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# INNOVATION THROUGH PARTNERSHIPS

FOUR CAPABILITIES FOR LOCAL GOVERNMENTS

BY TOMMI LAITIO



# INNOVATION THROUGH PARTNERSHIPS

## Four Capabilities For Local Governments

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# Introduction

This research brief identifies a set of skills and practices that local governments utilize to advance effective partnerships and produce innovative outcomes. It presents a partnership capabilities model that embraces friction as a prerequisite for public innovation and democratic legitimacy. The four capabilities – navigation, convening, experimentation, and codification – derive from my research project as a Bloomberg Public Innovation Fellow at Johns Hopkins University on how partnerships improve public space provision and governance in local governments of the Americas and Europe. In this brief, I introduce each capability and offer an illustrative case of public space projects in Amsterdam’s Zuidooost neighborhood to demonstrate the iterative, interdependent, and sequential nature of the capabilities.

Public sector innovation seeks to develop, implement, and spread “new and creative ideas that challenge conventional wisdom and disrupt the established practices within a specific context” (Torfing, 2016). Success depends in part on engaging a range of institutions and stakeholders in designing and pursuing solutions to increasingly complex public problems.<sup>1</sup> Partnerships between local governments and the private sector (including civil society) are one of several “institutional conditions and supports” in the OECD’s innovation capacity framework (Kaur et al., 2022), highlighted for their contribution to institutional connectedness and openness, the diffusion of policy and ideas, and financing and budgeting programs and solutions.<sup>2</sup>

Building the capabilities for partnerships and collaboration can be difficult in bureaucracies. Drawing on Mayne et al.’s (2019) state capability framework, capabilities can be understood as assets for successful governance. They derive from the set of group practices within organizations and teams, as well as individual-level skills that are routine and habituated in an institution.<sup>3</sup> Based on comparative case study research of the provision of public spaces in five metropolitan areas on three continents, this brief presents a partnership model with four capabilities that drive effective partnerships to advance public sector innovation.<sup>4</sup>

These capabilities are:

**Navigation:** Local authorities build staff agency, support, and ability to embrace and work through uncertainty and friction in partnerships.

**Convening:** Using practices such as shared learning, brokerage and facilitation, organizations gather partners to establish a foundation from which diverse stakeholders can build and advance a shared agenda.

**Experimentation:** Local authorities enable learning and adaptation through staff- or organization-level processes of ideation and testing of new or reconfigured solutions.

**Codification:** Local authorities institutionalize successful partnerships in governance structures and policies.

While partnerships are considered foundational to public innovation, they can pose risks to government legitimacy.<sup>5</sup> These risks are heightened by many local governments’ orientation towards consensus, which can override differing views and subsume conflict (Bäcklund &



This brief is a synthesis of findings from case study research in Amsterdam and four other cities.

Mäntysalo, 2010; Haugaard, 2016; Mouffe, 2013). Nevertheless, friction inevitably surfaces in efforts to work with stakeholders who hold different goals, assets, customs, and power. Friction is the dynamic resulting from competing priorities, unclear expectations, or unequal resources within or among groups. Triggered by concerns about authority, authenticity, reliability, and recognition, friction is often viewed as a hurdle to overcome or an obstacle to avoid. In my understanding of how local governments advance partnerships, I argue that friction is *an inevitable, desirable, and beneficial* feature of partnerships and a precondition for public innovation and democratic legitimacy. Within this orientation, governance processes respect, leverage, and build on diversity and difference. By developing the four capabilities of the partnership model, governments can create an environment where the tensions of partnerships are embraced as predictable and foundational to public innovation.<sup>6</sup>

**Friction is an *inevitable, desirable, and beneficial* feature of partnerships.**

This brief is organized as follows: in the first section I present the partnership capabilities model, with examples of each capability drawn from the cases I developed of partnerships for public space governance. I then present the case of public space governance in Amsterdam to illustrate how the four capabilities interact in a given setting. I conclude with development opportunities for local governments interested in building their partnership capabilities to drive public innovation.

## A Partnership Capabilities Model

The partnership capabilities model begins with the common public sector goals that motivate partnerships, namely resident health and wellbeing, equity, and sustainable development.<sup>7</sup> Procedural goals are also important considerations in partnerships, especially fairness, efficiency, and efficacy. To those procedural goals, I add “convivencia” as an approach to navigating friction. Convivencia refers to an orientation and *active effort* to co-exist across differences, in which difference is not a feature to be resolved but an opportunity for negotiation toward shared outcomes (DiMasso Tarditti, 2007; Low, 2022; Wise & Noble, 2016).<sup>8</sup> Because the policies and practices of local governments create the conditions that can either foster or curtail civic life, I propose convivencia as a foundation for municipal action in operationalizing responses to friction through the partnership capabilities.<sup>9</sup>

This model proposes that navigation, convening, experimentation, and codification are the four partnership capabilities that local governments need to ensure both innovative results and legitimacy in the delivery and governance of public goods. The capabilities are interdependent, iterative, and, ideally, sequential. I define each capability in more detail in the diagram on pages 6-7.

The model also delineates skills versus practices to illustrate how actions may differ for individuals versus teams or organizations. In reality, skills and practices are interwoven and shared among staff, teams, organizations and networks. As such, they may be less distinguishable from one another in practice compared to their depiction in the model.

# Partnership Capabilities Model

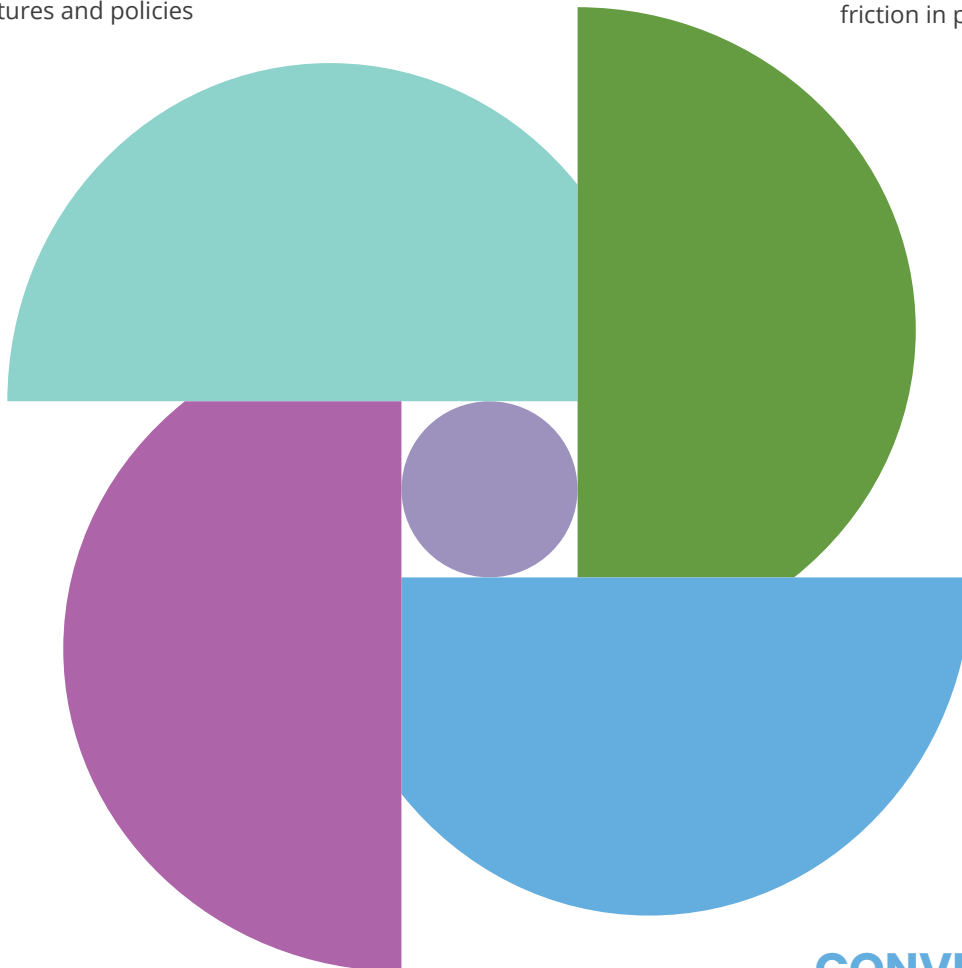
From Capabilities to Outcomes

## CODIFICATION

Institutionalizing partnership structures and policies

## NAVIGATION

Building staff agency, support, and ability to embrace and work through uncertainty and friction in partnerships



## EXPERIMENTATION

Providing institutional spaces and resources for ideation and testing of new or reconfigured solutions

## CONVENING

Gathering partners and brokers to recognize and leverage differences and to develop a shared action plan

## NAVIGATION

Local governments as employers and stewards of civic life have a responsibility to build staff agency, support, and ability to embrace and work through uncertainty and friction in partnerships. The capability to navigate friction entails being attentive to an alignment between resident needs and partnership opportunities and reconfiguring services and policies based on actively listening to stakeholder feedback. For staff, approaching friction as an opportunity to learn how to navigate complexity can improve work satisfaction, staff retention, and their sense of equity and safety. Embracing friction in partnerships with civil society can lead to a better understanding of resident concerns, foster a collaborative culture with stakeholders, and inspire new governance practices.

## CONVENING

Convening establishes a foundation from which diverse stakeholders can build and advance a shared agenda. The capacity to convene for learning aims to ensure that parties with different assets, and perhaps conflicting priorities, feel seen, heard, and fairly treated as they enter into a partnership. When successful, learning together with a curiosity toward differences builds a common understanding of the challenge and problem definition, facilitates a systemic approach to addressing public problems, ensures shared recognition and ownership of the challenges, and allows the partners to understand each other's assets and contributions towards advancing solutions (Alhanen, Soini, & Kangas, 2019; Bäcklund & Mäntysalo, 2010; Forester, 2009).

## EXPERIMENTATION

In experimentation, the local authority and its partners engage in an adaptive learning process in which they create, test, observe, and adapt or reconfigure new ideas or existing practices (Ehnert, 2023a, 2023b). It is a process that can improve the design quality of scaled-up solutions by mitigating risks and creating sufficient support for new interventions. Experimentation is a useful strategy for building confidence in organizational change by producing evidence for and prototypes of a different tomorrow (Bason & Austin, 2022; Ehnert 2023b).

## CODIFICATION

Codification is the process of turning the local authority's intentions and practices into institutionalized structures and policies. Codified policies and practices communicate institutional decisions and priorities; provide frameworks for government staff in partnerships; and allow stakeholders, the public, the media, and elected officials to hold the institution accountable (Barker & Rees, 2021; Bason & Austin, 2022; Huntington, 2006; Kattel et al., 2022; Wolff & de-Shalit 2007). Legitimate codification requires stakeholder engagement that is experienced as authentic by the involved parties. Particularly germane to public innovation, successful codification strikes a balance between predictability and flexibility (Kattel et al., 2022).

# Partnership Capabilities Model

From Capabilities to Outcomes



## NAVIGATION

### SKILLS

active listening, attentiveness to resident needs

### PRACTICES

embrace friction, reconfigure services

### POTENTIAL OUTCOMES

- Collaborative culture
- Better understanding of resident concerns
- Staff work satisfaction and retention
- Equity and safety



## CONVENING

### SKILLS

dialogue, curiosity, negotiation

### PRACTICES

facilitation, learning together, shared agenda

### POTENTIAL OUTCOMES

- Problem definition
- Systemic approach to collaboration
- Sense of recognition and shared ownership
- Understanding of assets



## EXPERIMENTATION

### SKILLS

creativity, observation, learning by doing

### PRACTICES

testing, iteration, adaptive learning

### POTENTIAL OUTCOMES

- Flexibility and speed
- Higher design quality
- Proof of concept
- Confidence for change



## CODIFICATION

### SKILLS

assessment, evaluation, policy development

### PRACTICES

advocacy, reporting, enforcement, policy adoption

### POTENTIAL OUTCOMES

- Predictability
- Legitimacy of government
- Accountability and transparency

The four capabilities are interdependent and iterative and may build upon each other in sequence. Navigation enables local governments to enter partnerships with confidence, understand the root causes of friction, and assess their need for external facilitation and brokerage in convening. Convening ensures sufficient stakeholder buy-in and helps identify the resources and actors available for experimentation. Experimentation provides evidence and builds confidence for systems change. Codification sustains the lessons of the previous phases into institutionalized practices.

**The four capabilities are interdependent and iterative and may build upon each other in sequence.**

The next section illustrates in greater detail how the four capabilities intersect and build on one another using the case of public space transformation in Amsterdam's Zuidooost borough.

## **New Public Spaces in Amsterdam Zuidooost**

Despite Amsterdam's reputation in urban planning praxis as a "just city" (Fainstein, 2014), neighborhood inequities are evident in what Savini et al. (2016) describe as a "core-periphery divide" between the city center and neighborhood development. The city government's efforts to close equity gaps are on display in the borough of Zuidooost ("Southeast"), a multicultural, historically underserved area of over 92,000 residents representing 170 nationalities, including a sizable population from former Dutch colonies in the Caribbean.<sup>10</sup> There are measurable socioeconomic inequities between Zuidooost and the rest of the city (Masterplan Zuidooost, 2021), but as an area of expansion from the dense downtown, the neighborhood is attracting newcomers, and the city has set a goal of building 30,000-39,000 new apartments and housing 60,000 new residents there by 2030.<sup>11</sup>

Twenty minutes from the center but physically detached from the rest of Amsterdam, the borough has a long history of large-scale planning initiatives, only some of which are perceived to have benefited local residents.<sup>12</sup> Friction results from some ambivalence from policymakers and residents alike about how the physically isolated and culturally diverse district fits into the city.<sup>13</sup> For example, one policymaker I spoke with said about Zuidooost, "...it's different. It doesn't feel like Amsterdam. It is Amsterdam but it doesn't feel like Amsterdam and at the same time I think it is the future of Amsterdam and that is what I find interesting." The 2021 borough master plan promises significant investments in business infrastructure, education, public spaces, and housing.<sup>14</sup>

As Zuidooost residents skew young – 35% of the population is under age 27, and youth are expected to be a "significant share" of future population growth – working with young people is an important principle in current urban planning initiatives. Two large-scale projects in Zuidooost advance this principle: a new public library branch, OBA Next, and Brasapark, a new park. The city council's decision to relocate the OBA Next project from Amsterdam's business

district to Zuidoost became a showcase initiative to underwrite “unequal investment for equal opportunities” in the city (Wagemakers, 2023).<sup>15</sup> And, in codifying the rights of residents and nonprofits to develop and maintain an urban garden within Brasapark, it serves as an example of the potential of a rights-based resident engagement model.

Both OBA Next and Brasapark are unfolding in a broader context of enshrining more equitable partnership practices between residents and city government. The planning and execution of these projects demonstrate all four partnership capabilities and are useful in illustrating how the capabilities work interdependently and iteratively to advance the city’s policy and procedural goals.<sup>16</sup>

## OBA Next

After the 2022 local elections, a new progressive coalition in the City Council announced the relocation of OBA Next – a planned €36.5 million (US\$40 million) investment into a “*library of the future*” – from the city’s Zuidas business district to the historically underinvested Zuidoost neighborhood (Soetenhoorst, 2022).<sup>17</sup> The decision effectively restarted the development project and ultimately led to several transformative impacts for the OBA and Zuidoost, including new ways of doing business for the library and unprecedented infrastructure investments in Kraaiennest, one of the most underserved neighborhoods in Zuidoost. The four partnership capabilities are on display in enabling this transformation.

**OBA Next and Brasapark are unfolding in a broader context of enshrining more equitable partnership practices between residents and city government.**

First, despite the recognized good intentions behind the decision to relocate the library, the project faced headwinds in the borough given a legacy of perceived institutional neglect. Borough Council President Tanja Jadnanansing elaborated, “you have this structure and system, which has been for decades forgetting about Amsterdam [Southeast] so you have to change the whole narrative. You have to change the whole mindset, if you will. So it will take some time” to transform residents’ experience of city promises as “a lot of blah, blah, blah”. The library recognized this legitimate historical distrust from residents in the borough, without taking it as an organizational affront. Chris Sigaloff, Head of OBA Next, explained, “I really need to take the local community seriously, I need to work with them, not just get their input, but really on an equal basis” and characterized community reluctance to engage with the library as “fair.” At the same time, the library and the city’s capital planning leaders understood that the city was searching for ways to prioritize its cultural projects within budget constraints and that time was of the essence to reconfigure the city’s commitment to the \$40M library project for Zuidoost. The project team also needed to identify new funding partners to cover approximately 20% of facility costs, per the city’s plan.



1  
A summer festival for youth organized by Hart voor de K-buurt and Kraaiennest, courtesy of OBA Next.

To **navigate** community distrust and significant uncertainty regarding the library's form and function, while pursuing partnerships, the library team aimed to reframe the project to generate local buy-in and support from the rest of the city. To that end, Sigaloff and her team heralded OBA Next as an ambitious "innovation program" that would inform the future of the entire library system based on its development and success in the vibrant and evolving district of Zuidoost.<sup>18</sup>

To do this, OBA Next **convened** diverse institutional and community partners including the community organization Hart voor de K-buurt (Heart for the K-neighborhood), which had often been an outspoken critic of local government.<sup>19</sup> Based on these convenings, OBA Next concluded that it should prioritize young people and their needs, especially for career and workforce development, given the sizable youth population and economic inequality in Zuidoost. Hart voor de K-buurt's active collaboration and advocacy led the library to be located next to the metro station in Kraaiennest (the "K-neighborhood"), one of Zuidoost's most marginalized neighborhoods. This was in opposition to the views of senior city officials that preferred a more central location next to the administrative building in the neighborhood square, Anton de Komplein.

OBA Next also **experimented** with placemaking and co-creation with residents, both new(er) methods for the library, using for the first time a series of pop-up labs in two vacant commercial spaces in the borough where staff with local ties developed programming in cooperation with residents and partners.<sup>20</sup> Called OBA Next Labs, their purpose, as Sigaloff explained, is "experiments around new ways of creating or making knowledge and information, accessible new

ways of developing talents and skills for the future, new ways of democracy and having a voice, and new ways of meeting and repurposing in a library.” Lab programming has a strong focus on providing local youth with creative opportunities to engage with artificial intelligence and virtual reality tools, podcast production, arts workshops and music events. The library team strategically launched these ongoing initiatives in the K-neighborhood to demonstrate the location’s desirability in meeting youth equity goals.

This phase of experimentation also included a groundbreaking partnership started in 2024 with Tumo Center for Creative Technologies. Tumo is a “free international after-school program” founded in Armenia in 2011 that teaches young people technology and design skills.<sup>21</sup> The partnership with OBA Next brings Tumo to the Netherlands. Tumo at OBA Next provides a space for Zuidoost youth to learn and explore areas such as gaming, programming, and web design, with an initial opening in Kraaiennest in early 2025, in advance of OBA Next.

In early 2024, the Kraaiennest location in Zuidoost prevailed against the other finalist, the district’s town center, whittled down from 20 original locations (OBA, 2024). As a coalition partner to Hart voor de K-buurt, local youth, and other stakeholders, the OBA successfully advocated for “the library of the future” to be located on a site next to a metro station, **codifying** the city’s equity commitment to Zuidoost. OBA Next will be the largest cultural investment into Kraaiennest in its history.



2  
A rendering of the future Tumo at OBA Next in Zuidoost, courtesy of OBA.



3

3

A view into Tuinen  
van Brasa.

## Tuinen van Brasa, Brasapark

Brasapark is an elevated park built to conceal an expanded highway cutting through Amsterdam's Zuidoost district.<sup>22</sup> "Brasa" means "to embrace" in Surinamese, a tribute to the area's cultural identity and the park's potential to reconnect neighborhoods historically divided by the highway. Within Brasapark, Tuinen van Brasa (Gardens of Brasa), a community-led urban garden, embodies Amsterdam's new *buurtrechten* ("neighborhood rights") policy and illustrates the four partnership capabilities.

Piloted in 2019 and adopted in 2024, the Amsterdam neighborhood rights policy gives nonprofits three specific rights: (1) the right to challenge the city as a service provider, (2) the right to bid for public land, and (3) the right to submit a plan for their neighborhood.<sup>23</sup> The policy is explicit on the friction involved in enshrining neighborhood rights. A section of the city's adopted participation regulation translated as "Learning from Practice" notes that these new rules will not ensure processes will always go smoothly and that the city has an obligation to observe and reevaluate regulations as needed. This monitoring and evaluation will require an open mind and attitude from all stakeholders (Gemeente Amsterdam, 2024).

**Amsterdam's new neighborhood rights policy responds to friction in participation.**

To ensure that Brasapark's design could sufficiently meet the district's diverse goals for open space, Project Director Age Niels Holstein hired a parkmaker, Sam Franklin. Holstein had assessed the city's prior planning efforts – three public meetings that attracted about 100 residents to discuss the park's functions – and found them wanting. The team turned to Franklin, a trusted parkmaker in the community based on facilitating over 50 resident-led greening projects, to fulfill what Holstein called “a very important role in that, in what I call now a methodology of parkmaking.” Franklin helped the team **navigate** residents' competing desires for park programming through conventional activities including civic engagement and consultation, as well as by embracing the “open attitude” described above when working with local stakeholders. This contributed to the team's subsequent success in cooperating with active groups from planning to implementation.

At one event in 2021 focused on gardening in Brasapark, a connection among four residents with a shared interest in urban gardening proved transformative in how the city thought about and activated Brasapark. Nathalie Guicherit, one of the residents who is a local organizer and volunteer consultant to nonprofits, explained how this group's approach differed from conventional gardening usage in Amsterdam's parks, in which residents rent urban allotments for private use. In contrast, this small group articulated that residents “need a garden that our community can use,” explaining, “I wanted to create a platform for everybody [in Zuidoost so that all] who wants to use it should be able to use it.” This fortuitous meeting led the group of four to propose a novel plan where they and other volunteers would develop the park for public use in partnership with the city and a local environmental nonprofit. Together with parkmaker Franklin, they started **convening** local residents, international experts, the city's technical staff, and others to develop a new proposed model of collaboration for planning, building and nurturing a public space, a garden for everyone. The resulting vision was in the tradition of shared governing of natural resources often referred to as commons (Foster & Iaione, 2019, 2022).<sup>24</sup>



PHOTO BY TOMMI LAITIO

4  
Local residents  
gardening at  
Tuinen van Brasa.

The city took seriously this novel proposal from residents of a garden for everyone. The project team “assessed whether the groups who made the plan would be capable of realizing it. After this assessment, we trusted them. When supported by us, professionals, they should be capable of actually deliver[ing] their own ideas,” Holstein explained, as Franklin’s “methodology of parkmaking” took shape. Subsequently, the city adopted this idea as part of Brasapark planning and made a two-year grant of €50,000 (\$53,430) to Groene Hub (Green Hub), a local nonprofit acting as fiduciary agent, to develop a section of Brasapark according to residents’ vision. Residents created their own organizational practices and statutes for the project, ultimately launching Tuinen van Brasa (Gardens of Brasa).

Tuinen van Brasa created an experimental space for volunteers and city staff to learn through concrete action how to jointly govern and maintain open gardens.<sup>25</sup> Guicherit emphasized that the goal of **experimentation** is project sustainability beyond its founders: “The biggest thing is that we created the platform. It’s not ours. I don’t feel that this is ours, it’s from the community. So the idea is that if we leave, it stays within the community, and somebody will reuse it or do something else with it. None of the vegetables, none of the fruits, nothing is owned by anybody.”

After the two-year grant ended, the city signed a contract in 2023 with Groene Hub to continue Tuinen van Brasa. The city agreed to an annual maintenance grant of €10,000 (\$10,800) and awarded other project grants to the nonprofit. The contract between Groene Hub and the city **codifies** the nonprofit’s right to lead the development of the urban garden in perpetuity (Groene Hub, 2023; AT5, 2023).

## Discussion

The partnership capabilities model proposed in this brief identifies friction as a prerequisite for effective partnerships while acknowledging the difficulties that come with it. I propose that the four capabilities – navigation, convening, experimentation, and codification – can help local governments embrace friction as expected, desirable, and beneficial. Local governments can channel friction towards pragmatic action by equipping staff and divisions with the skills and practices to build partnerships that contribute to public sector innovation. Below, I highlight development opportunities for local governments to build the four partnership capabilities towards this aim.

First, local governments should invest in staff incentives, training, and management practices that encourage enduring attentiveness to partner and resident needs even in the face of tension. Professional development and management practices that support staff sensemaking of uncertainty and channel it to action may be useful here (Bason and Austin, 2022). Staff should be encouraged and supported to learn new skills by undertaking pragmatic projects, activities, or approaches in the real world, backed by an organizational commitment to learning-by-doing and an openness to the reconfiguration of services and programs. In an increasingly tumultuous and unpredictable operating environment, local governments should facilitate workplace discussions on root causes of friction in democratic governance.

Second, local governments should consider investing in brokerage skills that are a key convening resource for recognizing and valuing differences across stakeholders in the service of defining shared agendas. Brokers might be innovation units, facilitation and mediation staff, or affiliated foundations focused on enabling innovation and partnerships, among other entities. Community foundations can often be an excellent convening partner; I encourage local governments to build or deepen relationships with such intermediary organizations in their region.

Third, I recommend investing in experimentation capabilities at the systems level as a means to develop a culture that embraces learning. Systems-level investments could include resources and incentives for frontline staff experimentation (e.g., microgrants), supported by feedback loops for knowledge sharing and replication. For example, staff development days create a space to disseminate insights from experimentation to the wider system for adoption and scale.

Finally, partnerships require codification. Codification is essential for government accountability and transparency, as public and private sector stakeholders can understand government priorities and rationales through what is adopted, scaled, or upheld in budgets, legislation, policies and strategic plans. Codification will require a balance between committing to key objectives and creating space for discretion and flexibility in implementation.

## Conclusion

Recent experiences in many cities demonstrate that building and maintaining equitable and inspiring public spaces cannot be done by local governments alone.<sup>26</sup> This research contributes guidance on how local governments can develop the capabilities to benefit from partnerships and advance policy and procedural goals to improve resident wellbeing, increase equity in access to high-quality civic infrastructure, and foster sustainable development. In all of the cases that substantiate this partnership capability model, partnerships have contributed to more effective public spending, innovative new practices, and greater public trust.

I have found that public sector staff from local governments in Europe and the Americas have been receptive to this approach to navigating the inevitable frictions that are commonplace in collaborative governance, based on my tests of this model as a Bloomberg Public Innovation Fellow at Johns Hopkins. As one North American library professional explained, “I used to think friction between different users and their needs was a challenge that we had to overcome even though there seemed to be no viable solutions. Now I think that a certain amount of friction between users and user groups is not only expected but an indicator that we are doing something right.”

This mindset reflects how friction can be re-imagined as beneficial for public innovation partnerships, shifting local authorities towards welcoming difference as a crucial foundation for governance. The four capabilities described in this brief serve to support efforts to pursue dynamic partnerships that are a cornerstone of public sector innovation. ■

## About the Author



**Tommi Laitio** was the inaugural Bloomberg Public Innovation Fellow at the Bloomberg Center for Public Innovation at Johns Hopkins University from 2022-2024. The fellowship supports exceptional public-sector leaders to share their practices and develop new insights on public innovation. Before the fellowship, Laitio acted as the first executive director for culture and leisure for the City of Helsinki, overseeing arts and culture, sports, youth work, and the public library for Finland's capital. Laitio holds an MA in Political Science from the University of Helsinki and an Executive MBA from Aalto University. As an independent consultant, Laitio advises libraries, museums, cities, and foundations in North America and Europe to find solutions for urban friction, partnerships, and public engagement.

**The Bloomberg Center for Public Innovation at Johns Hopkins University** works to advance public sector innovation across the globe by marrying cutting-edge practice with world-class research to transform the culture of government, deliver exceptional results for residents, and inspire trust in public service. Since its launch in 2021 in partnership with Bloomberg Philanthropies and Johns Hopkins University, the Center has brought research, technical assistance, and training programs in proven approaches for impact to 214 global cities, improving the lives of millions of people around the world.

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### Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

# Endnotes

- 1 Collaborative governance, co-governance, and co-creation are empirical frameworks in public sector innovation practice delineating multi-sector cooperation and multi-stakeholder participation (Ansell & Torfing, 2021; Gilman & Schmitt, 2022).
- 2 Fostering partnerships and diversifying participation is one of the five core principles of the [OECD Declaration on Public Sector Innovation](#) (2019). See Bloomberg Associates (2020) for a review of partnership benefits and models.
- 3 See Anderson (2023) for how the public sector can adopt a problem-solving capabilities approach.
- 4 The research project focuses on the governance of public spaces due to their long history of reliance on partnerships. I compare partnerships for parks and libraries in five metropolitan areas: Amsterdam (NL); Fortaleza (BRA); Los Angeles (USA), Mecklenburg County (USA), and Philadelphia (USA). I selected the cases based on variation according to two features known to influence partnership practices: level of delegation and available public resources (Bloomberg Associates, 2020; Bovens et al., 2014; Braun & Guston, 2003; Foster & Iaione, 2022; Saunders-Hastings, 2022; Schatterman & Bingle, 2015). In 2022-2023, I interviewed 123 public sector leaders and staff, stakeholders, and residents using a semi-structured protocol focused on why local authorities pursue partnerships, the strategies and policies shaping them, key successes and challenges, required skills, and considerations for equity in both process and outcome. I had an intentional focus on senior leadership, given their right and responsibility to set strategic guidelines, ensure compliance, and exercise discretion on partnerships.
- 5 I define legitimacy in rational terms (Weber, 1947) as an acceptance by residents and partners that the government is carrying out its legal duties in a manner consistent with democratically defined objectives. Risks to government legitimacy from partnerships include ceding control over public policy and assets to private actors, reinforcing distributional inequities, a lack of transparency, and prioritizing the needs and views of the powerful (Foster, 2013; Greenspan & Mason, 2017; Saunders-Hastings, 2022).
- 6 This analysis builds on the literature documenting the positive impacts of partnerships (Bloomberg Associates, 2020), co-creation (Ansell & Torfing, 2021), and public sector innovation capacity (Kaur et al., 2022).
- 7 Perhaps the most universal model of common public policy goals is the UN's Sustainable Development Goals, endorsed by all member countries, which aim to reduce poverty and inequality, improve health and wellbeing, encourage economic development, and address climate change.
- 8 On *convivencia*, I am indebted to the scholarship in cultural and urban studies that examines how cities and communities can foster, navigate, manage, and embrace diversity and difference in everyday life. *Convivencia* is the "shared life" of residents and describes their "lived negotiation" in moving through their local communities. It also conjures "belonging as [a] practice" of city living (Wise & Noble, 2016). See Scarato (2019) for analysis of the differences in meaning between *convivencia*, used in Spanish and Portuguese language, politics, and culture, versus the English language term "conviviality."
- 9 My research aligns with applications of the notion of *convivencia* in policymaking and professional capabilities (Addy, 2021; Blattman et al., 2022; Ciudad Buenos Aires, 2020).

- 10 Data on Zuidoost is taken from Dashboard key figures, Research and Statistics division, City of Amsterdam. <https://onderzoek.amsterdam.nl/interactief/dashboard-kerncijfers?tab=gebied&thema=bevolking&gebied=T&taal=en>. Retrieved on August 15, 2024.
- 11 Unless otherwise specified, Google Translate is used for all Dutch-language sources.
- 12 One example of a large-scale planning initiative in Zuidoost is when the city attracted European Union funding in the 1990s for a mega-development including a train station and new soccer stadium. This has created an entertainment zone that serves to reinforce physical and social disconnection between local residents and visitors to the area (Abdou, 2017).
- 13 Zuidoost is often stigmatized in the media, with scholars describing a narrative as focused on failed public policy, crime, and social problems with strong racist undertones (Abdou 2017; Pinkster et al., 2020).
- 14 Zuidoost was designed in the 1960s for middle-class families with aspirations for suburban life (Pinkster et al., 2020). However, delays in public transportation investments and reactions to 20th century modernist housing ideals resulted in a long-term cycle of decline (Bajema et al., 2018a, 2018b).
- 15 The Amsterdam Public Library (OBA) is a foundation separate from the local government, governed by its own board. However, the library is dependent on the city's annual grant in the funding of its operations and the city's capital investments in its facilities.
- 16 In my research in Amsterdam, I noted staff working in Zuidoost from at least the city's project management office, public space management, cultural affairs, and borough administration, as well as the library.
- 17 For more information about OBA Next see <https://www.oba.nl/next.html>.
- 18 OBA Next is defined as the library's "innovation program" in their online materials. See, for example, <https://www.oba.nl/obanext/tumo.html>.
- 19 [Hart voor de K-buurt](#) once led a "participation strike" as the city explored cutting the direct metro connection to the center from Kraaiennest (Wagemakers, 2022). Nio (2023, p.56) describes the participation strike as a response to "plans [that] had already developed so far that they no longer had any real influence on them." (See also van Aanholt et al., 2021.)
- 20 "New milestone for construction of OBA Next in Zuidoost," May 11, 2023, <https://www.oba.nl/obanext/obanextnieuws/Nieuwe-mijlpaal-voor-bouw-OBA-Next-in-Zuidoost.html>.
- 21 For more information about the Tumo partnership, see <https://www.oba.nl/obanext/tumo.html>.
- 22 The City of Amsterdam negotiated Brasapark's creation with Rijkswaterstaat, the national infrastructure authority, as part of the highway expansion plan and is responsible for park design and management. <https://www.amsterdam.nl/toerisme-vrije-tijd/parken/brasapark/>
- 23 Neighborhood rights is a model intended to make urban planning more inclusive in Amsterdam, with the intention of regulating resident participation in planning and policymaking by delineating the rights, responsibilities, and accountability of the city and residents.
- 24 Madison, Frischmann and Strandburg (2014, p.2, quoted in Foster & Iaione, 2019) define a commons as an "institutionalized sharing of public resources by the community."
- 25 For example, Tuinen van Brasa volunteers learned from the city's regulatory expertise on building codes and fire risk, and the city learned how to share power with residents and nonprofits. To learn more, see "Tuinen van Brasa" at Groene Hub: <https://groenehub.org/tuinen-van-brasa/>.
- 26 See, for instance, Laitio et al. (2023) on the restoration of Tom Lee Park in Memphis. The philanthropic collaborative in the United States, [Reimagining the Civic Commons](#), also offers guidance and resources for cities.

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