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Toward a New Definition of Community Partnership: A Three-Dimensional Approach

by
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Abstract

We propose a new definition of partnership, which emphasizes the role and meaning of power in creating partnership. Following a case study of change processes within a kibbutz community undergoing lifestyle changes, The proposed definition focuses on three dimensions of partnership: (a) the *overt* dimension, in which partnership is manifested through daily community life such as organizational structure, rules and norms; (b) the *covert* dimension, which focuses on symbolic rites of partnership and "non-events"; (c) the *latent* dimension, which expresses internalized partnership and influences participants' consciousness through socialization and world views.

Key words: partnership; community partnership; power; decision-making processes; kibbutz.

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Introduction

The past two decades have witnessed the growth of discourse on community partnerships among citizens, professionals, and decision-makers. On the one hand, professionals and elected representatives as well as formal and informal organizations have exhibited an increasing tendency to involve the public in decision-making and implementation of social programs. On the other hand, the public maintains its right to be involved in decisions that influence their lives – whether this is done through organized movements, charities, ad-hoc groups, or individuals (Balloch and Taylor, 2001; Cornwall and Gaventa, 2000; Dekker and Uslaner, 2001).

The advancement of participatory practices and the call for education toward partnership as a professional ideology and way of life have generated a search for a systematic philosophy of partnership. Nevertheless, the practice of partnership remains ambiguous. Regardless of who initiates processes of partnership the public is often led by deceptive rhetoric, as well as by methods that appear to be participatory but conceal patronizing, authoritative and technocratic attitudes. Studies of partnership point to the danger of such practices, as well as to the disparities between expectations and actual implementation of partnership (Barak and Sadan, 2003; Cooke and Kothari, 2001; Schmid, 2001; Shemer, 2003). Although service providers and citizens perceive partnership as an attractive and popular ideal, its practical implementation obstructs the very goals for which it is established. Despite the prevalent disparity between espoused goals and their practical implementation, the people who deal with processes of change on the level communities, organizations, and individuals aspire to develop theoretical knowledge and improve partnership techniques in an attempt to diminish patronizing relations between service providers and clients, or between decision-makers and those who are affected by those decisions.

This dissonance, and our belief that individuals have a right to decide about their lives and surroundings, provided the impetus for the present study of a collective kibbutz community, in which decisions about lifestyle changes are made in a context of community partnership. The study focused on several processes of change within the kibbutz community. Like other collective communities, the kibbutz operates on the basis of democratic institutions that involve member participation in decisions about various aspects of life, such as community assemblies, management by an elected body, and democratic elections.

In this paper, we will examine standard definitions of community partnership, and propose a new definition that allows for complex critical examination of the term and its use. Although the paper focuses on partnership among members of a specific type of community, or among community members and professionals, it

also sheds light on issues related to the individual and the nature of the patient/therapist partnership, as well as on organizational issues such as inter-organizational and inter-sectorial partnerships.

Literature Review

The various definitions of "partnership" and its derivative meanings in the literature reflect its ambiguity and dependence on context. In examining the definitions of partnership, one should consider the definitions of *all partners*, and their perceptions of the set of services and desired mutual relationships (for studies portraying different voices of participants, see Beresford, Green, Lister and Woodard, 1999; Daley and Marsiglia, 2000; Small and Rhodes, 2000).

Definitions of Partnership

Most of the references in the literature portray partnership as "the right practice" for interpersonal and inter-organizational work, and as the exemplary practice for management and therapy. One of the first comprehensive, ground-breaking experiments on partnership was conducted by the England and Wales Department of Health and Social Services (DHSS) in advance of deliberations on the 1989 Children Act. The definition of partnership derived from the Children Act refers to work relationships characterized by a common goal, mutual respect, and openness to negotiation. This implies sharing of information, responsibilities, and skills, as well as accountability and involvement in decision-making (Buchanan, 1994). Sharing does not imply equal distribution of resources, but rather recognizing that each partner has various assets that can be given and others that are desired from others.

Further reference to partnership is found in the *ladders of participation* and *matrices of participation*, which have developed over the years. In these scales and matrices, partnership is uniquely presented as one part of all relationships. Most often, partnership appears on the higher rungs of the ladder, below self-management and above professional control. A milestone in developing the scales approach is the ladder of participation proposed by Arnstein (1969), which highlights the political aspect of partnership in the sense of sharing power relationships between people involved in decision-making processes. Since this ladder was first presented, it has remained an important point of reference for the development of similar ladders and matrices of partnership (Barry and Sidaway, 1999), which have been adapted to various populations and plans (e.g., Hart, 1992; Wates, 2000), and which consider the complexity of relationships throughout the decision-making process.

Existing definitions refer mostly to the visible aspects of partnership on the levels of resources and skills, professional behavior, and community or individual organization. These definitions present, often naively, an idyllic reality in which issues of power that affect the implementation of partnership are blurred. By concealing the substantive aspect of power, partnership can be perceived as a persistently available and appropriate practice, based on repetition of egalitarian techniques. In reality, however, implementation of partnership is a complex, multi-dimensional political process that needs to be anchored in an ideology of participation. The definitions related to issues of power also emphasize its overt expressions and make little reference to the unseen, unfelt, intuitive, and historical dynamics involved in shaping partnership relations. Although power is mentioned in some of these definitions, it is important to establish and expand its meaning in a clear and critical way that expresses its centrality. This can be done, for example, through the activities of interest groups, through the application of knowledge and specialized skills, through reciprocal interpersonal and intercultural relationships, or through the use of beliefs and ideologies to enhance or curb participation.

Power as a Central Component in Creating a Partnership

Based on analysis of the findings, which will be presented later, we constructed a model that emphasizes the centrality of power relationships, as expressed in Lukes' (2005) three-dimensional theory of power.

According to this theory, *the first dimension of power* includes the *explicit* ways of effecting power, revealed by political participation through overt conflicts (Dahl 1961). In this context, the main question is "who governs?", or who causes others to act according his or her will, who controls decisions over central issues, and who activates political resources such as votes, positions, and negotiations. Because the premise is that conflicts are seen and known, power relationships in the community are determined through observation alone.

The *second dimension*, also termed "both faces of power", is described as *covert*. This dimension was developed by Bachrach and Baratz (1962) as a response to the first one, and incorporates it. The covert dimension usually refers to the indiscernible use of power in order to prevent a decision from being made. By channeling power, some people are excluded from the decision-making processes, and certain topics are removed from the agenda. Thus, those who wield power can manipulate the political agenda by setting policies and rules that are assimilated into society and serve their own interests. The covert dimension is difficult to identify, because it includes two facets: what is seen, and primarily what is not seen, or "non-events" and silence. The unseen facet is expressed in norms, beliefs, values, rituals, institutional procedures and "game rules" that function systematically and consistently in favor of people from certain groups.

The *third dimension of power* was identified by Lukes (2005) as the *latent* dimension. In this dimension, which incorporates the first two, power is expressed by controlling the awareness of others, through the ability to instill interests that may even conflict with their own. In this context, the real and subjective interests of different parties are articulated in order to influence the political agenda. Thus, instead of responding to their followers the leaders try to shape them by controlling their thoughts, values, and education. This influence creates meanings, perceptions, and patterns of activity desired by the leaders. Latent power is found, for example, by exposing the meanings assigned to language, symbols, myths, and socialization processes, as well as information content and channels of dissemination.

The three-dimensional theory of power provided the inspiration for examination of partnership, because it allows for presentation of abundant data from various perspectives, some of which are indirect. The theory allows for clear explanation of events and “non-events”, in addition to shedding light on the culture, unconscious behavior, and norms that prevail in the community. Many researchers in the field of power relations have endorsed this theory, and relate to power as a multi-dimensional concept (Clegg, 1989; Cooper and Hawtin, 1997; Gaventa, 1980; Hardy and Clegg, 1999; Sadan, 1997; Whitt, 1979).

According to the new approach presented here, power is a key variable in understanding and implementation of partnership, and plays a major role in the processes of change experienced by the kibbutz community examined here. We will begin with a description of that community and the methodology of the study, and then present the findings, which we organized as a theory that emanated from the study and provided the basis for our new definition.

Methods

We employed a qualitative paradigm based on an object-focused, descriptive, single case study research design (Stake, 1998; Yin, 1994). This design is used in many studies of partnership, as it sheds light on the complexity of communal activities and provides the basis for a thick description (Daley and Marsiglia, 2000; Geddes, 1997; McKersie, 1997; Wondolleck, Manbing and Crowfoot, 1996). The emphasis on a case study enabled us to explore the context of partnership, including the significance of relationships between partnership and environmental characteristics (Eisenhardt, 1995). According to the naturalistic approach, in order to understand a phenomenon it is essential to examine its context, which includes a variety of variables that cannot be directly identified or fully controlled. Although this method provides a limited basis for generalizability, its main advantages stem

from the potential for comprehensive, complex, and detailed investigation (Hartley, 1994).

The study was conducted over three years (1997-2000). Data were collected in the field using several methods to ensure a better understanding of the complexity of the studied phenomena within their context. Data were collected in semi-structured interviews, observations, documents, and informal conversations. To understand the context of partnership and substantiate the findings, quantitative data were also gathered. For example, we examined attendance and voting at assemblies, frequency of assemblies, and historical data on the community.

We performed content analysis, which included deductive analysis according to the research goals, as well as inductive analysis to identify and crystallize themes. The basis for data analysis was established through triangulating the collected data and compiling four stories of decision-making processes, as well as through a description of the community's culture and organization. This basic phase of analysis was expanded spirally and flexibly, in a gradual process of mapping the data into categories and establishing the relationships between them, until new constructs of meaning were derived. Through a process of "negotiation" between theory (Lukes, 2005) and data, we formulated a new definition and gained new insights into partnership.

Findings

The kibbutz studied here is a collective community that was founded on principles of on economic, social, and ideological partnership. Notably, the processes of change that have occurred in most Israeli kibbutzim over the past decade provide fertile ground for studying the implementation of partnership, because members of these communities have participated intensively in decisions about their way of life.

The kibbutz investigated here, which was founded 71 years ago and consisted of 885 members at the time of the study, is considered socially and economically successful. It possesses several major characteristics: *community culture*, such as multi-generationality (four generations), a common historical heritage, and perpetuation of an ethos of close social and personal relationships; *friendship* and *sense of community*, where friendship is viewed as a value, a symbol, an ethos, a responsibility, and even an existential necessity. The community is characterized by a strong sense of cohesion, which is expressed in identification with the place, loyalty, mutual aid, a sense of "home", and a feeling of "togetherness"; *wealth* - over the past decade, the kibbutz studied here has experienced financial success. However, although wealth is perceived as a symbol of success which facilitates

daily life and contributes to a balanced social situation, its detractors see it as the cause of individual and communal indifference and deterioration that endangers the community's future existence; and *leadership*, which includes a strong kibbutz secretariat, a formal leadership in positions of responsibility, and an informal leadership whose members are known and who are involved in highly significant decisions. Although the leadership is trusted and its activities are perceived as essential, criticism has been voiced regarding the lack of rotation in central positions.

The organizational structure of the kibbutz studied here is an autonomous and democratic, with communal financial and social management. Because overall responsibility for communal affairs is public, this structure includes representative mechanisms (e.g., the secretariat and committees), as well as mechanisms of direct participation (e.g., assembly and direct elections). In this connection, a critical survey revealed that although all of the bodies necessary for democratic management exist at the kibbutz, they operate at different levels of democracy.

The data include four stories of community decision-making processes that took place during the period of the study, in which decision-making was based on partnership. The stories describe the processes in detail, from the initial formulation of the decisions to the final stage of their acceptance. The stories relate to aspects such as team work, relations between the elite and the public, dynamics among the elite, as well as processes of learning and formulating decisions. Besides the descriptions of these processes, the stories relate to the experiences and perceptions of community members. In that way, we revealed dimensions that are not immediately visible or predictable.

The four stories describing the major decision-making processes during the study period are:

(a) The Assembly Story: A series of open meetings of learning and discussion for all members, which included community learning sessions and discussion groups dealing with issues relating to changes in this kibbutz and in kibbutzim in general. This story related to the sense of partnership raised by the assembly and to elements of partnership and non-partnership in team work throughout the assembly period.

(b) The Arrangements for the Young Story: The process of changing young adults' track towards an agreement increasing their independence regarding duties and obligations and rights within the community. This story describes the process from its initiation to decision-taking. It reviews the process of staff development, young adult work and the human resource workers who guided the process, the proposal consolidation process and the rationale of the proposal, stages of deliberation and the assembly ruling. There is reference to the issue of partnership

between the human resource workers and the young adults, among the group of young adults, and between the group and the public.

(c) The Story of Negative Reward: An attempt to change the work convention regarding employment and pay rules applying to the community. This story describes staff development and reviews its work from the consolidation of the proposal until its ratification. In terms of partnership, there is a description of staff work, including staff members' attitude to opponents, the relationship between staff and public, and dynamics within the elite.

(d) The Story of Changing an Organizational Structure: Changing organizational structures and setting up new mechanisms of community management. This story describes the process of staff development and work, processes of learning, consolidation of the proposal, presentation to public and ratification, with reference to its content regarding the re-organization of community partnership.

Data Analysis

The Three-dimensional Theory of Community Partnership

The proposed theory, which emanated from the data, aims to enhance understanding of the essence of partnership through its overt, covert, and latent dimensions. It portrays a complex picture of partnership, which reflects the intricate dynamics of power in decision-making processes in the community.

The theory is presented in Table 1 and described below.

(1) *Daily partnership: The overt dimension of partnership*. The first dimension is the daily dimension, where partnership processes are part of a known and concrete method of decision-making. This dimension of partnership can be observed and directly reported, and is expressed mainly in the daily life of the community, such as organizational structure, rules, regulations, and protest groups, as well as processes of learning and decision-making. On the kibbutz, this dimension is characterized primarily by a democratic organizational structure characterized by cooperation between the elite and public, as well as by a democratic process of decision-making. This dimension includes, for example, the establishment of daily rules and codes that are accepted by and known to all members. The major mode of communication is *conversation*, which takes place among members of the community as well as between community members and the elite. The pluralistic premise at the core of this approach assumes that the decisions correspond with the partners' true wishes. Understanding this dimension calls for observation of the community's routine partnership, which is part of the *direction* of daily life, where

Table 1: The Three Dimensions of Partnership in Decision-Making Processes

Characteristics	(1) Daily Partnership	(2) Symbolic Partnerships	(3) Internalized Partnership
Level of Influence	Overt (real)	Covert (potential)	Latent (conscious)
Mode of Influence	Direction	Rituals	Consciousness
Technologies	bridging, centralized	Manipulative	Assimilated
Communication	Conversation	Disconnection	Discourse
Concept of Democracy	By majority rule	Representative	Participatory
Elite behavior	Inclusive and responsive to political arena	Manipulating rules	Molding the arena: rules and public consciousness
Public behavior	Seen	Unseen	Seen, unseen, conscious, unconscious

each partner is an "actor" with a "role" (Goffman, 1959). To this end, we analyzed the organizational structure and the stories of partnership in the community. These stories are testimony to organizational processes and to relationships among partners. The organizational structure and culture provide the context in which the stories take place. In fact, daily life in the kibbutz was essentially characterized by "*a direction of partnership*": a democratic structure, a culture of sharing, friendship, ideology of equality and partnership, processes of change taking place through participation, etc. As in Goffman's "show" simile, appropriate "scenery" is set here in the community's democratic structure as well as in rules and that guide a communal society. Against this backdrop, there is a process of creating loyalty and discipline among the actors, while access to "behind the scenes" is limited to certain characters.

Daily partnership in the kibbutz is generally guided by the democratic perception of *decision-making by majority rule*. This is the principle for electing functionaries, for approving annual investment plans, and for making various community decisions. The rules, regulations, policies, and norms determine the members' rights and obligations and the rules of interaction, thus serving as a tool of democracy. The organizational culture of the kibbutz studied here does not encourage formalization of relationships. Some members accept this situation, yet

some voices claim that during the period of change rules must be adhered to, and regulations must be set in order for the changes to be assimilated.

The power relationships in this dimension revealed two types of technologies for decision making in the community. The first type, *mediating and productive technologies*, which were the most common, rely on power shared between partners. The second type, *centralized technologies* for decision making, is manifested as power exerted over some of the partners through authoritarian and coercive methods. A pattern of centralized authority is rooted in community culture through strong leadership, both on the formal and informal levels. Community members note the elite has an "inner sanctum" where decisions are "cooked up" without public involvement. Nevertheless, the elite's behavior is perceived as *inclusive and responsive to the political arena in the community*, e.g., to disagreements, opposition, requests for change, and supportive actions. At the same time, the behavior of the public, which is *visible*, clear, predictable, and directly observable, arouses a response but is interpreted mostly as indifferent to communal needs and as focusing on personal interests.

(2) *Symbolic partnership: The covert dimension of partnership*. This dimension is characterized by ritual and symbolic sharing. It includes behaviors seen in the first dimension as well as *covert* behaviors, whose impact stems from their non-existence. The "non-events" characterizing this dimension are *potential occurrences* that do not take place due to the dynamics of control within the community that block the partnership by various means, which are usually *manipulative*. Because the second dimension includes the first, one should examine events that take place, together with the "non-events". For example, alongside the issues that are not chosen for change, one ought to examine the issues that are chosen; alongside the members who do not participate in assemblies and committees or those who have no influence, one ought to examine who participates and influences, etc. The significance of excluding people from decision-making also implies removing the issues that those people seek to promote. This critical view of decision-making processes confirms the pattern of centralized control by the elite in the community studied here, which maintains a small circle of decision-makers.

In this dimension, the elite is characterized by *manipulating the rules of the game* in the community. It influences the public's *unseen behavior*, which tends to be passive. Such behavior, for example, exposes the participants and non-participants in the process of planning changes, as well as those who are involved and those who are not involved in the process of learning about issues that are subject to change, and those who are eligible to vote. The elite also determines the methods for placing some high on the agenda for change and shelving other issues, as well as the methods for suppressing opposition and establishing loyalty

and credibility, in addition to influencing the unseen behavior of some informal elite members. Taken together, these actions reflect communication that is characterized by *disconnection*, lack of dialogue, and lack of cooperation. Especially noteworthy is the tension between partnership-building mechanisms on the one hand, and mechanisms for promoting conformity and silencing on the other.

The main type of democracy in this dimension is *representative*, where elected representatives are authorized to promote the needs of the public and make decisions on their behalf. However, these representatives often "stab the public in the back" by seizing the power for themselves without involving the public in decisions.

In this dimension, the strategy used most frequently by the elite is *rituals* and rhetoric of partnership, which create a distorted space of cooperation. This is a semblance of democratic decision-making management for presenting a sharing process. In fact, the leaders of the process ignore its results and even prearrange them. It is a ritual, because there is limited consideration of voiced opinions or public legitimacy despite sharing of activities. Some claim that this practice is not only undemocratic, but characterizes a dictatorship in which leaders rule by coercion, control, and unilateral decision-making.

(3) *Internalized partnership: The latent dimension.* The third dimension is the most complex and difficult to identify, especially for those whom it affects. It expresses the discourse in the community, which includes the two preceding dimensions, as well as conscious and unconscious processes that influence the community members' awareness. Thus, it enables us to delve deeper into the essential components of culture, the significance of the partners' ideological perspectives and way of life. Issues clarified in this dimension include the community's ethos, characteristics of culture, the significance of education processes, values, norms, and tradition, the power of language and symbols, the effect of external powers on organization, and methods of instilling all of these elements in people's consciousness. Once this constructivist approach is recognized, it is possible to explain how influence can be achieved through *consciousness*, i.e., how meanings are perceived as self-evident and how people tend to make decisions.

To fully grasp the implications of this dimension, it is important to study the community *discourse*, which includes the members' direct utterances (their conversation) as well as what they imply "between the lines" (Foucault, 1980). Although the study aimed to examine the actual implementation of partnership, the data revealed deeper content, which enabled us to look beyond the external manifestations of partnership and expose its very essence.

The main technologies implemented in this dimension aim to *assimilate* messages among the community members. Such technologies are usually used by the elite to establish power relations. In so doing, the elite define the *rules of the game*, i.e., the rules and regulations followed by members, which govern the *public consciousness*. In this arena, the public acts *consciously* as well as *unconsciously*. Sometimes behavior is *seen*, clear, and overt; and sometimes it is *unseen*, either because it is not directly perceptible or because the public is inactive.

Whereas the data are indicative of a false democracy, the kibbutz educates toward *participatory democracy* and is organized accordingly. Although representative democracy is expressed through elected functionaries as well as through the secretariat and committees, the assembly is the major decision-making body, in which all members participate. Furthermore, direct participation is constantly encouraged through invitation to join new committees, discussion groups, frequent assemblies, open meetings, accessibility of information on community issues, etc. A critical perspective of this dimension validates the centralized pattern of partnership, in which the community internalizes a democratic, cooperative way of life but is bound by the decisions of the elite. The combination of these dimensions reveals a paternalistic and an authoritarian system, which is only seemingly democratic (Ben-Rafael and Topel, 2004; Pavin, 2002).

The third dimension emphasizes processes of socialization, which strengthen the sense of community and shape the members' thoughts, feelings, behavior, and hopes. The processes of local socialization create a sequence of continuity, entrenchment, coherence, and loyalty, which serve the human need for belonging and security.

Toward a New Definition of Partnership: A Three-dimensional Approach

Based on the analysis of data presented here, and in light of the weaknesses noted in existing definitions of partnership, which tend to focus on the overt dimension and underplay its more complex aspects of power relations, we propose a new definition that expresses the multi-dimensional complexity of the concept.

In our definition, community partnership encompasses three dimensions of power: daily partnership, symbolic partnership, and internalized partnership. These dimensions are identified through investigation of the community's characteristics in the context and process of influence over decisions, as well as through the technologies used for sharing power, communication within the community, perceptions of democracy over decision-making, and the behavior of the elite versus the public (Table 1).

Partnership may express changing dynamics of power relations. It may be initiated by the elite (top-down) or by the public (bottom-up), or it may be attained

through establishment and assimilation within the community, where it represents dynamics of sharing or participation. At times, partnership may be eroded by processes of establishment, and by a return to patterns of unilateral control. Because power relations among partners are not necessarily equal and can vary in intensity, the partners' contributions and benefits are not equal. The partnership further comprises various levels of involvement, from direct participation to representation.

A partnership process aims toward mutual relationships that are characterized by willingness and ability to share sources of power such as ideas, information, decision-making processes, tasks, skills, and accountability. For these to be shared, partners must establish operative norms and define each other's rights and obligations (Buchanan, 1994; Calder, 1995). The partnership here is guided mostly by values of respect and human equality, which are prerequisites in a relationship that enables freedom of action and maximum expression. Partners must respect each other's diversity without being prevented from trying to influence each other or from trying to resolve conflicts. On the contrary, processes of dialogue and consensus are necessary for successful partnership.

Discussion

The theory and re-definition proposed here portray processes of partnership as three-dimensional. In contrast to the definitions described above, our new definition views partnership from a critical perspective, based on an integrative approach that recognizes the overt, covert and latent dimensions of the various partners. This conceptualization reflects the development of the concept, from an approach that advocates sharing of goals, resources, skills, and accountability, to one that constantly integrates the dimension of coercion and manipulation.

An approach that considers power from a multi-dimensional perspective can promote practical, critical, and realistic perspective of partnership, rather than an illusory perspective that focuses on promoting partnership as an ideal ethical value. Descriptions of partnerships on the basis of actions fail to consider the broad range of variables that influence them. To achieve a comprehensive understanding of these variables, it is important to examine "non-events" as well as non-participants. This calls for a radical view, which considers the existing and potential attitudes and perceptions of partners, and how those perceptions are constructed. Both the leaders and the partners themselves should be aware of this multi-dimensionality, and keep it in mind throughout the stages of planning, implementation, and evaluation. Partnership that presents a semblance of power sharing can actually reproduce authoritarian patterns, and enhance the marginality and exclusion of

individuals and groups (Webb, 1994). Essentially, this kind of partnership camouflages patronage, assimilation, and cooptation. Furthermore, although partnership may be implemented by the establishment and the public, both parties often adopt an ambivalent approach that simultaneously encourages and prevents partnership. However, our study revealed that the elite often uses quasi-sharing tactics, while the public, despite its demand for sharing, hesitates to take advantage of opportunities for partnership.

The new definition cautions against a partnership "reflex", i.e., a hasty tendency to construct processes as sharing. Partnership has become a popular social brand-name, but its extensive use is not always justified. Although partnership in decision-making is commonly employed as a tool for management of organizations and communities, a true partnership is a rare commodity (Calder, 1995; Cooke and Kothari, 2001). Although our study was undertaken in a community whose lifestyle is conducive to community partnership, the findings point to a discrepancy between espoused partnership and its actual implementation, as well as between various concepts of partnership. Because the *rhetoric of partnership* is often a form of deceptive tokenism, a critical examination of complex organizational processes that may be accompanied by temptation to form partnerships is essential. Although the proposed definition may be idealistic and difficult to implement, our new perspective crystallizes and enhances the complex dimensions of partnership, and sheds new light on decision-making processes that are planned as partnerships. Approaches that enhance awareness, as expressed in the third dimension of our definition, influence democratic decision-making processes.

The definition proposed here warrants further examination in studies on sharing, participation, and partnership in decision-making processes that relate to implementation of changes and development of programs, services and communities that are designed for the promotion of individual welfare and quality of life. We recommend that such studies focus on the following aspects, which can enhance understanding of the concept of partnership: development of the "three dimensions of partnership" theory, examination of the practice of partnership, and development of methods for evaluating the efficiency and effectiveness of partnerships.

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