

PART OF SYMPOSIUM

The Partnership Boston University-Chelsea School District: A Case Study of Knowledge Management

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1. Introduction¹

The partnership between Boston University and the Chelsea district represents an exemplary case, unique throughout the world for many aspects, of a private university that accepts the responsibility of managing a public school system without receiving anything in return.

The collaboration was indicated as a model for urban educational reform in the United States. The university put in disposition its own competencies in the educational and managerial field to resolve Chelsea's scholastic system, before becoming too ridden with typical problems of an economical deprived urban area.

The agreement was initially signed for a ten-year period and would have had to stop in 1997 with a complete reorganization of the capacities of the urban area to govern itself. In reality, however, the agreement was extended for another five years by unanimous votes from the School Committee and upon approaching this second time frame, during 2003, the agreement was once again renewed up until 2008.

In this context, the present paper has the objective of testing some research hypothesis.

Is the governance system coherent with the developmental vision that originally created the agreement? Which managing systems and leadership leaders has been put in act by the partnership to make the developmental vision operational? In particular, how and what way has the partnership changed the participation and the involvement of the staff, students, family and community?

In a future perspective of sustainable autonomy of the school district, will the governance system be able to put in place knowledge management mechanisms to let the district autonomous from Boston University management team?

An experience of collaboration that has been ongoing for almost 20 years, which has completely transformed an entire scholastic district, bringing it to its high in the evaluation of scholastic performance in the state of Massachusetts, represents a privileged point of view for analyzing in which way the recent theories of knowledge management can help to read the changes and preview the future prospective of the school district.

From a methodological point of view, the second generation of knowledge management studies had the merit of being able to move the attention from exclusive questions of sharing even towards problems of the production of knowledge.

The first generation of studies, which has come to be known as "supply-side KM", has considered the problem of bettering organizational processes central through which knowledge comes to be captured, codified and divided. These approaches assume as point of departure the existence of knowledge useful. The problem of knowledge management is to transfer that knowledge in easier ways to minimize drop out and maximize socialization.

The second generation of studies, which are called "demand-side KM", concentrate on the problem of how to better the capacities of an organization to produce knowledge. This means the bettering the capacities of an organization to satisfy the demand of new knowledge to be up to date with contextual changes, creating bases for strategic management.

¹ A special thanks to the Superintendent of the Chelsea School District and all the other managers who kindly supported our research with their time and experience.

Evidently, both points of view are important. From the capacity of an organization to integrate production of new knowledge and for its division of existing knowledge, depends on KM success.

The partnership between Boston University and Chelsea can be seen from each of these points of view. The capacity of the school district to be managed with autonomy and continuity does not simply depend on the effectiveness with which Boston University has been able to transfer and divide managerial and educational knowledge within the past few years. If that was the case, the partnerships end would decrease the amount of intangible assets (knowledge based), for which it was based the success of the school district.

The possibility of the Chelsea district to continue in the future to pursue high performance depends on the amount of intellectual capital successfully accumulated during the almost 20 year partnership and its capacity to reproduce new intellectual capital through knowledge management.

The paper analyzes these various aspects, putting in the center of the argument intellectual capital of the district and the mechanisms of knowledge management that enforced it through the knowledge brought forth by human resources and organizational systems, in social relationships of involvement and participation with families and the community.

2. The school district developmental strategy

In March of 1989, when the government board of the Chelsea school district proposed a partnership to Boston University, the university had already matured collaborative and support experience at different schools².

Nonetheless, the proposal of being able to directly manage an entire school district, completely delegated by the power and responsibility of the School Committee, represented a hurdle previously unseen.

To understand the strategy followed by Boston University for the development of the Chelsea school district, one needs to keep present the centrality that is assumed in the mission statement by the School of Education outreach program:

At the School of Education, we believe that the teaching profession brings with it great responsibility not only to impart knowledge, but to shape character. Our faculty and students live this belief every day through our curriculum and our outreach efforts across the community and the nation.

Looking from this perspective that has fundamental the need of university resources and above all professors and students from the School of Education for the turnaround of the school district and to put it in a situation where it would be able to govern itself without receiving any financial return from the partnership.

In preparation to the agreement, Boston University's School of Management received the assignment of conducting a study on the problems of the school district, whose conclusions are contained in: "*Report on the Chelsea Public Schools: A Model for Excellence in Urban Education*". In this report, there are unprecedented suggestions for making changes to follow through a coherent turnaround of the governance system in the school district.

More precisely, the partnership intends to front the Chelsea school crisis, putting to act the comprehensive strategy: "readying all children to learn, preparing teachers to teach, restructuring outdated curriculum and involving as much of the community as possible in the education system." This strategy, together with an Action Plan contained in the initial report, is articulated in seventeen strategic objectives that represent altogether the mandate that the

²The Boston University Public Schools Collaborative is a university organizational entity that has been developing activities of supervision for support programs for the public schools of Boston for many years. It is also important to note that The Boston University School of Education Consortium was created in 1977 to facilitate the exchange of best practices and educational expertise between the School of Education, local school districts, and social service agencies. Today the Consortium also helps find field placements for School of Education students in classrooms, social service agencies, and educational administration.

partnership will attribute to the Management Team of the University to realize within ten years.

The developmental vision of the partnership can be represented with a strategic road map (Fig. 1) in which the objectives are articulated in six distinct, but tightly connected, performance areas:

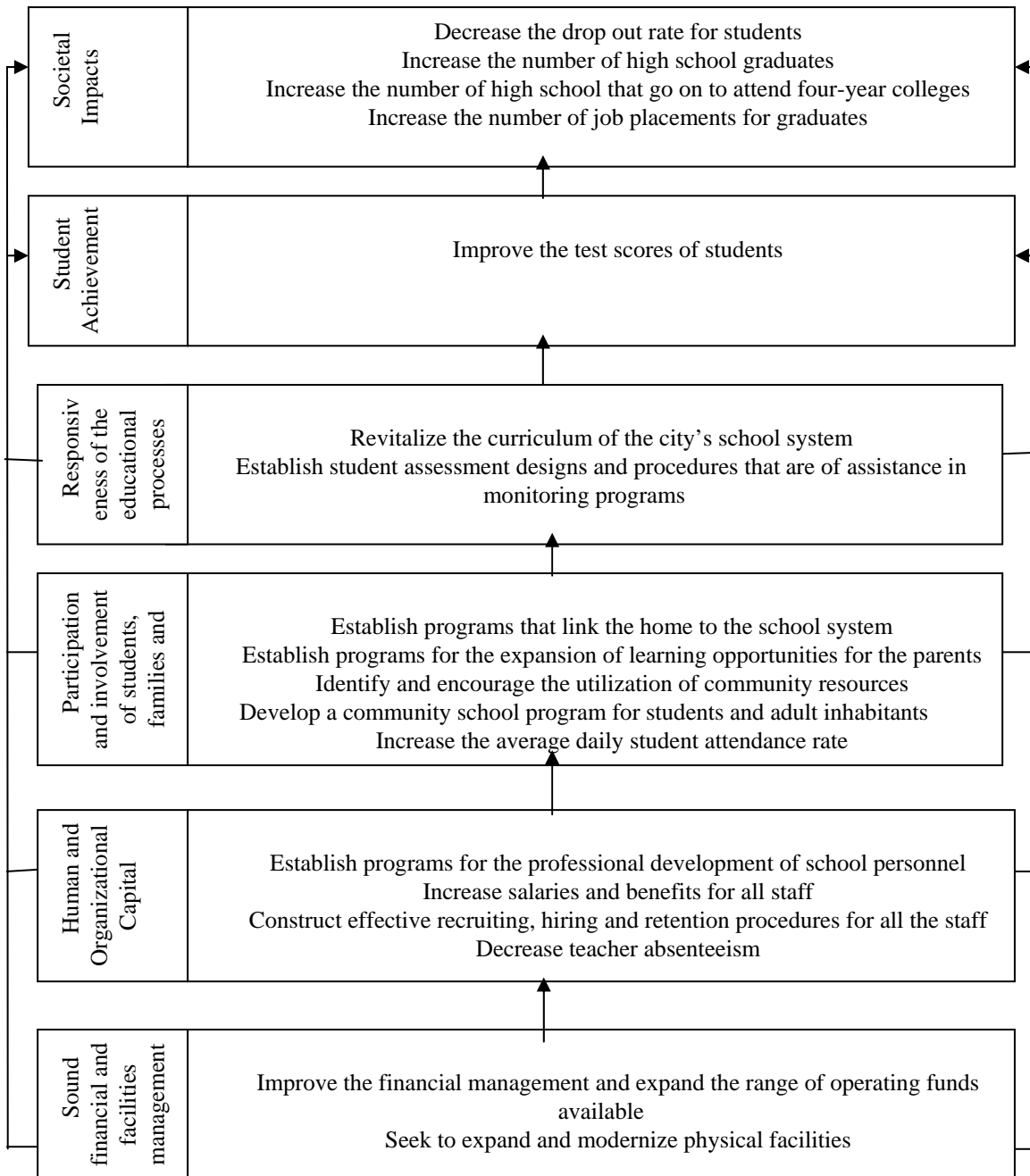
1. Social impacts
2. Students' learning;
3. Correspondence and efficiency of internal processes of the district, educational and administrative;
4. Participation and involvement of students, families and other stakeholders especially within the reference of the community (relational capital of the district);
5. Development of human and organizational capital (competencies of personnel, culture, leadership, team work, coherence in objectives and incentives, informative systems and knowledge infrastructures);
6. Management of financial and material resources in a sustainable manner respecting the developmental vision.

Social Impacts and student achievement

In John Silbers, the President of Boston University, vision: "The story of the schools of Chelsea is the story of America's urban schools. By the first half of the twentieth century they have become the gateway into American society for immigrants and their sons and daughters. But now, as we are all sadly aware, many of our public schools are in disarray and no longer offer a passageway to success. Nowhere has this breakdown of public education been more evident than in Chelsea"³.

³ Silber, J. (1994) "The Partnership: The Vision", *Journal of Education*, Volume 176, Number 1, p.3.

Fig. 1 – Strategic Road Map of the Partnership.



The Chelsea district started to decline rapidly during the 1950's as a consequence of a political, economic and social decline in the entire urban area. Following the construction of Tobin Bridge⁴, the city found itself in a state of crisis ailed with the corruption of political classes, by the rapid erosion of the quality of public services, by the increase of social problems connected with the diffusion of poverty. Towards the end of the 1980's, student costs, financed by the government, were largely beneath other districts within the state of Massachusetts. In

⁴ <http://www.bu.edu/chelsea/needfor.htm>.

1988-89, only a quarter of high school students took the Scholastic Achievement Tests. Only a fifth of high-school graduates planned to attend a four-year college. Quarters of the teenage girls were pregnant or already mothers. Fifty-two percent of those who entered the high school did not graduate.

In this context, the BU-Chelsea partnership assumed as its primary strategic objective on which is based the social, cultural and economic growth of the city by beginning with human capital investments of young students within the school district.

3. Student, family and community participation and involvement

The vision for the development of the district is based on the principle that the betterment of students' performance most importantly depends on the pupils arriving to school ready to learn.

The ability of the students to be formally educated depends on many factors, but the determining role has to certainly be recognized by the family, as the founder for knowledge, competence and capacity that the student brings with himself from preceding levels of study; the socio-economic context in which he lives especially concerning the support services, i.e. cafeteria, transportation, health care and the amount of opportunities to learn that a lively and stimulating environment can offer (Glenn, 2005).

The developmental strategy of the school district could not have been realized without an involvement from all of the stakeholders. This crucial point is expressly indicated in the agreement highlighting that the parties recognize that both the success of the project and their ability to achieve the objectives of the agreement depend on factors external to and beyond the capacity of the University and the School Committee and require the support, cooperation, and active involvement of the parents, people, public employees and elected administrators of the City, public and private agencies and branches of government beyond Chelsea, including the Commonwealth of Massachusetts and the Federal Government, as well as business and industry.

The partnership inaugurates, in fact, a new governance model for school districts that finds its origins into what in the literature is noted as network management. In this model, the interaction with the social, economic and political environment plays an important role. The management problems are primarily projected externally in complex networks of complex, interrelated organizational relations (Mayntz 1993; Provan and Milward, 1995; Berry et al., 2004).

That which characterizes a network is both a selectioned set of actors that for varies reasons (institutional obligations, reciprocal dependence consequential to the complexity of the activities taking place, closeness, being technically complimentary) create structures of interdependence where each unit is not simply in a subordinate position within a hierarchy (Agranoff and McGuire, 2003).

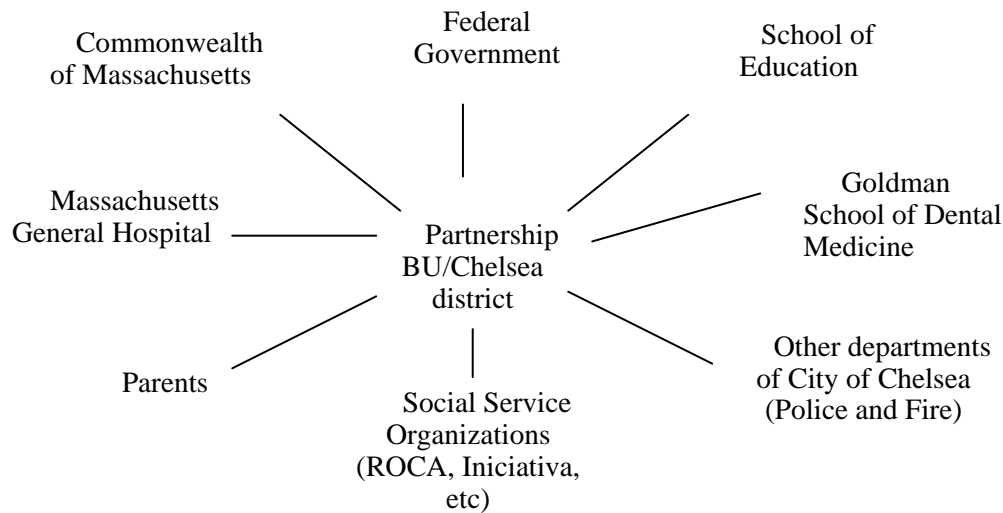
A network exhibits a relative amount of stability, meaning that its internal relations are frequently developed and continuous, but it differs from a hierarchical structure, because the central entity is not a single dominating actor that can impose its own rules unilaterally (Crozier, 1988; Kickert, Klijn, Koppenjan, 1997; O'Toole, 1997).

This does not mean that the internal actors of a network have to have the same interests or objectives, and they can also have conflicts among themselves. However, the effectiveness of a network depends on its capacity to be able to divide the mission and the understanding of factors that determine final results.

The presence within a network of autonomous subjects makes applicable coordination instruments and a control of employees from the organizational hierarchies. The public entity cannot simply define the objectives and negotiate, respecting the budget, determined targeted results with a organizational unit or an agency. The internal planning of a network does not imply many managerial operations and overall has confrontation and persuasion. Due to the uncertainty and complexity of the politics of governance, in the planning activity prevails a point of view of the process rather that a definition of precise objectives. The most effective orientation of the actors involved is manifested through an elaboration of the mission statement, values and strategies on that which should be the 'future state of the system.' In other words, the final result is not only important to meet, but above all the way in which they arrive to decide it.

In the following figure is presented the developed network of the Boston University/Chelsea partnership

Fig. 2 – Principal actors of the partnerships developed network.



The figure demonstrates the involvement of numerous actors that contribute to the development of the scope of the partnership in various ways and with diverse functions:

- Financing of the programs, projects and events
- Co-production of the scholastic system
- Offers of complementary services respect the core activity of the scholastic service
- Participation in the decision making processes of the school district

For the management team of the partnership, the creation of public value brings the development of two orders of managerial functions (Moore, 1995, Paletta 1999):

- The *political management* that implies research capacity and obtains consensus and external resources, to stimulate virtuous behavior of co-production, to insert oneself actively in the institutional network of the community; to manage the relationships with the groups of interests and the other stakeholders;
- The *operational management* that instead has more evident internal effects meaning the number of ways it can create the conditional organizational contexts, of guideline, incentives, monitoring of the superintendent and of the scholastic managers towards the following institutional ends

Both the managerial functions are relevant and are convincing re-enforcement because one without the other would not be able to realize the strategy. While the paragraph dedicated to organizational capital of the partnership punctually analyses the functions of operational management, here is highlighted that the function of political management demonstrates itself centrally for the success of the partnership. The management of the network has made possible a governmental action that goes beyond the competencies of the single institutions involved. The partnership promised to put together resources and competencies that if let act autonomously would automatically not be able to produce desired results (Metcalf 1989;

Rebora e Meneguzzo, 1990). Following here are described some of the most significant programs through which the management of the network is concentrated.

Community school program was inaugurated in 1996 with the occasion of new scholastic structures being made available to the Williams Building. The program makes up a series of complementary services for school activities (sports clinics, piano lessons, cooking classes, English language, laboratories for adults), but all this is independent from the Chelsea public school. It is above all financed with public funds and private donations; it is directed by a director, that is nominated by the city; it operates within the Human Services department; but, it is managed in a completely cooperative way with summer and after-school district programs. An independent board, that is made up of a superintendent of school and representatives by various community organizations and independent citizens, guarantees the coordination.

One of the principal determining factors of the social capital of the partnership is represented by support, involvement and family satisfaction. The partnership has emphasized these aspects, promoting some basic programs that have demonstrated themselves in order to invert negative results.

The Intergenerational Literacy Project supports the families to help make students do school work at home in a coordinated way with the development of programs at school. The professors at Boston University in cooperation with the teachers within the Chelsea district offer English literature courses to immigrant families, some of which have not yet learned to read or write before becoming involved in the project. The program seeks to accomplish the general goal of supporting families in working with their children, both to attain the instructional objectives of the schools and to reinforce positive attitudes toward education. To accomplish the larger goal, two sub-goals and objectives have been outlined: to improve the literacy skills of participating adults and to improve literacy knowledge among preschool and school-aged children⁵. Intergenerational Literacy Project started to offer literacy instruction to parents in 1989. The program was developed in collaboration with 17 community organizations and is guided by a Board of Collaborators representing parents involved in the program, the Chelsea Public Schools, Boston University, and community organizations. The ILP is sustained in a small part by the school district, being financed primarily with external subsidies and state funding.

A second environment with which the partnership has worked to create the foundation, in long period perspective of economic and social development of the urban area, is a program called Early Childhood Education, which is open to kids between three and four years old. The importance of these programs is widely documented in the literature (Lynch, 2004). Even within the Early Childhood Education Program case, even if on a small scale, it has demonstrated itself as being crucial in order to follow the objectives of the partnership. In fact, besides the general benefits coming from the program, the support provided by the immigrant families needs to be highlighted, which is for the most part made up of working parents that speak a language other than English as their first language, to accelerate and make more efficient social integration, thanks to the cultural openness within those same families.

The new philosophy of government relations with the families foresees a wide range of interventions within which take place other complimentary initiatives that go within the programs *home-to-school for special need education* for the construction of an efficient *Parent Information Center* up until a collaboration with *Iniciativa*, a coalition of organizations and individuals working to increase parental involvement especially for Latino students.

In conclusion, the partnership Boston University/Chelsea responds to many of the requisites that the theory proposes for the foundation of the network; the variety and the complimentary of the actors, the division of the same mission statement and the vision to develop the relative stability of relations- the use of mechanisms of coordination and not hierarchical.

⁵ The Boston University/Chelsea Partnership, Fourteenth Annual Report to the Massachusetts Legislature, September 1, 2005.

4. Human and Organizational Capital

“Just as children must come to school prepared to learn, so teachers must come prepared to teach” (Silber, 1994). This concept shows in an essential way the importance of the available human capital for the developmental strategy for the district. The problem does not simply concern the quantitative relationship between students and teachers, teachers and other personnel, the rate of absenteeism, but above all the knowledge, competencies and values of personnel necessary to accompany the innovations introduced in the curriculum, new learning strategies, different way of involvement and participation from students, family and the community.

In general, the entire human capital should be congruent with the critical factors of success within which the strategy is constructed. In the professional organization, as within the Chelsea school district, the strategic congruence of human resources has some important managerial implications.

The first implication concerns the individualization of working family professionals whose competencies are central for the realization of the strategic objectives. It begins with the assumption that the success of the strategy depends on the capacities to clinically act on the restrict number of professional profiles, later individualizing with a scrutinizing analysis the strategic competencies demanded in order to realize the developmental vision. The evaluation of the gap between the competencies already present within the key figures and the competences necessary, construct the basis for the start of the recruiting programs, formation, career retribution and incentives.

Even if its true that the human capital makes up an individual intangible asset and for this reason only the individual has the complete freedom to use his/her knowledge and competencies, it needs to be realized its organizational dimension that is reflected in the growth of values of the entity in which the person feels tied and offers his/her services with diligence and professionally.

In following individual interests, the human resources puts themselves in service of organizational scopes, not in order to cancel the individual tension towards its realization, but towards the instrument that best in self-realization. They foresee during the construction of the long-term relationship of institutional identification the way to realize economic well-being needs, social esteem and awareness of the human condition (Masini, 1970).

The benefits that the organizations can keep from a prepared and motivated human resource department, does not simply depend on an augmentation of productivity and/ or quality of individual performances, but on the possibility to divide knowledge and coordinate competencies, transforming the individual competencies in organizational capital. This transformational process is principally realized through the availability of qualified leaders at all of the levels of the organization, group work, knowledge infrastructure, the managerial systems based on incentives and being in line with individual preferences with strategic objectives.

All of the personnel, not focusing only on key figures, should be put in condition to understand why people were hired according to the strategy and their implications on day-to-day work. This intervening environment is not alternative to the necessity of act on few figures and on professional values, knowledge and competency development even more critical for its strategy. Above all, here are relevant processes of diffusion and communication of the strategy, in the end to promote an organizational climate capable not to slow change. On the other hand, this point does not only concern the processes of implementation, but the same formulation of the strategy. The previous involvement of teaching personnel in the objectives and initial process of changes is basic in order to sustain changing strategies, especially in the process for the transmission and internal diffusion from the part of the individual strategic values. In fact, when the subjects that have to implement the new programs are excluded from decision making process for the new programs, it is probable that they demonstrate a strong resistance to the change, that in some measure is related to the intrinsic quality of the programs proposed and from the positive authority from who proposes them.

The case study demonstrates that the partnership has given life and implemented a series of programs and initiatives that in the course of almost twenty years has aided in intangible assets within the Chelsea School District increasing its human and organizational capital (Tab. 1).

Tab. 1 – Factors responsible for the human and organizational capital of the district

Dimensions, programs and initiatives	Control of the strategic competencies	Leadership distributed	Team work	Organization Alignment (objectives, responsibility incentives)	Organization climate	Knowledge based infrastructure
Increase salaries and benefit	•			•	•	
Curriculum reform	•		•		•	
Full course scholarships at Boston University	•					
Instructional leader		•	•		•	
Teacher Exchange Program	•					
Chelsea Mentoring program	•	•				
Plan for hiring new administrators		•				
Teacher evaluation process				•	•	
Core knowledge curriculum alignment initiative						

From the moment Boston University assumed the responsibility of the Chelsea School District, has inherited a body of underpaid and demoralized teachers, but at the same time was made up of a group of professionals that continued to have the educational heart of students⁶.

Moreover, because of the general social and economic conditions, but also due to the specific work conditions within the district, the capacity of attracting and maintaining talented personnel was very low.

In the light of these premises, as a preliminary condition to attract talented teachers (also possessing the strategic competences desired), to motivate the human resource department to follow these strategic objectives (alignment) but also to give clear signals of change to all of the personnel (atmosphere), the Team Management has negotiated with the unions politics to augment salaries and work schedules.

⁶ Partial testimony to this comes from the observation that has always been very low. Between 1990 and 2005 the number of days frequented has increased from 95.47% to 96.38%.

Already after the first five years of the partnership were complete, teachers' salaries grew by 42%. Confronting the average salary of the district with that of the state in the years 199-2003, the salaries within the Chelsea District still fall short of those of the state, but that distance has been significantly reduced:

	District		State	
	1999	2003	1999	2003
Average Salary	\$32,272	\$44,356	\$45,149	\$51,803

The first years of the partnership were particularly crucial due to the enduring financial crisis and fund reductions (Clemente, 1994). In 1991, the financial collapse of the city created a real danger of firing Chelsea teachers. The choices assumed in this phase as ordered by the presidio of strategic competencies were determined for the growth of the school district in successive years. The mayors worked with the office of the superintendent in order to identify the teachers with greater competencies and experience with which to construct the future re-launch of the district.

5. The BU-Chelsea partnership: managerial and organizational reflections

The case study here proposed presents many perspective analyses from a business management viewpoint. First of all, the public-private partnership between the city of Chelsea and Boston University (BU) is based on the necessity to actively contribute to the turnaround process that has involved the public administration of Chelsea for a long time (Furman and McGahan, 2002; Zimmerman, 1991). Therefore, it is interesting to investigate if the contemplated managerial techniques used during the turnaround have been effective in building a well-regulated educational district.

Secondly, Boston University's intervention, that continues to manage the school district in Chelsea, has been oriented, in an explicit way, to the transfer of knowledge from BU's management to the human resources in the Chelsea school district. Also in this case, it will be interesting to reflect on the concrete opportunity for the personnel of Chelsea to work independently from the consistent presence of external competences in order to sustain the planning and control systems and the management of the organization.

Furthermore, the BU-Chelsea case study represents a successful example for New Public Management models and contributes to create a social network in the local area (Cyert and March, 1963). The research for legitimacy from the part of the local authorities in Chelsea through alliances with other actors known in the territory produces conditions for the development of the school and the pursuit of strategic and managerial instruments perceived and shared by the local community.

In fact, the partnership between Boston and Chelsea was founded on a fiduciary relation that came to substitute the two alternatives of the pure market and the internal growth with a cooperative relationship based on a formal agreement and a subscription of values shared among the different actors involved in the contract (Williamson, 1975). This relation did not eliminate the managerial risks that succeeded one another during the turnaround process. Nevertheless, the final objective was to control the transaction costs during the turnaround process, replacing them with other kinds of costs necessary for the maintenance of the long-term relationship .

Following the delegation of authority for the managerial processes from the School Committee to the BU Management Team, the relationship between BU and Chelsea can be

analyzed in the perspective of an agency relation, where as even if there is an absence of transaction costs related to the pure market, other perceived costs would still be related to the partnership because of the mechanisms of control and insurance to maintain knowledge, trust and integrity for the fiduciary relation (Jensen and Meckling, 1976).

In synthesis, the aim of the following paragraphs is to propose through the analysis of the above mentioned case study some reflections about the management of a school district with the following questions: which are the different ways of involving the local stakeholders in the management of the school district; what is the role of planning and control systems in the turnaround process for Chelsea; which are the future perspectives for the management of an autonomous school district at the end of the formal agreement.

6. Stakeholders' participation in the management of the Chelsea school district

The focus of this analysis is on the managerial and informative instruments that support the governance system of the Chelsea school district and assume a particular configuration following the public-private partnership with BU.

The formal agreement between the two organizations foresees the total delegation of authority from the Chelsea School Committee to the BU management team, assuming the responsibility for day-to-day management of the school district mainly financed by the State of Massachusetts.

The contract between BU and Chelsea was from the beginning signed with a temporal horizon useful to allow for the transfer of the managerial competences to the human resources of the Chelsea school district. More precisely, the agreement established in the first section that: «the University shall manage and operate the Chelsea school system ...It shall provide the School Committee which timely reports concerning the management of the school system and its implementation of the program for the improvement of the Chelsea schools»⁷.

Through the delegation of authority to Boston University, the public governance of the educational district wanted to create an immediate amelioration of the environment favorable to an effective and efficient management of the organization, maintaining the responsibility of the reporting process to the community (Vasu et al., 1998).

In fact, the transfer of the knowledge to the educational district required some improvement in the collaborative processes as time went by. Formally, the last agreement drawn up on July 1, 2003 foresaw for the extension of the partnership for 5 more years in order to pursue the educational and managerial objectives in the medium-long term, that were missed during the first section of the agreement.

At an organizational level, one of the strategic roles contemplated by the partnership concerns the figure of the superintendent of schools, for whom the General Laws of Massachusetts contemplates the following role: «The school committee of a town not in a superintendency union of district shall employ a superintendent of schools and fix his compensation. A superintendent employed under this section or section sixty or sixty-three shall manage the system in a fashion consistent with state law and the policy determinations of that school committee. Amended by St. 1993, c. 71, s. 52»⁸.

Moreover, at an organizational level, the case study here proposed becomes relevant for the relationships among stakeholders present in the local area. Coherently with the most recent managerial theories (Post J. et al., 2002), the agreement between BU and Chelsea as well as the strategy and structure for the contract foresees the fundamental role of the organizational culture underlying the relations among different social actors (Crozier and Friedberg, 1977).

⁷ Section 3 of the formal agreement.

⁸ Massachusetts General Laws, Charter 71, Section 58.

There are many questions that could be related to the organizational culture oriented towards the stakeholders' needs (Freeman, 1984). For example, it could be relevant to verify how the direct or indirect involvement of the actors in the partnership grew during the period (Drennan, 1982). More over, of particular interest is the analysis of the fiduciary relation created through the years among different stakeholders and institutions involved in the public agreement (Seligman, 1997).

Regarding the BU-Chelsea case study, there are two focal aspects of study. From one side, there are considered heavy political and social implications that have influenced the partnership since its origins. More precisely, the city of Chelsea had to manage the turnaround of its structure and processes with the involvement of the families and the citizens of the precinct. The School Committee was the first body to give the official recognition to the delegation of authority to the BU management team. At the beginning, a great distrust was popular among the families of the city that did not positively feel for the involvement of a private institution, Boston University, in the management of the public school district of Chelsea. The local citizens perceived Boston University as an organization close from a geographical viewpoint, but with very different views considering their political, social and economic situation.

From here, the relationships with the families have always been considered a crucial point for the success of the partnership, even for the political role assumed by the citizens at the time of the election for the local government. In fact, the educational theme assumes a strategic role in an area characterized by high rates of unemployment and illegal immigration, where the local human capital is unanimously considered one of the most important indicators of development for the community (Carnegie, 1975).

During the years, the initial anxiety of the families towards the involvement of a private institution became a positive feeling of collaboration that brought about the extension of the agreement in two different moments. Obviously, the member of the School Committee, represented by local parents, progressively perceived the advantageous exchange of knowledge processed between public and private organizations for the development of organizational and social capital. This phenomenon could not have been possible, for terms and conditions, with an exclusive intervention of the market. Only in recent years, the local stakeholders understood the importance of the autonomy of the educational district, that 18 years of supervision could be sufficient for it to be able to continue with an autonomous management process without the intervention of external participants now involved in the governance system (fig. 3).

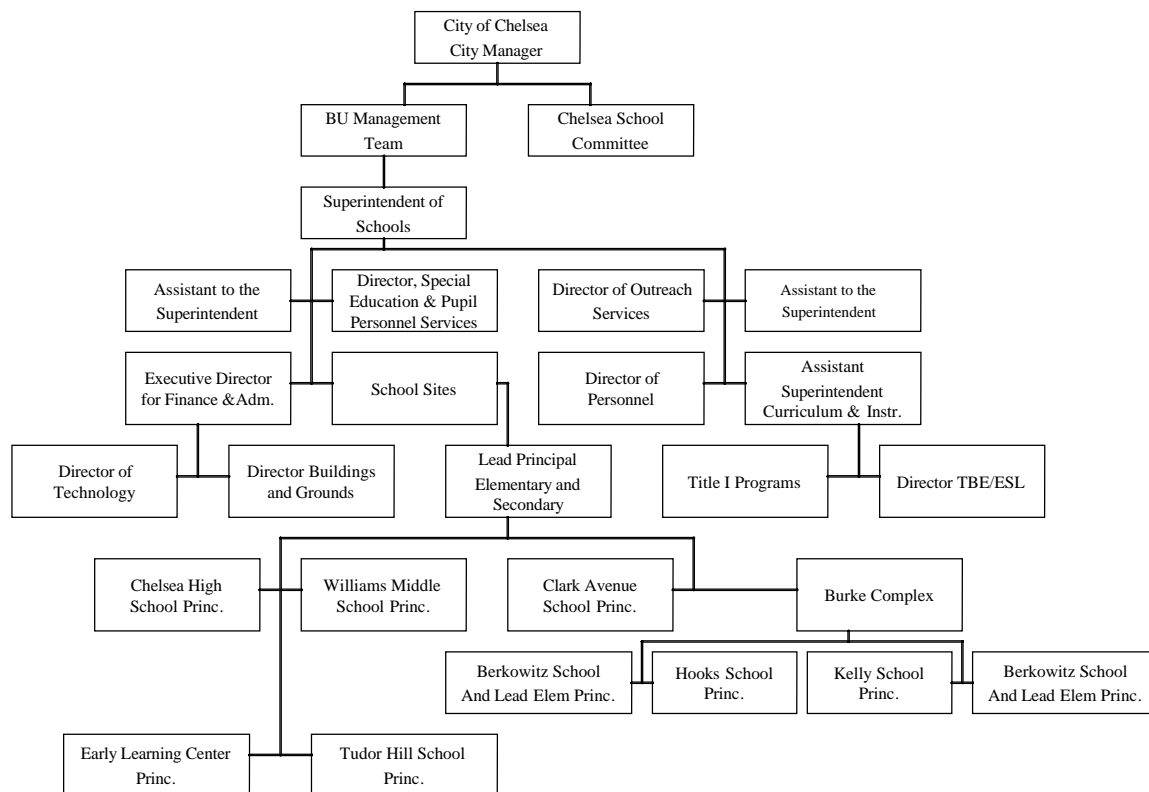


Fig. 3 The organizational structure of the Chelsea school district 2002-2003.

Boston University was also involved in a delicate relation with the local unions that represented the economic and professional interests of the teachers and the other personnel of the district. The human resources employed in the school sector were highly disappointed because of the low salary and uncertainty of the evolution of their careers in a very difficult social environment. Even today, as highlighted several times during the interviews with the BU managers, the relations with the unions constitute one of the most critical aspects to regulate in the partnership, making it able to influence the managerial decisions about personnel contracts (Chisholm, 1989).

The worker representatives play a fundamental role in the success of the governance of the Chelsea school district. At present, there are seven union promoters for the defense of the workers' rights in the educational district. Every three years, the BU management team renegotiates the contracts' terms for the teachers with the presence of the unions. This process represents a critical event for the BU managers if we consider that the labor cost represents up to 85% of the budget for the Chelsea school district (Tab. 2). For the BU management team, the activity for the contracts' renewal is the clear expression of the fiduciary relation between the two organizations of the partnership. In fact, the BU managers would not be obliged, in the formal agreement, to periodically negotiate with the unions. Nevertheless, those responsible for the management evaluate the contents of the contracts making them a strategic factor in the management of the school district, so that the management of the personnel's rights constitutes a basis for good management of the district.

Besides the economic aspects, the superintendent affirms that the management ability to negotiate with the unions represents a strategic task for the BU management team. This is because the negotiation with the teachers for the educational contents is facilitated if the superintendent can count on the economic satisfaction of the personnel (Jones et al., 1988).

The Chelsea school district especially thanks the superintendent for trying to continuously and institutionally promote stakeholder management in the organization. More precisely, the involvement of both the educational organization and of the local community has been formalized in the Community Based Organization. This is a formal agreement where the different forms of cooperation and exchange of resources between internal and external parties of the school district are established. For example, families are directly involved in the learning activities of the districts' students, so that the transfer of knowledge is not only for the formal students, but also for their families. Recovery programs outside the mandatory schedule have been institutionalized in order to favor the students that had learning difficulties in the past. Moreover, the involvement of the families evidently emerges during the budgeting process, when they are involved together with the local government for the approval of the contents for the programming document (Kaplan et al., 2004).

Even the personnel of the school district take part to the uninterrupted processes of amelioration of the organization and for the renewal of learning, attending activities for the upgrading of their competencies. This learning process usually allows them to be reactive towards the changes of the organizations and of its related environment.

In particular, referring to the training of the human resources of the school district, we need to separate two different levels of intervention. On the one hand, training programs for the teachers started in order to integrate the educational and the social activity of the school district; on the other hand, even the personnel that is not directly involved in the educational programs, such as the administrative staff, have been trained in order to follow the processes for the good management of the school district.

These training processes have been conducted through formal and informal mechanisms, and create an impact on the strategy, structure, and culture of the whole organization (Connor and Lake, 1988).

The previous considerations related to the growing rate of involvement of the stakeholders have characterized the Chelsea school district, showing one of the main milestones of the turnaround of an organization where there is a high amount of attention towards the need of social actors in its environment. The interventions of the administrators were not limited to the training processes of the personnel and to the financial area, but all deeply involved in the aspects related to the value chain of the subjects within the organization.

The basic idea, which characterized the involvement of a plurality of social actors in the development process of the school district, was to create social networks of stakeholders in order to allow for two effects. First, the spontaneous involvement of a large number of stakeholders showed that the success of a turnaround process is not necessarily due to the formal admission of the social actors in the governance system. In the Chelsea case study, the significant formal and informal involvement of the stakeholders in the planning and control system of the organization, allows for BU management to cover its role in a serene and collaborative atmosphere for the use of locale resources.

Moreover, the trend to project a reporting system with a multiplicity of viewpoints has been explicitly formalized through the use of a particular managerial instrument that is becoming popular within public and private organizations. The balanced scorecard, in fact, formalizes four different perspectives of analysis that could easily be applied to the Chelsea school district coherently with its organizational culture because BU's management is already sensitive about

the four areas of the scorecard: the financial perspective, the learning and growth perspective, the customer perspective and the internal-business-process perspective (Kaplan and Norton, 1996).

Even if the governance of the Chelsea school district never formally asked for the balanced scorecard application, however, the praxis shows that there is a great interest by part of the administrators towards the informative content of the scorecard. The growing need for information technology that characterized the school district could in the future bring, among other things, the reengineering of the collecting and communicational processes for the information that supports management of the organization and satisfies the new demand of the social statement (Lines, 2005).

7. The evolution of the planning and control systems for the school district under a turnaround process

The need to reform the planning and control system of the school district was related to the fact that before the agreement the accountability of the organization was almost non-existent. The organizational structure did not foresee a financial officer and all the managerial data was manually collected without a clear method. In fact, only the superintendent of the school district knew how the educational programs and all the other activities fundamental in running and developing the educational organization.

Furthermore, the BU management team considered the existing informative system structure unreliable without a technology platform, so they were forced to re-engineer the whole architecture for the existing management system in order to control directly the informative flows about the educational district. Coherently with the turnaround process, the BU managers introduced some of the most elementary managerial instruments to monitor the organization: first the budgeting system, and secondly the whole process of communication and training for human resources implied in the local educational district.

The BU management team identified with the correct budgeting process the way to put strategies into action and write effective programs for the renewal of the organizational structure and managerial processes. Even as the Eighties came to an end, when the agreement was first occurring, the BU staff decided to go to Chelsea for weekly appointments with the administration area of the educational district. They collected much useful information to project new information system. Besides the risks related to the presence of unreliable accounting books, the BU managers had to often face a difficult fiscal situation for the whole public administration of Chelsea characterized by frequent episodes of corruption and a declaration of bankruptcy.

In 1992 the first Executive Finance Director were introduced with the task to coordinate the management of the whole educational district. He was also responsible to maintain a daily contact with the financial representative of the BU team and to diffuse periodically the information about the activities of the school district.

Among the several functions related to budget, however, there is another characteristic to mention. The BU management team attributed to the budget the property of being able to make stakeholder relations easier. The uncertainty and flexibility related to the execution of the programs, together with the management of the relations with the social actors of the district, explain the reason why the budget incorporates several short term objectives though incremental steps for the management team's long-term projects. The budget's aim was to and still is to be an instrument of internal management and a carrier to negotiate the objectives among social actors and city governance (Feltham and Xie, 1994; Murphy, 2000; Antle and Demsky, 1988; Bryson, 1988).

The budgeting process for the Chelsea school district starts identifying the strategic purposes for planning the following years. Specifically, the Annual Report for Massachusetts establishes

the pursuit of the 16 strategic directions negotiated between Boston University and the city of Chelsea (point 4 of the Annual Report 2004). From this basis, the budget has to become the effective instrument for realizing the political expectation of the turnaround for the school district, as declared inside the formal agreement.

Further, the budgeting process annually starts in October, and through several phases run in the course of the administrative calendar. At the beginning of the autumn, the responsible for each area must transmit his requirements in terms of human and financial resources (teaching hours, numbers of teachers, number of students per class, educational materials, etc.). Also the teachers and the deans of the schools are involved in the budgeting process, in fact among their tasks is the supervision of the requests sent by the responsible of the area to the central administration of Chelsea, in order to verify and respect the strategic objectives drawn up in the partnership.

As regards the underlying budgeting logic, the financial officer of the City of Chelsea during an interview explained that the decision system created by the responsible of each school is not really coherent with the zero-based budget methodology (Brown, 1981). Rather than entirely program the requirements for the next year in relation to the developing needs, the responsible tends to modify and maintain the programs of the previous years.

The most critical areas are the ones related to the estimation of labor hours, the demand for transportation and other services. In these cases, annual small variations, both in increase or decrease, do not show a radical planning activity for the school district.

During the same interview, the financial director of the Chelsea school district underlines, however, that all responsible are encouraged to plan the school district activity not only with a historical approach, but also in terms of new proposals and programs respectful to the strategic contents of the partnership. The same financial chief admits that this philosophy is not very popular among the schools, and that budgets within the last years did not show great change, especially with regards to the expenses' expectations.

The first phase of budgeting produces the objectives' collection for each area. Weekly meetings between the financial manager of the BU team and the staff members of BU are planned in order to discuss the sustainability of the programs for the following year. Once the first draft of the programming documents is ready, the BU management team supervises the contents of the budget and formulates the first judgment about the managerial process. At the same time, the BU team can propose corrections and new ideas for the approval by the governance of the school district and the city, or it simply ratify the contents of the document for the following presentation during a public meeting.

In fact, another critical moment during the writing of the budget takes place at the end of March, when the budget comes to the City Manager for the approval of the government of the local entity. This process begins with a public meeting where all the substantial and formal aspects of the budget are discussed in order to collect the consensus of the stakeholder and the entire community of Chelsea. The accounting rules of the city (Charter of the City) establishes that: «At least sixty days before the commencement of the ensuing fiscal year, the city manager shall submit to the city council a proposed operating budget for all city agencies, which shall include the school department, for the ensuing fiscal year with an accompanying budget message and supporting documents...The school budget as adopted by the school committee shall be submitted to the city manager. The city manager and the superintendent of schools shall coordinate the dates and times of the school committee's budget process in accordance with the laws of the Commonwealth »

The city of Chelsea did not foresee a particular format for the budget and therefore the structure is free. The only rules to respect come from the general laws of Massachusetts in terms of public meetings for the annual budget (Charter 71, Section 4): «The powers, duties and

responsibilities of the city manager shall include, but are not intended to be limited to, the following: m) to prepare and submit an annual operating budget, capital improvement program and long term financial forecast.»

As regards the timing for the collection of the information to write the budget we notice the flexibility that characterizes the whole process for the public administration. In fact, it is possible to promote some variations during the year in order to align the planning document with the flexibility and incremental character of the planning and control system of the organization. During the year, it is possible and recommended to change the requirements planned in terms of different amount of expenses, salaries, funds, and other important chapters of the budgets.

The budgeting process also involved a various group of human resources with different skills. Several social actors are asked to bring their point of view in the difficult activity of planning the future actions of the school district. The BU management team works together with the public administrators of the City of Chelsea, the teachers, and an active team of social actors of the local community. This practice creates the conditions that are needed to maintain a multiple perspective of analysis for finding the best way to run the school district not only in terms of judgment at the end of the school year, but in terms of planning during the budgeting process.

Transferring the strategy to the annual objectives in the budget assumes some peculiarities according to the partnership dated 1988. The 16 objectives defined in the first agreement never changed. This static approach was in part due to the complexity of the strategic directives, which have not been reached entirely because they are not exhaustible or were satisfied only during a process of many years. On the other hand, BU's management, according to the representatives of the City of Chelsea, decided to maintain certain continuity in the strategic direction of the school district development. The personnel of the school district are allow to modify the objectives of each annual budget, under the respect of the values contemplated in the partnership and followed during the turnaround of the educational organization.

Tab. 2 The budget of the Chelsea school district. Years 2005-2006.

PROGRAM SUMMARY BY FUND		General Fund		Federal Grants		State Grants		Private Grants		Total	
		2005	2006	2005	2006	2005	2006	2005	2006	2005	2006
ESTIMATED REVENUES											
Local Appropriation		3,577,102	3,577,102							3,577,102	3,577,102
Chapter 70 state aid		41,740,214	41,971,878							41,740,214	41,971,878
Estimated FY04 carryover		180,000								180,000	
Indirect cost recovery		175,000	165,000							175,000	165,000
Grant receipts				6,185,397	6,236,600	1,110,482	949,201	201,754	279,526	7,497,633	7,465,327
	TOTAL	45,672,316	45,713,980	6,185,397	6,236,600	1,110,482	949,201	201,754	279,526	53,169,949	53,179,307
ESTIMATED EXPENDITURES											
Administration - central office		1,012,740	1,026,504							1,012,740	1,026,504
Administration - principals		3,995,003	4,209,373							3,995,003	4,209,373
Alternative education		976,909	952,731							976,909	952,731
Benefits/Adjustments		2,340,911	2,308,842	279,509	350,092					2,620,420	2,658,934
Computer education		894,555	887,688					43,540	33,550	938,095	921,188
Elementary		7,926,217	7,692,102	425,075	342,941					8,351,292	8,035,043
English as a second language		653,885	787,139							653,885	787,139
Foreign language		376,319	433,024							376,319	433,024
Health & Physical education		971,971	935,528							971,971	935,528
.....											
Pupil personnel		1,869,643	1,884,534			17,600	15,000			1,887,243	1,899,534
School Committee		57,950	93,950							57,950	93,950
Science		849,071	674,630							849,071	674,630
Special education		8,035,489	7,760,352	1,029,354	1,072,420					9,064,843	
Student activities		466,580	435,210	66,000	57,000		3,000			532,580	
Student athletics		156,920	164,960							156,920	
Title I		-	-	3,857,268	3,853,164					3,857,268	
Transportation		2,233,066	2,459,494							2,233,066	
Visual & Performing Arts		1,369,873	1,377,714							1,369,873	
Total		45,678,822	45,720,486	6,185,397	6,236,600	1,110,482	949,201	201,754	279,526	53,176,455	53,185,813

If the budget represents the main operating instrument for the pursuit of the strategic plan for the Chelsea school district, many critical aspects remain to be solved for the correct collection of data to put in the information system. According to the interviews with the responsible of the financial area, the absence of an effective accounting system, capable to highlight the connections among the different activities of the organization, shows up as the first need for the management of the school district. In fact, the management accounting system of Chelsea remains quite traditional and inappropriate to produce the critical relationship among the resources consumed and the value produced. Certainly, the financial difficulties of the last years constituted an obstacle for the improvement of the information system, because the resources of the district were absorbed by other priorities (Harrington, 1991; Sandford 2002). The awareness of the lack of an adequate information system is at least promising towards an improvement of the accounting system among future priorities.

The reporting system requested according to the partnership foresees, moreover, that the BU management team writes periodically a report about the activity of the school district to submit to the School Committee of the city of Chelsea. The frequency of the reporting activity depends on the informative needs perceived. The university should, at least monthly, transmit a report to the School Committee referring to the management and the results of the educational district. Possible changes in the schedule of the educational programs and the reengineering of the educational and managerial processes must to be included (Kochan and Useem, 1992; Petrozzo and Stepper, 1994).

When necessary, according to the business operations of the BU management team, the university must communicate the information about new financing opportunities, projection for revenue, economic and financial changes of the budget- especially regarding to the cash flows of the school district (Section 4 of the general agreement). As above mentioned, the BU management team has to also write and transmit to the School Committee, the City Manager, and the City Council, an annual report about the fiscal plan for the school district and the most relevant changes in the education programs respect to the previous years (Section 3 of the general agreement).

8. Future perspectives for the management for an autonomously controlled Chelsea school district: conclusive considerations

The relevance of the case study examined is related to the characters of the partnership that was drawn up under formal mechanisms, the contract between Boston University and the City of Chelsea, but has always found its development and continuity on the basis of knowledge shared inside the organization of the school district and among the several stakeholders. Cultural values, behavioral praxis of the organization and each social actor represent the pivot for the development of a complex and territorially based system of relationships to provide educational services and preserve the assets of the school district.

The basic idea is that the organizations are related social entities through social, political and cultural system, making the entity of the possible turnaround unable to leave the active involvement of the local stakeholders (Post et al., 2002).

The intervention of different groups of social actors in the turnaround process of the school district has been possible thanks to the favorable attitude of the Chelsea government and with the support of the BU management team. They both considered the contribution of the stakeholders as a critical resource for the development of a strategic area of the local entity such as the school district⁹.

⁹ Inequality and the American Dream, *The Economist*, June 17th 2006, pp. 13-14.

The success of a partnership with a private institution is the result of the trust that the local entity and the stakeholders showed towards an organization of undisputed value for the technical and social skills of its human resources. In particular, the local government of Chelsea chose to share the decision of signing the partnership with the citizens of the city, communicating all the milestones of the agreement and transforming an institutional constraint of a contract with a powerful institution, creating an opportunity of social consensus and an active network for the local stakeholders.

It remains to be established whether the Chelsea school district will be able to maintain the same level of performance and amelioration that it has seen in the last few years. Out of the contract's constraints, it will be necessary to evaluate the city's capability to continue the involvement of private institutions and of the other stakeholders in the development of the local social and human capital for following generations. At present, the two organizations involved in the partnership until 2008 have shown the will to cooperate for the future, even if the form of the next informal agreement has not already been defined.

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