



The Harold Hartog
School of
Government and Policy

The Role of Academia in Improving Local Governance: A Roundtable

In cooperation with



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A Note from Dr. Nahum Ben-Elia

Local government and academia are strange bedfellows. With very few exceptions, academic institutions have disregarded local government as a subject or subordinated it to a disciplinary approach (e.g., political studies). Although the general academization of the public sector has affected local government as well, this has been a main result of professionalization and rising standards. Academia pervades local government through single purposeful disciplines – such as city planning, economics, accounting, or education – or through scholastic personal backgrounds and preferences. There are very few programs, worldwide, that attempt to embrace local government as a holistic, multidisciplinary or transdisciplinary subject. Given the rising societal importance of local government, its expanding competences and the consequent demands for robust professionalism, what is the role of academia in supporting these general trends?

Exploring this possible role is a demanding and unresolved issue. Consider, for example, the teaching function. What exactly should be taught: a synthetic, wide body of knowledge based on the public (political) nature and functional competences of local government, or a specialized set of task-oriented functional skills? Or consider the issue of research. Should it pursue erudite studies for a narrow academic community or should it aim at a wider audience, as an evidence-based input for improved decision-making and public debate?

This workshop brought together a unique group of local government elected members and officials from overseas – the UK, the Netherlands, the United States, Australia and South Africa. Knowledgeable, experienced and wise, they advanced fascinating perspectives and insights on the relation between academia and local government and its implication for possible program development. We are extremely grateful for their commitment and contribution.

I have slightly edited the workshop's transcription but I hope that this publication still radiates the substance and flavor of an exiting discussion.

Dr. Nahum Ben-Elia

Workshop Chair



A Note from Martin Karp

The Tel Aviv-Los Angeles Partnership was established in 1997, and mayors Antonio R. Villaraigosa and Ron Huldai are its honorary co-chairmen. It was created for the purpose of facilitating a dialog between citizens and institutions from both cities, in a way that benefits both communities.

The partnership focuses on different areas and promotes educational and cultural endeavors. One of the education projects that the LA Federation proudly supports is the Teach and Study Program (TASP). TASP interns are university graduates who participate in a two year work/study program during which they teach English in the Israeli public school system and study for an MA degree in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL).

It was thus highly appropriate that Robin Kramer, chief of staff to Mayor Villaraigosa, addressed the panel on the role of academia in improving local governance. Robin and the City of Los Angeles have gained a great amount of experience in this field. The workshop facilitated a fruitful exchange and I think it will help the Hartog School plan a successful academic program for local government professionals.

The LA Federation supports creative partnerships between academia and government, with the understanding that both parties gain from such endeavors. Importantly, we believe that academia has a responsibility to the general community and it is this philosophy that underlies our proud association with the Hartog School's annual Israel local government conference.

I would like to thank all the international participants who arrived for this important seminar, particularly Ms. Robin Kramer, chief of staff to Mayor Villaraigosa.

Martin Karp

Senior Vice President, Israel and overseas,
Jewish Federation of Greater Los Angeles



Profiles of Participants



Dr. Robbert P. Baruch

Robbert Baruch represents the Labour Party and is the founder and director of Baruch SCPA, a strategic communications and public affairs company. He is Labour Party whip, and was the Labour Party's campaign manager in The Hague during two consecutive successful elections. Robbert lectures on US-European relations and local consequences of the War on Terror, and writes about local affairs, including the administrative organisation of the Randstad. He is the Chairman of the Pierrot Foundation and a member of the Global Executive of KolDor. Robbert studied political philosophy and public administration at Leiden University, and is an alumnus of Yeshivat Machon Meir.



Sir Jeremy Beecham

Sir Jeremy Beecham has been a Newcastle City councilor since 1967, and led the Council from 1977 to 1994. He was Chairman of the Association of Metropolitan Authorities from 1991 to 1997 and of the Local Government Association from 1997 to 2004. Jeremy played a leading role in a Cabinet Sub-Committee on Modernising Local Government, and is currently Chairman of the Labour Party National Executive Committee. He continues to serve as a councilor for the Benwell and Scotswood ward. Jeremy serves on the boards of numerous public bodies and is a member of Labour Friends of Israel. He became a Knight Bachelor in HM Queen's Birthday Honours in 1994. Jeremy was educated at University College, Oxford, where he obtained a first class honours degree in law.



Dr. Nahum Ben-Elia

With an extensive background in public policy and public management, Nahum has served as policy advisor and program consultant for a range of national and local institutions in Israel. An associate researcher at the Floersheimer Institute for Policy Studies, he has published a substantial body of studies focused on critical local government issues. His latest book – *The Fourth Generation: A New Local Government for Israel* – (now in its second edition), advances a new conceptual view of local government in Israel.



Dr. Rotem Bressler-Gonen

Rotem Bressler-Gonen earned an MBA from Ben-Gurion University of the Negev and a PhD in public administration and government local from the London School of Economics. Her doctoral thesis examined the efficiency of mechanisms of political appointment in creating responsive bureaucracies. Rotem is currently a post-doctoral fellow at the University of Haifa, where she teaches urban politics, and public policy and administration.



Solomon (Sol) Cowan

Sol Cowan has been a member of the Executive Mayoral Committee of the City of Johannesburg since 2001. He oversees the five-year turn-around strategy for the Inner City, which includes the development of City Improvement Districts, and the establishment of the Johannesburg Development Agency and of an inner city task force. Previously, Sol was a member of the Mayoral Committee of the Eastern Metropolitan Local Council, where he was responsible for the unification of the tax base for Johannesburg. Sol earned a BA Honours in political science and was owner and director of a number of small businesses.



Martin Karp

Martin Karp is the senior vice president of Israel and overseas concerns for the Jewish Federation of Los Angeles, which is the central planning, coordinating and fundraising body for 18 agencies, which offer the entire Los Angeles community a broad range of humanitarian programs. In Israel, the Federation shares a partnership with the city of Tel Aviv, which promotes educational, cultural and social service projects. The Federation's annual fundraising campaign, which supports these programs, is the largest single year-round fundraising endeavor in the Jewish community.



Robin Kramer

Robin Kramer began her career in public administration in 1976, when she became director of the Democratic Party of Southern California. She was deputy mayor for communications and community affairs under Mayor Richard Riordan, and became the mayor's Chief of Staff in 1995 – the first woman ever to hold this position in Los Angeles. In 2005, Robin joined the administration of Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa as Chief of Staff. She holds a BA in political studies and journalism from Pitzer College, and an MA in urban studies from Occidental College.



Sir Simon Milton

Simon has represented Lancaster Gate ward for 14 years, and is the current Leader of Westminster City Council, in which capacity he is responsible for council policies and services citywide. He is the author of *Civic Renewal*, the Council's strategy for regenerating the city's physical and social infrastructure. Simon is keenly interested in effective city management, maintaining the vibrancy of city life, protecting residential quality of life, and improving education and school standards. Simon was educated at Cambridge University and Cornell University in the United States.



Yaira Paz

Since 2002, Yaira Paz has been the organizational development and training director for “Mafamim”, a network of decentralized units established by the Ministry of the Interior and local government to oversee organizational development and training in Israel’s municipalities. Yaira received an MSc in political science and public policy from the University of Haifa.



Michael P. Ross

Michael Ross is the youngest member of the Boston City Council and the first Jewish city councilor in over 55 years. Michael has worked to advocate affordable housing, improve residential parking, maintain clean streets, and increase police presence. He is the first councilor from his district ever to chair the municipal Ways and Means Committee. Michael also chairs the Committee on City and Neighborhood Services and the Special Committee on Youth Violent Crime Prevention. He holds a bachelor’s degree in government studies from Clark University, an MBA from Boston University, and is currently completing a law degree at Suffolk University, where he is also an adjunct professor.



Dr. Gary Sussman

Gary Sussman is a native of South Africa, where he was heavily involved in the *Habonim Dror* Youth Movement, eventually serving as its secretary general. Prior to becoming the director of Research and Program Development at the Hartog School of Government and Policy, Gary worked first as director of the Palestinian-Israeli Civil Society Cooperation Unit, and then as project director, at the Economic Cooperation Fund. This NGO, founded by Dr. Yossi Beilin, aims to establish, maintain and support Israeli-Palestinian and Israeli-Arab cooperation in the political, economic and civil society spheres. Gary was awarded a bachelor’s degree in economics and environmental studies by the University of Cape Town, and an MA magna cum laude in political science by Tel Aviv University. He earned his PhD at the London School of Economics, where he completed a dissertation on *The Referendum in F.W. de Klerk’s War of Manoeuvre: An Historical Institutional Account of the 1992 Referendum*.



Greetings and Introduction

Nahum Ben-Elia: Setting the Framework

Local governments across the world are facing major challenges. Their expanding roles, and the growing complexity of their tasks, place new demands on leadership and professionalism. This is true for Israel, as well. In this context, two key issues require due consideration:

- What professional competencies are required in order to equip local leaders and officials for the demanding agendas of 21st century local government?
- To what extent can policy-oriented research improve the decision-making capabilities of local government?

At the present workshop, we would like to discuss the role of academia in the development of these new competences. Assuming there is a need for the academization of local government,

- Is there a need for new municipal careers, or will it suffice to upgrade existing professions?
- Which types of academic program should be encouraged?
- How can academic research improve local governance and influence policy and public debate?

We would like to explore these issues both from an international and an Israeli perspective.

We will not deny having a “vested interest” in these issues. As noted by Professor Yossi Shain at the opening of this conference, the Harold Hartog School of Government and Policy is seriously considering creating a center for local government studies. We believe that this is a timely decision. The increasing importance of local government in Israel, as well as the growing complexity of local issues, magnify the need for a dedicated academic framework for interdisciplinary teaching, training and applied research on key areas of local governance.



Presentations

Robbert Baruch: Preparing Students to Be Politicians

I will try to be as controversial and pithy as possible. I will address the question of necessary professional competencies. I will then try to answer the other three questions, and will conclude by explaining to the School of Government and Policy how I feel their curriculum should look. In addressing the issue of professional competencies, I would ask: To what field will these professional competencies be applied? If we are talking about applied research, I would ask what effect this research will have.

First, however, I'd like to remark on the role of the university. There is a choice to be made about the type of university you want to be. On one hand, you can be like a Humboldt University, that is, focused on applied academics. On the other hand, you can make the university into a bulwark of freedom. This is an essential, academic choice. I hold that a university should be a bulwark of freedom, meaning that you have to be very careful and minimalistic in applying political questions to academia. You have to practice the utmost restraint.

Second, a personal remark: I'm a member of the Labor Party. I'm a social democrat, meaning that when I look at problems, I look at the challenges facing large groups of people; when I look at answers, I look at answers that lie in society, in the collective. When we have to prioritize – for example, in education – I think our priority should not be academic education, but vocational training. Yet here, in Israel, I would advise everyone to support art as much as possible, because Israel is already the biggest and the best in vocational training.

Having said this, we can ask ourselves what competencies local administrators, people in local politics, need. You have to first ask yourself: What is local politics? In fact, what is politics? There are several answers to this. One lies in Easton's very famous citizen theory: input, throughput, output. If you agree with Easton that this is the essence of politics, then you will believe that learning politics means learning public administration.

Another answer is that learning politics requires learning how to allocate resources. If you take this position, then you will think that economic knowledge is what you need to become a local administrator.

There are yet more tempting definitions of politics. I will present three of them. First, I want to take the position of Carl Schmidt, who said, "Politics is the enduring question of who is for us and who is against us." He meant that politics is, in essence, the art of conflict, the art of power. The second position I want to support is that of Leo Strauss. I urge everyone to read Strauss' "City and Man"; it's actually the first essay on Aristotle's politics to answer this question. However, I want to quote another of Strauss' works, "Persecution and the Art of Writing", in which he wrote: "Politics is the question of how to reconcile order which is not oppression with freedom which is not licentiousness." In other words, politics is the question of how to make choices and how to move things forward.

The third position I want to support is that of Max Weber, whose approach was more psychological. In "Politik als Beruf", he wrote of politics as a vocation: "Politics is like drilling in hard wood. You have to prepare that all of your endeavors, everything you want to achieve, everything you're doing is directed to failure." In other words, you must be prepared for big disappointment, and that requires psychological preparation.

Where does this leave us? Conflict, power – I think one needs fields of knowledge to progress in government. First of all, I think one needs knowledge about conflict, and an intellectual basis in the classic thinkers, whose work contains the essence of political knowledge. In other words, Plato, Aristotle, and the Peloponnesian War should all be part of the curriculum.



Second, you need to know about practice, aggregate political practice; otherwise, you cannot prepare yourself for the disappointment that Weber notes. You need to know social history, political history. You need to know about political psychology. You need to dive into the psyche of the particular brand of people known as politicians and administrators. You also have to know the basics of economics, and how political finances work. You need to know public finance. You need to know how a budget works. You need to know how to read a financial statement. This might sound silly, but a lot of public administrators don't know how to read a budget.

To illustrate: I am the majority whip in the province of South Holland; we tested 20 parliamentarians, and asked them how big they thought the budget of the province was. The answers ranged from €100 to €4 billion. The correct answer was €675 million. It was a shock that these people didn't know the "bread and butter" of what they were doing. Nevertheless, you have to be realistic about it. Apply this test to your own surroundings.

How can applied research improve the decision-making capability of local government? In local government, decision-making is of secondary importance. As we have already established, the first thing about local government is the product, that is, actual performance. You therefore have to shift not toward the decision-making process, but toward what you hope to ultimately achieve.

As I have noted elsewhere, there is a barrier between science and practice. In my opinion, the biggest warning against combining the two may be found in a book by Allan Bloom, "The Closing of the American Mind" – another book I urge everyone to read. Science should put forward its own agenda, and it should be a scientific agenda, especially in Israel where politics is, if I may put it "politically correctly", in transition, still developing. That is, there ought to be a division between science and religion; the two should not mix. This is something about which you cannot be controversial enough, within Israel.

On the other hand, where do we as politicians snap our fingers and ask science to help us? Not to make choices for us that should be political choices, but to show us where the choices have to be made and what the choices are. I mean things we run into on a daily basis – such as traffic management, mobility, residential zoning; we need to ask academia to show us what the options are. We need to learn from experience, from cases, from existing models, and from existing knowledge. We as politicians deal with power and how to gain a majority for our most perfect decision, and that is different from value-free science.

As for the question of whether we need new careers: science cannot answer this question. Democracy should answer this question. The residents of a given village should vote for an administration with a certain profile. The voice of the people is the voice of God; if the people want someone who makes decisions, they vote for someone with that profile. If they want an academic person, they vote for someone with that profile. It's about personality. I have my ideal of a local administrator, what he or she should know, and I will touch on that a bit later.

So, then, what type of academic program should be encouraged? Well, as I noted, two different things should be considered. One is politics as a vocation, and for that you need philosophy, economy, history, and so on. Then you have politics as a process, and for that you need information about zoning and transportation, and you need economic models. Both of these branches of knowledge should be implemented in the academic process.

To return to the question of how academic research can improve local government and influence public policy and debate...I would reiterate that politicians should not set the research agenda. Academia should set that agenda, irrespective of political preferences. As I noted, there should be a barrier between science and politics, because each has its own agenda, each has its standards. Politics should not play a big role in science;



that is the road to destruction. On the other hand, science should help politicians to make decisions; it should reveal various options. Scientists should prepare for their own disappointments, because politics is a distinct field, and politicians will take a management summary and use it to get a majority vote. Nevertheless, it is the responsibility of academia to confront politicians with facts and options.

In preparing students to be politicians, you should prepare them for three things. First, you have to know what you're talking about; you have to know the facts. This means you have to know zoning, sociology, finance, as I noted. The second is political conversion, how to achieve a majority for your initiative, or motion, or whatever you want to achieve. For this, you must understand public administration. The third involves claiming your actions, showing the people what you've done. For this, you must know marketing, how to deal with the press, and also, you must understand human psychology.

In conclusion, then, the curriculum of the School of Government and Policy should include zoning, finance, sociology, public administration, media relations, mass communication, and psychology.

Robin Kramer: Bringing Integrity to Government

I wish to begin by saying that I am biased: I believe that to prepare people for effective participation in democratic life and government, you need a purposeful mix of experiential learning and interdisciplinary classroom learning. The program I directed for many years – known as “CLORO”, which stands for absolutely nothing – was invented in 1948 by two individuals who were interested in general semantics. They were concerned that people came into government through apprenticeship in the way that physicians become physicians or lawyers become lawyers, and so had no preparation. Of course, all of us citizens were or are their guinea pigs. The method of learning that CLORO uses, which I think is applicable here, is purposefully about mystery. It's about experience and exposure. It's about reflection and synthesis. All of the learning that goes on, which is very helpful in the public arena, is galvanized around sustainable development.

I have been wondering what kind of skills a university can offer. I say this not as a trustee of a university, who is responsible for its stewardship, or as a government official who “rips off” the skills, resources and intellectual capital of universities, but as a person who has one raised eyebrow over the possibility of partnership between universities and government. First of all, a university has to ask itself: Where are our gates? Do they begin and end at the physical place our students enter? Is the community our university and our classroom? If so, do we see the community as a Petrie dish? Do we send our students out to learn in a way that makes citizens and business people and labor unions their subjects? Do we leave society better than we found it? Do we do no harm? Or do we leave with only our research, leaving nothing behind for the people we have studied or the institutions we've tried to help?

I think that universities can bring people in government the neutrality you mentioned, which is more theoretical than real. Also, they can lend a sense of depth, exploring topics in ways for which government sometimes does not have time. The most useful thing a university and its people can bring to government, if there is integrity, is brutal facts; the university can set a table different from the one set by local government.

Tension can arise, however, because academics tend to study processes and results to the morbid end. The disaggregation of process and results, which might be useful in a classroom, is not always useful or practical in the real world. Another thing of value that a university can bring to government is the art of the long view. As you



probably know, politicians in the US have term limits, so people come and go. You come and learn your job, and then you're done and have to look at the next job, if you're in politics.

I find it interesting that you did not include history among the topics that should be learned by potential politicians. When I work with local government officials, especially new school board members, the first thing I ask them is: When does history begin? When did it begin for you? Did it begin the day you were elected? It shouldn't have. There is a whole context – not only of politics and political philosophy, but also of a city, of a neighborhood, of a government. If you are not knowledgeable about the context you are entering – for example, about the 27 fiscal audits that took place before you arrived – then you are ignorant, and doomed to make the same mistakes others have made before you. Universities have the capacity not only to aggregate knowledge but to share it over time.

When I think about the competencies of local government officials, I believe they ought to include integrity; the ability to have “horizon thinking”, which can be rare; and the ability to be, in a sense, poets much like Solomon, with keen mediation and conflict resolution skills, as well as diagnostic and analytical skills. They should know, above all, as Robbert said, how to follow the money. They have to be knowledge workers. Not only must they know how to think, but they must also how to deliver the goods, and to communicate in real time, “on their feet”.

To answer the question, “Is the university well suited to teaching professional competencies?”: I'm not sure. Perhaps it is well suited to teaching some of these competencies, especially those needed by local government officials. However, I think the university has a great opportunity and responsibility to conduct what we call “action research”.

I'd like to present a few examples of how action research and partnership work for us. A woman professor of social work at the University of Southern California has spent the past 12 years as an “outside insider”, helping to create a coherent working method for all of the deliverers of services for children: staff in mental health care, in early childhood development, in schools, in services for the developmentally disabled – all of whom have different sources of funding, all of whom function differently and govern differently and sometimes compete or work at cross purposes, all of whom have different philosophies despite serving the same population (children), and many of whom don't get along. From her university perch, using her students as data collectors and drivers, she created a coherent system of shared measurement.

By using the university as a neutral collector of data and information, and as a good mirror, this professor has been able to get well over 200 organizations to collect data in the same way, to issue annual “report cards” that reflect progress by geography, ethnicity, race, age, and income, and thereby to give us an indication of how the children of our county of 12 million people are doing. These data can now be used in ways that a government body was never before able to use them. Legislators can now use those data in ways that have not only benefited these institutions but, most importantly, have benefited the children they serve.

Another example is presented by a gentleman who runs the Asian Pacific American Legal Center, a local NGO. After the riots in 1992, this gentleman was moved to help repair a very broken community. When the mayor for whom I work was elected in July, he called me up and said, “Robin, I don't want to wait for a riot. I'm no longer 28 years old; I'm a little older and wiser. I'd like to pull together NGOs like mine, action research pods from the university, a few foundation troublemakers, and create a set of innovation networks.” Indeed, what they did was to aggregate their practical knowledge, their applied research knowledge, and that much-warranted knowledge the foundations tell us they have but don't often share; they then used this aggregate knowledge to



set priorities for housing, early childhood education, public safety, and so on. They've used it to spur activities that research has shown *do* work, either in our own city or around the world, particularly in addressing poverty. By this I mean that they have spurred activities that are sustainable, that have been evaluated and so have a record, that are cost effective, and that may have been too limited but that can be expanded "to scale" (a term I hate), or adapted for our situation.

This is very promising. To be honest, the universities have had to be dragged into this, and it's the activist NGOs that have done so.

Just two more examples. We have a woman on staff, a senior advisor to the mayor; she's my favorite colleague. She is by training and background a teacher, an educator, and she serves as deputy provost at the university. The university gave her a year's leave of absence to come and get her feet dirty and her hands wet. Her legacy includes a rotating senior advisor position, to be filled by someone from one of the ten universities in our region. We hope to recruit three a year and, over time, to make this a permanent position in the mayor's office. Because of her example, the university will pay for the sabbatical leaves [of the academics who fill this position]. The value of this exchange has been tremendous: this colleague has been able to go back to the university and tell them the mortifying things she's learned – which she shared with us, too.

The last example I wish to give is of a little center recently formed at the University of Southern California, the Badrosian Center on Governance. One of their first areas of academic inquiry is e-governance. The professors at that university are doing a great deal of work with the United Nations on this topic. I think there is room for partnership, but I do have an eyebrow up. Thank you.



Discussion

Robbert Baruch:

I would like to make a brief comment to reflect what I agree with, and what I fundamentally disagree with.

What I agree with is the idea of apprenticeship. I think anyone who wants to pursue a career in politics and administration should have practical experience – including in the student body. I would encourage students to be active in student organizations, in NGOs and so forth, to learn about the practice of politics.

Here's where I fundamentally disagree. There's a big difference between good government and bad government, between good decisions and bad decisions. You need to get a feeling for good and bad concepts. There are different ways of looking at concepts such as "justice", "democracy", and "aggregation of meaning". This should be part and parcel of all academic study, but particularly of political science. In my opinion, this includes reading Strauss and Plato.

Robin Kramer:

I don't disagree.

Rotem Bressler-Gonen: A Review of Israeli Programs

I'll be brief. I'll present what currently exists in Israeli academia in terms of local government programs– which is why I'll be brief.

When asking *why* a local government program is needed in Israel, it's like asking why should the sun shine. I'm biased; I teach local government, it would be great if a local government program were to exist anywhere.

Let me tell you what exists in Israel at present. Most of Israel's seven universities have an urban planning program, which deals with the physical part of local government mainly infrastructure. This primarily means environment and transportation studies, and whatever else is relevant to the physical part of a city. However matters of policy-making, political analysis of procedures in local government, managerial aspects of how to run a city, organizational dilemmas, quality of service delivery at low cost, adaptation of reforms, how to reform local government, how to deal with budget constraints – these questions are not currently being addressed enough at the academic level. They are being addressed by a few academic researchers, but not by any structured program.

At this stage, the University of Haifa offers the most structured program, but it's still very small. It actually recruits local managers, local executives, and regular students who are interested in local government – in fact, 30% of the students in this program are "regular students", and the remainder are local personnel. It is theoretical, which is very important, but it also offers practical experience. We have drawn from the U.K. experience, where practitioners also teach, we have theory and research, but practitioners also teach, and bring day to day dilemmas into the school.



The emphasis at the University of Haifa is on theory and, as I noted, that program is relatively small. The other programs that we have include a Local Government Institute at Bar-Ilan University, which is for practitioners and does not offer an academic degree; practitioners can continue their studies within Bar-Ilan University and are exempt from introductory courses. They get a certificate, but no academic credentials. The program at Ben Gurion University includes a module on public policy and local government, and in fact, the certificate that is granted is of Public Policy and Local Government. Tel Aviv University, the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, and the Open University each offer a few courses on local government, as part of public policy and management degrees, but that's all. That's what we have.

In Israel's case, we can only speculate as to what academic programs of local government might contribute to local governments and their performance, to policy-making in local government, and to the welfare of the public. If we draw from the lessons of the UK and the US, The Netherlands and Scandinavian countries, we can see that local government programs are very helpful in generating reform, criticizing local government when necessary, consulting government, bringing in students from local government and listening to their dilemmas and struggles, and working with them, providing some sort of new insights.

Another interesting thing is that my students come from different cities. In sharing their problems, they sometimes realize that their problems are not so different but can be dealt with in different ways. In a way, they get some structured advice and clear understanding of their activities, and of the performance of their local government. Of course I believe in theoretical research, with the risk of being too structured and too theoretical. It is very useful to have some points of comparison between students it helps students realize where they may have been going wrong, or where their serious problems lay.

Yaira Paz: A View from the Ministry of the Interior

For more than a decade, the Ministry of the Interior has encouraged the organizational development of local authorities in Israel, and the advancement of leading approaches to improved management capabilities. Based on a review of the outcomes of these experiences in the past five years, we have recently produced a policy paper, which outlines the professional competencies we feel are necessary for managers in local government. It is clear to us that academia should be involved in the professional development of local managers. We are glad that Tel Aviv University was the first institution to agree to enter into a partnership and promote dialogue on what may be the proper curriculum. We are talking mainly about mid-career studies. The question of what is needed for these professionals remains unresolved. What is the proper model? Which subjects should be taught?

We have some internal disagreement, as well. It seems that everyone at our ministry wants performance to improve. However, you cannot improve performance without upgrading present capabilities. In order to achieve excellence, you need both substantial academic background, and a program focused on the knowledge and tools necessary to the management and administration of local government.



Simon Milton: Differentiating between Knowledge and Skills

In looking at the UK, we should differentiate between knowledge and skills. Historically, people who become senior managers in local government in the UK have come through their professional districts. They are professionals, first of all – whether architects or planners, social workers or educators, and they end up leaving their services for senior positions as managers of or in local authorities. I'll talk first about managers and then about politicians, because again, there is a difference in how you develop each.

It became apparent that these professionals were weak in general management skills, which could not be developed according to the traditional model of learning your profession and then – because you were good in your profession – ending up in a management position, and then in a leadership position, in a local authority. We found that this model needed to be supplemented.

Today, institutions of higher education offer courses and programs in local government. The best of them is Warwick (we have a graduate of Warwick in the room). There are others, too, such as the London School of Economics. Nevertheless, there was a gap. It was felt that performance was not as good as it could be. Certainly, there was a great difference between high performing councils and low performing councils, which could not be explained simply by saying that one had better results than the other. The caliber of the people working in them was different. What could be done?

What ended up happening, in 1998, did not involve turning to the universities, but rather involved creating a new agency, an Improvement and Development Agency called "IDEA". It had a rocky start, but now it's very well entrenched. It is resourced very generously, by what's called "top-slice". In other words, out of the money that the government gives local government, a budget is "top-sliced" for the Improvement and Development Agency. This agency has established numerous development programs, which tackle particular weaknesses in the performance of local government from a skills perspective. What skills do you need to be a city manager? What skills do you need to run a good social welfare/social services department?

Various models of training have been established. One of the biggest and most successful methods of training appears to be not classroom teaching, but peer review. According to this method, those who perform best help those who perform less well, exchanging staff, putting together a team of people from within a strong local council and sending them to a poorly performing local council to review the situation and suggest improvements. The programs are very practical, not at all theoretical. This appears to be working. How do I know? Because each council has its performance measured every year, through a very complex, time-consuming and expensive process, and we see the councils improving, year after year. Something good is happening. Even though they made the tests harder this year, the councils continued to improve. So we can say quite empirically that the standard is improving.

Politically, while the weaknesses of local politicians are their poor skills, it has been recognized that it may be difficult to train them, after all. IDEA also does a lot of work with politicians. It established something called the Leadership Academy, where you can send politicians for two weeks spread over a period of time; it offers programs they can be involved in. IDEA has even developed a job description for a council leader, and a skill competency framework for local politicians, which is very innovative. You can check their website: IDEA.org.uk. I don't know why it wasn't the universities that met this need, or why it was necessary for other agencies to be created to meet this need, but that is the situation. We've even now created a new agency, called the Leadership Center for Local Government, of which I'm the director. The Leadership Center for Local Government aims to develop the leadership skills of senior politicians and senior managers. It's only one year old, so it's only started



to deliver things. Some of the programs we're about to deliver comprise a somewhat elitist package for senior people, including taking them to other countries. We're going to involve academia, go to Harvard and places like that, draw on professors.

Nahum Ben-Elia:

You asked why universities in the UK haven't been involved? I think in a sense you've been lucky, in that in the past two decades, your two different governments have been visionary. Both the Tories and New Labour brought forth powerful agendas. I was commenting ironically to our colleagues at the Institute for Local Government Studies (Birmingham) during a recent visit, that they have had an "easy life". To a great extent, dominant local government ideas, as well as concrete reforms, have been based on conceptual paradigms developed by the central government. In this sense, academia has played a "reactive" role, however critical.

Our task here is the opposite. We have a central government that is in an ongoing, deep state of "coma"; there are no vital signs that suggest anything is happening there at the larger, conceptual level. There is a lot of palliative activity, but hardly the planning of robust strategic policies. We need to develop a new public agenda for local government; we need a new vision of local governance. This conference is part of that effort. In a sense, the program we would like to develop needs to determine the academic agenda for Israeli local government, and the challenges that the 21st century, or at least the first and second decades of it, poses.

Simon Milton:

I'm not sure that you're right in your description of the position of academia in the UK. I don't think it's necessarily right to say that the government has created an agenda and that academia has responded. Actually, local government, in particular, derived some of its philosophy from academia. That's one of the criticisms one might have of it: that it's relied too much on academia. As a practical politician, what I would like to see in academia, nationally, is some sense of what we can do and how we can do it, as this relates to both government and the actual policies that need to be implemented.

It can be dangerous for academia to get too close to government at the national or local level. There needs to be a degree of separateness. On the other hand, to take Robin's point, it's useful for people to get their feet dirty and hands wet, for there to be some connection between academia and government. This may be less applicable to Israel, which is a small country. However, this does seem to me to be happening increasingly in the UK: local universities are engaging more with local communities, with local issues, at the institutional level, and sometimes at the political level. I think it would be helpful if people with expertise were to actually engage directly and personally in the political process, whatever their political perspective.

A few years ago, when I was involved in social services policy in Newcastle, the involvement of academics in our task force certainly contributed to the way we developed social services policy. We had a couple of lecturers in our political group who took an interest in planning and were into policy-making – as individuals, not as representatives of any institution. Conversely, we had a member who had served on the council for some time and was a bit more difficult; he went on to get a degree in political science at the university.



The informal engagement of individual academics, rather than of academia at large, can actually be beneficial to both sides, because the prescriptions of academics can lack humility and awareness of the choices that politicians must make or advocate, and for which they are held accountable. There is a curious notion that the world reflects the realities we have to contend with, and that can be disillusioning for both sides. I think we have to allow for the reality of engagement in the concepts.

Sol Cowan: The South African Experience

The South African experience is not really too different from the Israeli experience. In the past, local government – or government, in essence – was not really taken seriously as an academic career. In those days, the highest qualification for local government was being a teacher. Local government wasn't really a profession that people went into. If they did, it was a job for life – you could never get rid of it.

Things have changed. Given the new dispensation and the obvious shortage of skills, we're assessing how to attract the right skills for senior as well as middle management. Tertiary institutions do offer studies in public administration, although I personally wasn't happy with what I saw, to put it mildly. Our political science degrees involve learning various theories.

What to do? Theory without practice is irrelevant, and practice without theory is...well, you need a measure of both. I'd like to acknowledge the UK system; in particular, the University of London and the School of African Studies offer something very unique...a sort of MBA for the public sector. An MBA in the financial sector involves study of sources, issues of finance, issues of economics, and so on. In South Africa, you can't get a degree in public administration. Looking at the course content of what they call the MSc in public policy, you see it covers a range of disciplines – human resources, economic issues, financial issues, issues of public policy – using case studies and demanding a lot of work. That's something I would like to see implemented in South Africa. The reason I'm saying this is because I've actually enrolled in this particular course; there's an organization that is helping public senior managers study through the University of London. It costs a lot of money, but they're trying to adapt that kind of course knowledge to the local situation, and develop a similar course with the help of one of the tertiary institutions.

I don't really believe in short courses. They're superficial. They cost a lot of money, but what do people actually get out of them? I've seen so many of them, taken one or two of them myself, and I get the sense that if you get in-depth knowledge, even if it's theoretical, it gives you the tools for senior management, helps you understand, as Robbert said, what a budget looks like, how it gets transposed into visible outputs for the community.

These are the tools that should be offered by a university. Course content is obviously up to the university itself, but we must consider how to collaborate with tertiary institutions, because we're not the gatekeepers of all knowledge about local government, we don't have all the answers. It's incumbent on universities to collaborate, especially on urban issues, architectural issues, heritage issues. They have the disciplines, but we have the practicalities. How do we merge the two and ensure that whatever policies we formulate are formulated collaboratively, as well as in collaboration with the communities we serve?



Gary Sussman: The Challenge of the School of Government and Policy

When Professor Yossi Shain and I took over the School of Government and Policy, we decided to shift its focus from the regional conflict toward domestic issues. We saw local government as being a very important issue. We delineated three elements: this conference, research, and teaching. We decided to use the conference as a vehicle to create public awareness and drive. I think we have accomplished that. The conference and the working groups also facilitate interaction between policy-makers and academics, which could be improved. I think we can improve this process much more, and invest more energy in actually making these working groups real.

The next challenge is teaching. The major challenge we face as a school is actually in our faculty. Ideally, we should have three or four young post-docs, like Rotem, whom we should steal from Haifa, strategically placed in various departments. We also need some more senior policy researchers like Nahum, around whom we could create a core of people.

From my perspective, the two big dilemmas concern teaching. One: Do we go the public policy or the MBA route? My instinct is toward the MBA, for two reasons. First, I think it's more appealing. For example, one of the problems of doing an MPP, a master's in public policy and local government, is that you give people a very narrow skills base. If they get their degree, they actually can't work in it. Whereas with an MBA – and this is almost an ethical issue – people can actually get a real job. Second, I think the MBA provides more relevant skills, because local government today is like business; it's far more about being an economic autonomy. So, my instinct is toward an MBA; in fact, we've been speaking to the Business School about offering an MBA with them.

Then the question arises: Do we offer a BA, or an MBA? I'm a bit conflicted, but I think there is very little you can do to train a politician for a local government profession. I think the problem with an MBA is that you take the liberal arts out of traditional academia. I think there is something nice about doing a liberal arts BA, and then doing an MBA. I think this conversation has actually helped me realize that we need to focus more on the MBA than on the BA, because I think we need to get people who have both an academic background and a bit of real world experience.

I take issue with executive training. I don't think it's our job, necessarily. I don't think the university is skilled at it, and I don't think we should just offer executive training, without teaching and research. I'd note that at this university, and all universities, there's been an explosion of executive training programs, because they provide extra budgetary income for the universities and there's no strategic oversight. Even in this faculty, we have programs that compete with each other. They're appealing, and they're "cash cows", but I'm not sure...

Sol Cowan:

Can I just say one thing about the MBA? It's not everybody's cup of tea, not everybody has quantitative and statistical knowledge, and it's a very mathematical degree...



Nahum Ben-Elia:

We have been discussing the MBA option with the Recanati School of Business and Public Administration at Tel Aviv University, probably the best school in this field in Israel. The MBA option offers a unique opportunity to provide the skills and knowledge that local government managers might require. Nevertheless, there is also a need to develop a public-oriented core. I think there are four main domains to consider. One is related to skills: Which functional skills are relevant to the people who are supposed to enter local government, or to people already working in local government? The second concerns how we develop a comprehensive political view and the professional capability to act effectively in a political system. The third concerns what our public values should be, and what our vision of local government should be. We have a technical vision of local government – that is, the local administration of services – but I think this is a “Victorian” view of local government. The fourth domain is practice. I’m a strong believer in dirty feet and wet hands.

Michael Ross:

You should come to Boston. I don’t know if you’ve been there before, but it’s a great example. I have an MBA in public management from Boston University. First of all, I got that free when I was working in city government, because we don’t tax local non-profits – that includes free tuition. (I don’t know if you levy a property tax on non-profits in Israel.) My MBA had a concentration in public management; a regular MBA is meat and potatoes, and that’s a little weak. I suggest you consider this type of MBA [with a focus on public management]. I also suggest you look into the phenomenal, world-renowned co-op program offered at Northeastern University in Boston, where students spend a semester in the field. Those students later get jobs in government, because they’ve been out in the field; this has an advantage over any internship. Also, the Kennedy School of Government [at Harvard University] offers a monthly course for managers/government officials, which covers a different topic each month. Participants take a couple of hours to discuss the tools of government, and what happens when government goes wrong.

Robbert Baruch:

That’s exactly the point I’m trying to make. If you’re only learning the practical tools, you may know how to drive a car very well. However, you also need directions, because otherwise you’re going to go off the road and skid into buildings.



Nahum Ben-Elia: Closing Remarks

Before closing this session, I would like to thank you all for your unique contribution. The knowledge, experience and insights you have shared with us have been intellectually challenging. In an earlier discussion, I argued that Israelis are poor learners because they are poor listeners. I want to assure you that we have listened carefully to what you have said.