or” approach. It requires a more flexible “this as well as that” approach.

And this has far-reaching implications specifically for executive political organizations and their organizational function logic. Among other things, this requires new forms of cooperation. No organization currently possesses the skills to go it alone and be able to react to new problems. It requires collaboration between various organizations and sectors of society in order to be able to overcome complex social problems.

In summary, there are currently three indicators that suggest the need for collaboration relationships, especially for political organizations:

First, the classic action-and-reaction approaches and models of political organizations approach structural boundaries due to the increasing relevance of areas of tension between global and local views, these boundaries being only able to overcome through the development and implementation of new organizational forms. In this context, collaboration is a much more promising approach.

Secondly, a perspective is developing due to the increasing differentiation and dissolution of classical boundary assumptions based on the “either-or” principle. This ever opening

perspective, based on the “this as well as that” principle, liberates a dynamic through which organizations of the political system are encouraged to seek out collaboration with various players, organizations and sectors.

Thirdly, political organizations must constantly adapt to the changed environmental developments. This organization-internal change effort could continue emerging for decades more or less successfully. The political organizations were able to provide this work to date, because the internal degree of change was not all too high and the environment of the respective political organizations had been stable for almost five decades, as well as resistant in its structure. Through the transformation of the environment, political organizations are confronted with necessary internal adaptation and change processes which can no longer be managed using previously applied organizational means. Even in this case, collaboration offers political organizations at least one promising possibility for the future design of change processes. This is especially the case because collaboration of participating organizations not only necessitates an active design outward, but also an internal design of the collaborating relationships.

It turns out that political organizations seek collaboration to other organizations and players not only in the handling of pertinent issues and complex societal problems, but there is actually also an inherent self-interest in collaboration shared by political organizations which allows them to react to the mutual interdependence. Although, from the perspective of the current observational state, it needs to be said that this self-interest in collaboration is still particularly strong.

Collaboration must utilize the “gap” (“Zwischenraum”) located within the tense interdependence between politics and the independent outsourced organizations. This functionalizes collaboration into an independent system that offers the opportunities for the system to be tested beyond the legal framework and, up to a certain extent, even beyond efficiency-oriented financial aspects and subsequently to constitute them into a sustainable state.

The hypothesis assumes that the consideration of spatial aspects possesses a potential of making a valuable contribution to the development of collaboration relationships. This applies to any form of collaborative and network-like relationships – equally whether they

are trans-national or trans-regional collaboration relationships, or collaborative relationships in the context of the “Europe of Regions”, transnational environmental collaboration or trans-regional collaboration projects.

Currently, there is a lack of attention to the spatial, territorial aspect of collaboration. That is surprising, since organizations are also currently evaluated and assessed based on their territorial location. This is particularly true for the evaluation of organizations by using rating agencies to evaluate growth projections, profit expectations, strategic development potential and so on.

Along with this, the term “space” is currently being included more and more in other disciplines in theoretical considerations.

The geographic perspective of the political system actually became relevant due to the division of space into territorial states, which resulted in the politicization of space¹ (Harvey 1990). As a further consequence, space is almost exclusively included as a resource when considered in direct connection to the geographical characteristics of state territories.

It generally seems noteworthy that almost every major thinker of the last few centuries was able to put his basic thoughts about space on to paper. What can be interpreted in most cases as a fundamental ontological position², led to the progress of Descartes, Newton and Kant in the approaches of Albert Einstein. This concept rendered his resulting fusion of space and time³ as the idea of an absolute space unthinkable. Space is therefore *created* only by way of the interaction of spatial bodies or by human activity.

Already at the end of the 19th Century, the concept of space ever increasingly became a question of differentiation of the connection between social order and space.

During the 20th Century, social science considerations of space were finally more prevalent on the map. Émile Durkheim and Georg Simmel ventured to be the first

¹ The first fundamental change in the understanding of space as a political category took place through the emergence of territorially defined states in the so-called *extended 16th Century*, i.e. at the beginning of modern times, with the end of the feudal system.

² What is space? What is nature? What is “real”?

³ Through the development of “space-time” in the context of the general and special theory of relativity, Einstein coined the paradigm shift in physics and hence triggered by the long prevalent idea from Newton’s space.

sociologists to tackle the concept of space. “Previously, a social scientific look at the space of geography and economics has been ignored” (Sturm 2000: 146).

Georg Simmel attempted a typological sketch and description of social space forms (Simmel 1908), whereas Foucault described the historical aspect in his *Archaeology of Knowledge* as a discursive order – on the basis of time and space (Foucault 1969).

These social science considerations naturally have an impact on the understanding of space. Individual and social activities and, subsequently, social processes have become the central postulates of the design and differentiation of space.

For Lucien Febvre and even more clearly for his pupil Fernand Braudel, geographical space is no longer static, but a relational and therefore changeable, enabling framework of political and economic practice. Even an end of a nation-state theoretical focus is postulated in which the territorial bond of government politics refers almost exclusively to a transnational framework of trade relations (Braudel 1949).

Around the 1970s, an effort was started to make the social constitution and design of space more concretely definable, and to (partly) return to material conditions. The *social practice* (production, reproduction, consumption) was the focus, and was tested from this perspective on its relevance for space/spatiality (*spatial practice*). Space for Lefebvre is also the product of social practice. Edward Soja and David Harvey go more in depth and modify the further consequence of these considerations (Soja 2003; Harvey 1992).

Pierre Bourdieu goes so far as to offer escapes from the permanent dualism of the bond between space in nature and social space (Bourdieu 1998), where he observes the social interaction space that “is dynamically constituted from the relations between players and objects” (Löw 2001: 302).

As a further consequence, sociology dealt with the subject of space in the context of issues related to poverty, marginalization and social exclusion in general. Spatially definable relationships as a constellation of conditions for social problems were made a central theme (Weichhart 2007: 58). In particular, Dieter Läßle and Martina Löw still criticized a few years ago the fact that the successful experiments made so far of the spatial handling of social processes are often stuck in the infancy of urban sociological considerations (Läßle 1991; Löw 2001). Above all, Hannah Arendt distinguished herself with her treatment of theoretical reflections on space (Arendt 1960).

Currently, Anthony Giddens is the main person to be identified who focuses on those social practices in space and time that involve “regionalization” (Giddens 1988).

And finally – and here the brief digression links back to the topic of collaboration – the subject does not cover the fact that the social transformation processes since the year 1989 – the environment into which the need for political organizations to collaborate should be included – make an ever increasingly strong tension between *global* and *local* observable. These are two trends that evidently point in two completely contradictory directions. While *globalization* drives the society of a territorial state towards a growing dependence on the external world, the *regionalization tendency* suggests that there is a parallel trend towards a stronger coupling of society to the local and regional environment. Paradoxically, the globalization discourse chimed in the topic of the *disappearance of space*, however, there is evidence that even with globalization, new structures of spatial differentiation of socio-economic circumstances and processes are emerging (Weichhart 1996, 2007).

In this sense, spatial dimensions of current political issues are no longer to be considered in the classical terms of territorial, regional or purely geographical, but now historical, symbolic and social components of spatial structure and organization are arising (Sturm 2000: 11).

In fact, however, it is a spatial view of, firstly, the interdependence between the different organizations (governmental organizations, NPOs, clubs, and so on) and secondly, of the relationship between politically-influenced design schemes of collaboration in relation to regional and inter-regional political structures, which has so far not sufficiently been researched. Such a spatial perspective promises answers to the question of how, in this tense interdependence, a development space can be created through which the collaboration *and* an exchange in the political system can occur, *as well as* remains in the situation of separating itself from the subsystem of politics in the sense of sustainable development, and can be joined to a specific, promising cooperative political system. This is especially true in cases dealing with social problems.

The Case Study

The case study is centered very specifically around the above-described tense interdependent relationship between politics/administration – outsourcing/individual organizations – “third sector”/non-profit organizations/civil society. Therefore, the project is an ideal case study for a typical example of the described theoretical and practical engagement in the framework of the collaboration issue.

Since early 2008, the iff Department of Organizational Development and Group Dynamics has been charged with the implementation of a complex collaboration project for Upper Austria in the field of health care. The main objective of this – currently ongoing – collaboration project “NSM – Optimizing the Interface Management in Upper Austria” is the construction and development of a collaboration effort to optimize the cooperation of the government-based service-providing as well as non-profit organizations between the health care industry and the social services industry.

The subject gained particular significance since through the inclusion of all sectors; a dispute can take place with the interfaces between the different levels, areas and institutions of health care and social care.

Basically, this management project is about the sustained assurance of a rapid, seamless as well as medically and economically feasible treatment chain for all patients in the medical sector, as well as for all clients in the social services sector, with the objective of maintaining existing strengths and eliminating weaknesses.

Over 30 organizations from the fields of state administration, social insurance, social service organizations, welfare associations, hospital owners and the medical board are represented in this project.

For this reason, there are both players and organizations from the government political system and government-related fields such as the Austrian institution of legally organized social insurance, public service institutions in the health care sector such as government-run hospital associations, as well as non-profit organizations of the civil society that perform public services.

From the outset, it was the central goal to not launch another traditional planning project, but to develop a specific stable collaboration system based on the collaboration approach, and to test this especially during the duration of the project in selected model regions.

On the consulting side, the necessary services are assembled for this from professional organizational consulting and scientific analyses.

The scientific aspect of the project focuses on the solid modeling and design of organizational development and testing processes and the analysis of international case studies with a focus on the subsequent implementation of the collaborative conditions analyzed.

The organizational consulting is geared to responding to the management challenges in the design and development of collaboration.

Consultants can support networks and collaboration particularly effectively at the start and in the structuring phase, since they can offer options for organizational structures and process steps without a unilateral commitment and in view of the entire system. Consultants can also be used to carry out surveys and preliminary talks in the selection of participating organizations and therefore support the selection of potential collaboration partners (Grossmann/Lobnig/Scala 2007).

To implement the collaboration project, a structure is selected that has been organized quite centrally in terms of a “bottom up” principle, but also to ensure the commitment of the leadership and management at regional and state levels.

Contrary to conventional planning projects, it is essential that in collaboration projects the collaborating players on the operational, practical “doing” level develop the substantive and structural design of the collaboration according to the “bottom up” principle. This will ensure that the collaboration actually develops on its own and not as usually experienced where external solutions are imposed on existing problems. This is a key success factor for sustainable collaboration. This will enable the operative players to solve their problem areas with their own self-created measures. The observation has shown that this approach is by no means self-evident and therefore was received with distrust and astonishment by the operational players at the beginning, however, as the project advanced, enthusiasm for the approach was ever increasing.

The comprehensive integration of the control level guarantees the necessary commitment needed for substantive results and also ensures the anchoring of the collaboration project in the organizations involved and in their necessary internal restructuring measures. The broad involvement of the control level of the collaboration players causes both the

substantive collaboration structure developed by the operative basis and of course also the collaboration effort itself to gain experience in necessary defense of their status and political validation.

On the highest political control level, a steering committee is constituted in which the top executives of the participating organizations as well as the main political decision-makers of the country are represented. This committee makes all of the decisions arising in the project and also secures these in the relevant project environments, whereas the presence of each respective leader from every institution involved in the steering committee ensures that these decisions made on the basis of a broad consensus are also carried forth into the individual departments and by the local players.

Following the “bottom up” principle, in order to support the operational level that bears the main burden of preparing the substantive and structural design of the collaboration – in terms of hierarchy, directly under the steering committee – a national project team was trained that laid the cornerstones for the project at the operational level, where also relevant scientific findings were considered. This team sets the substantive framework and formulates the outline and guidelines as an action guide for the concrete preparation on the operational processing level. Another challenge is for the national project team to adapt solutions and suggestions on the operational level and it consolidates them with an overall country focus. In addition, the team carries out the selection and establishment of the processing teams at the operational level.

In summary, it can be said that at the highest control level (at the federal state [Bundesland] level), a dual project system has been installed: a committee at the executive level that secures the current results in the context of the pilot project, and ultimately makes policy decisions, and a project team to organize and process the substantive, operational agendas.

This dual system project is then repeated at an operational level.

In both model regions, each composed of several political districts, a committee was in turn established at the executive level and finally both teams are located here at the operational level, which assume the brunt of the substantive work following the lines of the “bottom up” principle. The operational teams conceptualize the practical tools, instruments and content suggestions with regard to the relevant performance-related processes in the

model regions within the framework of the country project teams. The committee at the executive level provides content-based support for their substantive findings and structural proposals for the design of the collaboration, and these findings and proposals must ultimately also be supported from all sides. In this respect, the committee at the executive level makes the necessary decisions in relation to the work of operational teams and secures these results – as would the steering committee at the country level – among the relevant players and organizations in the pilot regions.

The testing in two model regions was necessary to attain a well secured, substantive and legitimized density of results based on the necessary critical range and awareness of the collaboration.

The role of research assistant of the collaboration project offers both practical insight into the process of the case study as well as an observer perspective that allows scientific inferences to be drawn and analyses to be carried out.

In the context of inter-organizational interdependence between the political/governmental organizations, government-based outsourced agencies and organizations in the non-profit sector, the central substantive focus of the observation is on the importance of politics for collaboration in this area of tension. An attempt was made to gain a perspective in particular regarding their needs, impact and practical implications, where the three aspects of policy, space and the role of counseling came under special consideration.

At the beginning of the project, certain mistrust and a distinct reluctance to accept the collaboration project were formally noticeable. In the course of the project, particularly as it turned out that the collaborative approach provides very concrete, new and innovative results from problem solving, one could observe that the fears and the typical Austrian resentment towards everything new started to subside and the players gradually became more able to accept collaboration and its working methods. A progressive increase in the commitment necessary for collaboration could be determined. The more this commitment took shape, the more often it was observed that stakeholders for collaboration joined in, effectively laying down their existing self-interests of the home organization, as they perceived the collaboration effort as an autonomous system, whereupon they also

represented this system externally and defended it from non-cooperating players regarding irritating intervention.

Particular suspicion existed at the start, precisely at the highest level of management regarding the just described, extensive and – for the players involved – unusual project structure. Because of the previously executed, conventional planning projects, this structure presented a renewal, which was considered at the beginning to have only a cautiously formulated probability of success.

Meanwhile however, it was possible to completely eliminate this resentment. Despite this, the process required a lot of time and persuasion work, both through the consulting system as well as with the quickly persuaded team at the operational level.

Based on the observation, it can however be determined that the approach of a broad project structure has meanwhile proven its worth, and is bearing the first collaborative fruits. Firstly, in the model regions as well as throughout the entire territory of the province, a broad degree of familiarity was attainable that helpfully stimulates the further development of collaboration between the health and social sectors, and in addition to that, the project was able to become well established in the home organizations of the participating collaboration players. The message of the need for parallel co-development of the home organization during the development of the collaboration was clearly delivered to the players involved, both at the leadership level and also at the operational level.

The dual board covering provided by collaboration both at the control level as well as at the operational level has been particularly successful in the event of possible sources of irritation. The participation and involvement of all stakeholders necessary for collaboration in the development of the collaboration effort guarantees access to the concerned contact partners for resolving any sources of irritation throughout the entire project period and thereafter. This provides the collaboration effort with self-contained mechanisms for reacting to crises from the very beginning and is capable of responding out of the collaboration structures.

Based on the observations, an essential and not too underestimated success factor for collaboration can be identified which mostly enjoys little attention: in collaboration

relationships, the project organization as well as the social setting of collaboration meetings with the respective committees and collaborative teams is a critical and often underestimated factor.

In the spirit of collaboration, the project organization – similar to the role of consulting – must assume a neutral position in relation to the participating organizations. The organization is intended solely for the purposes of collaboration and must also adapt to their needs. Special self-interests of individual collaboration partners are not allowed to bear any role in this setting. Exceptions may only be carried out if someone from the project organization first gets approval from all project stakeholders and this is jointly agreed upon.

Ensuring an appropriate social setting for each collaboration meeting will require from the project organization a high level of empathic skills and a deep understanding of content on the functioning of collaborations. It is therefore not sufficient to merely shift the organizational preparation of collaboration meetings to the administrative staff without any substantive coupling to the collaborative project. In order to support a successful and sustainable development process of collaboration, the position of the project organization must be supplied with sufficient resources, especially those of a substantive nature. Conscious – or even subconscious – savings at this point threaten the positive development of collaborations.

A well thought out social setting of the collaboration bodies that is focused on space organization promotes, supports and stimulates various goals including the confidence-building between the players and the work process.

The Role of Politics

The role of politics and administration is naturally an essential aspect of politically initiated collaboration and many aspects can be investigated. Nevertheless, a central question would be: Why do national and regional governments mainly refuse to assume the collaborative management approach – the design and solution of social problems (this finding can at least hold for Austria)? As a key obstacle, the political line of conflict between the government and the opposition was suspected.

Indeed, the initially established hypothesis in the current state of observations could only partially be confirmed.

The negative attitude of the political side can be observed at the control level, however, two causative observations for this could be noted.

Firstly there is the inherent fear of a loss of power and control. The collaboration approach not only runs contrary to the typical accumulation behavior of the political system for progressive accumulation of power, but still calls for subtasking of authority. In this sense, models of collaboration are in no way conservative system-preserving structure models. On the contrary, collaboration efforts each require constant further development of the collaboration itself, but also development and at least a partial opening up of the internal structures of the participating organizations.

Secondly, no confidence in the collaboration approach already exists that is based on previously applied policy models. Previous observations have revealed that the players in the political system are not confident in the value of the collaboration approach, and are therefore initially reluctant to accept this organizational model.

In addition, collaboration relationships – as already mentioned – compel a subtasking of authority in order to create a substantive profit and advantage for the entire system. However, unlike well-known policy approaches such as neorealism and neoinstitutionalism, with the collaboration approach there is no player who embodies the *primus inter pares* (Schieder/Spindler 2003). This means, one player – endowed with disproportionate political power – is missing who would be urge on the other players participating in the collaboration and force the agreements to be adhered to.

As the observations of the case studies show, a tendency for the second reason can be grounded – as the primary reason for preventing unconditional participation in collaboration.

In the course of the case study, it will still be shown in the implementation and policy-making stage whether this assumption can ultimately be confirmed. There, it will also be proven whether in the policy system this assumption primarily concerns the fear of the loss of power and control, or whether it in fact concerns a lack of confidence in a new political control model.

In fact, the originally established hypothesis, where the central obstacle to political commitment to collaboration is the conflict between the opposition and the government, can no longer be confirmed. Obviously, a final statement on this hypothesis must also be made for the phase of implementation and decision-making. But the trend here also seems mainly to be the lack of confidence in the collaboration model as a key obstacle to a political commitment.

This differentiated observation result is surprising in that it causes further considerations to go in an entirely different and unexpected direction. This alleviates the question of how to navigate around a possibly prohibitive line of conflict in the political system drawn between the opposition and the government and how a satisfactory solution can be found, and instead poses the question of how and in what ways “trust” in the collaborative approach can be created in the initiative phase and during the constituent phase of a collaboration project in policy-related areas.

Based on the present observation, a guideline is currently to be followed based on practical conviction in this specific case: learning-by-doing based on concrete achievements.

That is, it is not so much a priority to restore confidence in the collaborating partners, but primarily the basic structure of trust in the collaboration as such. Trust in collaboration as a sustainable problem-solving ability for virulent social problems must be strengthened.

Unlike the control level, the hypothesis above can in no way be affirmed at the operational level. Quite the contrary – players on the concrete “doing” level have a strong urge for collaborative relationships. And this is so – be it to induce process optimization, to bring about an improvement in bilateral relations, to ease the work burden, or but also to achieve a qualitative improvement in the provision of services.

Paradoxically, this collaboration effort of the operationally working players within a participating collaborative organization causes an area of conflict between the operational level and control level that can seem to stand in the way and have an irritating effect on the desired collaboration and necessary organizational commitment.

It can be noted that the building of external partnerships requires at least as strongly pronounced communication efforts inwardly as well as outwardly, in order to offset the

differentiated degree of organization-internal collaboration efforts between the stakeholders at the operational and management levels.

The Role of Consulting

The role of consulting should be viewed critically in the context of politically initiated collaboration efforts. Consultants as the “third party representing all parties” (Grossmann/Lobnig/Scala, 2007) cultivate a central and a not-to-be-underestimated success factor in the initiation, development and structuring of a collaboration relationship. However, this raises the question of specific conditions and adjustments where a consultant must be prepared for the specific situation of collaboration in public management, but also to create the necessary conditions for the time “after consultation”. Which player can take on the “third party representing all parties” of consultants in a politically initiated collaboration effort? How can the creation of such a “third party representing all parties” be stimulated by consultants during the development phase?

In their activities in the development of a collaboration effort, consultants always find themselves involved performing a balancing act. As a “third party representing all parties”, you do not only represent collaboration and participating players, but – and this is the critical aspect – a mediating role between the specific players working in the collaboration (i.e. the overall collaboration system) and the originally politically motivated clients, as well as a negotiating role. Here the consultant constantly runs the risk of losing the “representing all parties” status and thus being labeled as a partisan affiliation from the perspective of both political entities and leaders as well as the specific implementing players. In the interest of the necessary trust needed by the collaboration consultant, this must be prevented. Only through the constant, conscious reflection of this “all party” posture by the consultant can a branding of partisanship be prevented. But this is no easy task and must not be underestimated.

This finding ultimately applies to all collaboration projects, but especially politically initiated ones. This is specifically true also because in the political system it is not unusual to make informal arrangements. A falling out can often be precipitated by suspected bias being present. This can be prevented only through maximum transparency. Finally, all agreements made outside of a collaboration effort as well as results from negotiations

must be replayed into the structures of the collaboration effort. But solo consulting runs should be avoided, however, and actually, in order to maintain trust, the consultant should always first obtain an order for negotiating and action from each of the respective existing collaboration structures, thereby avoiding conflicts of trust from the beginning. But the observation of the case has shown, however, that such a policy system gains (internal) dynamics that are not always compatible with such a alienation.

The assumption of the role of the “third party representing all parties” for the period after the consultation is an essential element for sustainable, functioning collaboration. The stimulation of the replacement of this role (occupied by the consultant) should be the basis of previous observations on some crucial points:

An institutional structure is required in order to be independent from both the personal commitment of individual players – as valuable as this also is – as well as even to ascribe substantive and formal weight and sustainability to the collaboration.

It is important that a hierarchization of these collaboratively agreed structures be avoided in order to maintain the integrity of the overall collaboration system.

The player in the role of the “third party representing all parties” does not only advocate and speak insistently in favor of the collaboration, but the collaboration must also constantly continue to develop and advance organizationally and administratively through new sources of stimulus. This task should be carried out without any one party overly putting forth its own self-interests. This interpretation of the role is only possible if consequences for the specific player can be anticipated (foreseen) in the event of misuse or of a deliberate organizational controlling error. Therefore, an organizational form is needed that can immunize these roles against abusive interpretation and exercises. One possible solution offered here – also applied in other political arenas – is the rotation principle, where the degree of institutionalization, as well as the frequency of role replacement should be made individually, dependent on the collaboration and on the participation of all collaboration stakeholders.

For the consultant, the difficulty now lies in stimulating the formation of such a structure and organizational role during the consultation phase so that the development and emergence of such a structure and organizational role is understood by the collaborating players and organizations as self-innovation that they are introducing into the world. The

cooperation structure and the organizational role of a “third party representing all parties” are only worth as much as the collaboration partners substantively bear its development. The necessary commitment for this only arises through a joint development process. Therefore, it is counter-productive and damaging to sustainability, if external consultants introduce ready-made solution templates into the current collaboration process. There is, of course, the question of how such development can be stimulated. Given the current findings, it has been shown that the emphatic skills of the consultant are in demand and necessary. This process can be supported by mention of the need for such a structure and organizational role, where as a source of additional stimulation and support, the above-mentioned pivotal points can be incorporated as guidelines. The participating collaboration partners must however manage the actual development process themselves in order to foster the level of commitment necessary.

Based on the current situation, the question remains unanswered – as already raised in the period about the role of politics – of how the trust of the political collaboration initiators in the collaboration approach can be increased and strengthened by the consultant, especially in the early phase/decision-making phase of the collaboration. No concrete solution can be provided on the current state of the observation. There exists the suggestion of strengthening confidence by way of “learning by doing” and the expectation of finding other possible solutions through further observation of the case study.

The Role of Space

Based on current observations, two relevant levels of space analysis can be identified which can be viewed in the context of collaboration relationships.

For the first one (1) are the actual specific territories in which collaboration takes place, and for the second one (2), an action space (“Handlungsraum”) is suspected within which collaboration relations can be separated from the outside world in the sense of exclusion.

(1) The historically emerging territorial structures function and must be observed in the development of collaboration. This particularly concerns the legally formal political management structure on which a collaboration effort is built and with which collaboration occurs. In the current case, examples of this would be the regional political management processes and administrative organizational structures.

Of course, this observation should not be considered a groundbreaking insight, but simply meant to show that local structural conditions should be purposely included in the considerations for the development of collaborations.

Of course, territorial circumstances – and the observations showed this also – are also considered in the context of collaboration development. However, the remaining consideration stops on a meta-level and is not explained with the detail structure of existing local conditions. That is surprising, as – in light of the finding that the observance of this collaboration aspect has no significant news value – regional structural characteristics during the development of the case study always continued to become an issue, but until now were never identified as a separate processing point. From the present state of the observation, there exists the assumption that it will change relatively rapidly. And that is so when it involves concrete everyday cooperation structures. To implement such a structure, you need a debate and deliberate consideration of spatially territorial local circumstances.

(2) In fact, no connections between the collaboration and the political system (in terms of design and control system) however, are created by considering spatially territorial aspects. Far more interesting than the spatial analysis of legal, formal, political, administrative structures is the determination that a space is required through which the collaboration is in a position to join in an exchange for the political system, but also – and this is the paradox – the option even precisely enables separation of politics from this subsystem. For collaboration in the politics-related field, this is an absolutely necessary job for being able to achieve sustainability in the sense of the basic idea of collaboration – whereas the collaboration effort is only committed to itself and its participating players and organizations and evolves on its own.

This balancing act between the connection to and distinction from the control system of politics is considered critical for the further development of collaboration. First, a connection to the political control system is needed in order to obtain the necessary legitimacy and confirmation of its existence, to ensure necessary collaboration resources and to agree on and confirm strategic development decisions, and, at the same time, it also requires a boundary in order to limit the influence of the political system to a necessary and constructive measure and to not manage it to death. Excessive influence of control by the design system of politics would painfully disrupt the balance of collaboration

and, at worst, lead to eradication of the collaboration effort. Players and organizations participating in the collaboration that can no longer recognize the value of their voluntarily surrendered partial sovereignty in favor of a collaborative overall gain due to excessive external influence (through the political system) will move out of a collaboration or drive its actual demise.

This balancing act between connection and boundaries – better subsumed with the concept of control problems – has already often been covered elsewhere (Willke 1995, Maintz 1993, Scharpf 1993). Nevertheless, there has been as of yet no attempt to address this problem from a spatial perspective.

It can currently be observed that collaboration is based on a unique logic control: Cooperation through negotiation. This form of cooperation is different from forms of control in hierarchically controlled contexts or in the market economy (Grossmann/Lobnig/Scala, 2007).

The question arises as to how this very promising and, to some extent already proven approach of cooperation by negotiating can be combined with the theoretical considerations of a “gap” (“Zwischenraum”).

With the current state of observations, there still is no clearly recognizable image of the formation, shape and concrete design of such a gap. In addition to the ongoing observation of the case study, another theory analysis is needed, in particular, an idea-based historical review and analysis of selected historical intersections during whose epoch of collaboration relationships in Europe were operated as political control models (Jönsson/Tägil/Törnqvist 2000, Sassen 2006). At least now there exists the conviction that the observance of space, in the context of collaboration, can make an essential contribution to problem-solving as well as model creation.

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