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THE 9TH EDITION OF THE INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE  
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REALITIES AND PERSPECTIVES

**The Search of a New Logic of Public Administration Reforms:  
The Case of Metropolitan Areas in Italy**

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**Abstract:** The aim of this paper is to formulate some recommendations for the currently undergoing reform of Italian metropolitan areas. This case is particularly relevant since it clearly represents how, even if expected by law, reforms might not happen on the implementation side. We draw the recommendations from some basic assumptions of the collaborative governance model. Recommendations deal with the development of a systemic, collaborative and leadership oriented view of reforms. Indeed, reforms should be intended not only as a legislative process, but also as a complex change management process characterized by the decisive role of the human factor.

**Keywords:** local government; metropolitan areas; collaborative governance; public administration reforms; Italy

## 1. Introduction

From London to Bucharest and from Washington to Rome via Brussels, local governments around the globe are facing new challenges and they are experiencing several kinds of reforms. In this paper we adopt a managerial perspective and we discuss the collaborative governance model as a new logic for public administration reforms; in particular, we focus on the undergoing reform of Italian metropolitan areas.

The metropolitan areas in Italy were introduced with the law no. 142/1990 to be the new second tier of local government. They would have been created after the elimination of the Provinces in the correspondent areas. However, until now, actually they have never been created. For current times, law no. 54/2014 has been recently approved by the Italian Parliament that imposes the substitution of ten areas of the Provinces with the new Italian metropolitan areas as of 1st July 2014.

Accordingly, the aim of this paper is to formulate a series of recommendations on this specific reform using theoretical constructs of the collaborative governance model as a potential new logic of public administration reforms. This case study is particularly relevant since it clearly represents how, even if

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expected by law, reforms might not happen on the implementation side: some Authors have labeled this situation as the implementation gap in the Italian public sector reforms (Ongaro & Valotti, 2008).

## **2. In Search of a (New) Logic for Public Administration Reforms: The Collaborative Governance Model**

The complex reality created by the crises and the crash of old patterns and models of governance is pushing scholars and practitioners to search for new logic of public administration reforms. Indeed, as highlighted by Alasdair (2010), the logic of discipline that inspired public administration reforms was "a reform philosophy built on the criticism that standard democratic processes for producing public policies are myopic, unstable, and skewed towards special interests and not the public good. It seeks to make improvements in governance through changes in law that imposes constraints on elected officials and citizens, often by shifting power to technocratic-guardians who are shielded from political influence" Alasdair (2010: 135).

However, more recently, the literature has proposed a new model for looking at the working function of public administration, under the affiliation with public governance: the "collaborative governance". According to Emerson et al. (2012), "collaborative governance" can be defined as "the processes and structures of public policy decision making and management that engage people constructively across the boundaries of public agencies, levels of government, and/or the public, private and civic spheres in order to carry out a public purpose that could not otherwise be accomplished" (Emerson et al., 2012:3).

The collaborative governance model assumes a conception of citizens and stakeholders not only as clients of public services, but also as co-producers of public policies and public services. Indeed, if on the one hand they claim greater accountability, on the other hand citizens and stakeholders are seeking additional avenues for engaging in public governance, which can result in new and different forms of collaborative problem solving and decision-making (O'Leary et al., 2012). Thus, the model of collaborative governance recasts the perspective for implementing reforms, because it challenges traditional models of reforms in several points.

Firstly, collaborative governance model overcomes the previous ideal of the State based on New Public Management ideas (e.g. Barzelay, 2001; Hood, 1991). Indeed, in collaborative governance model, the role of the State is related to increasing and to improvement of the 'citizen-capabilities' (Sen, 1993) in order to enable people to exert an effective role in pursuing outcomes of public interest. Under this point of view, the State is subsidiary to civil society.

Secondly, collaborative governance model is embedded in a typical context of social systems where is explicitly recognized that different kind of organizations can contribute to the same public purposes by providing different set of resources (e.g. power and authority, financial resources, skills and competencies, information, etc.).

Thirdly, this model is based on the idea that public organizations should implement their strategy and decision making processes by involving citizens and stakeholders and the wider civil society and engaging them in collaborative processes aimed at producing better outcomes at lower cost. Thus, collaborative governance is pursued by politicians and managers together with citizens and stakeholders through networks, characterized by inter-organizational and inter-institutional arrangements. To this regards, some Authors (e.g. Castells, 2000; Klijn, 2005) have emphasized how

public networks might be more effective than bureaucracy and market-based settings for solving wicked issues, namely in uncertain and competitive environments.

Fourthly, the collaborative governance model explicitly recognizes the need for inter-organizational structures and processes for connecting the different organizations and managing the resulting complexity of their interactions. More specifically, it implies the development of organizational structures tailored to policy issues and the development of cross-functional project teams, alliances and hybrid organizations in order to overcome the jurisdictional boundaries.

Finally, according to the collaborative governance model, public managers are asked to play new roles: for example, they are called to handle social mediation and to govern interdependencies; to be social entrepreneurs by building relations with different actors; to reading the needs and the potentiality of a community; to mobilize collective resources and the local knowledge in order to address outcomes of public interest (Sancino, 2010).

### 3. The Creation of Metropolitan Areas in Italy and the Collaborative Governance Model: Some Recommendations

As above anticipated, Italian metropolitan areas have been defined by the law no. 142/1990 but they have failed to be implemented. The reasons for this delay are varied. However, the reform of the Italian metropolitan areas has been reintroduced in the agenda since the crisis has reinvigorated the search for optimizing the systems of local government in Italy. Here below, we formulate some recommendations for the implementation of the Italian metropolitan areas drawing them out from the principles of the collaborative governance model.

Firstly, the creation of the Italian metropolitan areas should be based more on co-operation between local authorities and on a complex adaptive process of learning and sharing objectives, strategies, policies rather than as the establishment of laws and of rigid procedures and rules. In other words, the different local authorities' part of the future Italian metropolitan areas should evolve from a classic idea of inter-institutional relations to a collaborative model of relations between them (see table 1).

**Table 1. Logic of relation**

	<b>Classical inter-institutional relation</b>	<b>Collaborative relation</b>
<b>Organization</b>	Organisations as hierarchies	Organisations as networks, partnerships
<b>Authority</b>	Authority top down, centralised	Authority earned peer to peer, distributed
<b>Value creating relation</b>	Value created by transaction and exchange	Value created through interaction
<b>Value creating lever</b>	meeting unmet need/deficits	Generating capabilities/building on assets
<b>Knowledge</b>	Knowledge and learning from experts to people	Knowledge and learning co-created

*Source: own adaptation from Leadbeater (2004).*

Secondly, reforms cannot be restricted to the definition, although necessary, of issues related to electoral representation and decision making in political assemblies, but they must be accompanied by the empowerment of the people and of the systems of local authorities involved in the metropolitan areas.

Thirdly, Italian metropolitan areas should be designed with innovative and functional boundaries in order to build a modern institutional architecture able to incorporate and to manage new categories, like city regions and city users.

Fourthly, since each metropolitan area has its own geography and its social history, it is important that this reform provides the tools to the different metropolitan areas for creating autonomous and accountable institutions able to fit with the peculiar needs and vocation of each territory.

The fifth recommendation is based on the idea that we should shift our reforms models' from a culture of designing reforms to a culture of monitoring reforms. To this regard, the design and the implementation of the Italian metropolitan areas should take the opportunity to give a higher degree of freedom in the designing of autonomous and decentralized institutions, and to focus more on monitoring the reform outcomes. The last recommendation concerns the idea of reforms by leadership. Indeed, as Barzelay and Gallego (2006) explained, reforms, even if they might be defined by laws, are implemented by people and require a complex process of change in administration and management.

Summing up, after twenty years of failure in the reforms of the Italian metropolitan areas, the Italian case clearly represents the need of new logic for public administration reforms. Accordingly, this paper aimed to point out the importance of understanding reforms not only as a juridical or managerial process, but also as a process characterized by a collaborative, systemic and leadership dimension where the human factor plays a decisive role for determining the success or the failure.

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