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Partnership 2000: A New Model for Diaspora-Israel Relations

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Partnership 2000 (P2K) is a program undertaken by the Jewish Agency for Israel (JAFI), in conjunction with the United Jewish Appeal (UJA) and Keren Hayesod (KH), to twin diaspora Jewish communities with 27 regions throughout Israel (located in the north, south, and the Jerusalem area) for the purposes of linking Israelis and diaspora Jews in various collaborative efforts. Based upon Project Renewal (PR), its conceptual and organizational forerunner, P2K is intended to address the material and spiritual concerns of the residents of the regions and of the diaspora communities through a process of joint governance and allocation of funds.

This study of P2K looks at the program primarily through the eyes of its North American participants. It is based upon interviews with 16 key informants (from JAFI, UJA, and local community officials) who accompanied the transition from PR to P2K, supplemented by questionnaire responses from 25 volunteer and professional P2K participants from Jewish communities throughout North America and responses to a similar questionnaire by 15 Israel-based representatives of North American communities.

Project Renewal Phases Down

The origins of P2K may be traced directly to PR, inaugurated in 1978 by Israeli Prime Minister Menachem Begin to bring about the physical and social rehabilitation of impoverished neighborhoods and small towns.

In the late 1980s and early 1990s, with the massive influx of immigrants from the Soviet Union, the Israeli government, JAFI, and the diaspora fund-raising bodies redirected their efforts towards underwriting the tremendous costs of immigration and absorption.

At this time, the JAFI Renewal Department embarked on a series of projects intended to forestall the resentment of PR neighborhood residents in light of funds and attention having been shifted to the new immigrants. Included in this effort were a variety of exchange programs between communities and neighborhoods. This period also marked the beginning of JAFI's entry into the field of local economic development, designed to stimulate small businesses and create employment, which initially took the form of technical and scientific incubators, entrepreneurship development, and other initiatives. While PR had incorporated neighborhoods and towns located primarily in the center of the country, the new emphasis on economic development was directed more toward the peripheral areas.

In the early 1990s, "Operation Opportunity" was established as a national network of local economic development programs with an element of diaspora involvement, based roughly on PR twinnings. Its scope expanded from a municipal to a more regional one as it became apparent that certain economic interventions such as tourism transcended the local geographic unit.

However, it proved difficult to harness diaspora communities in this effort because the focus was neither as potent nor as defined as that of PR. It became evident that to raise funds for a community center was much easier than for a loan fund or for business start-ups.

To Build a "Living Bridge"

P2K was officially launched in mid-1994 with the term "living bridge" coined to express the philosophical underpinnings of the project. Its two equally important goals are regional development and strengthening the connection between the people of Israel and the diaspora.

In pursuit of the project's goals, programmatic initiatives were undertaken in a variety of areas. Programs aimed at improving the economic profile and capacity of the region (grouped under the heading of "economic development") are geared largely toward stimulating employment and include municipally-based Economic Development Units (EDUs), encouragement of small businesses, technological and scientific incubators, courses in entrepreneurship, tourism development, business forums, etc. In addition, programs in the realm of human services are undertaken to ameliorate some of the social problems experienced by residents of the region, including work with the elderly, new immigrants, youth at risk, and health care facilities.

To strengthen the Israel-diaspora relationship, a wide range of programs has been initiated in

fields such as culture (museums, artists, etc.), media and transnational communications, religion/Jewish identity, leadership/volunteer development, and education (schools, colleges, day camps, youth trips, etc.).

The Diaspora Seeks People-to-People Contact

The type of programming that has become synonymous with the "living bridge" is "people-to-people" programming, connoting the bi-directional flow of individuals from the community and the region. For most diaspora participants, people-to-people programs have come to represent the heart and soul of P2K.

Examples of people-to-people programming, as reported in "The Partnership 2000 Electronic Newsletter" (published by JAFI's Israel Department), demonstrate its diversity and potential for creativity. Included are:

- Professional exchanges: ("Midwest medical delegation visits Western Galilee").
- Educational exchanges: ("Teachers from the Galilee panhandle visited their Canadian partners").
- Interfacing among women: ("Thirty women from Tulsa, Minneapolis, St. Paul, Tulsa and the Kinneret region took part in a week-long conference focusing on women's issues").
- Youth programs: ("230 Keffiyada volunteers in 15 Partnership 2000 regions are teaching English in a fun setting to some 2,500 youngsters this summer").
- Religious/identity programming: ("Round-table discussion on Jewish diversity between the Midwest Consortium and the Western Galilee").

In both 1996 and 1997, approximately 7,000 persons took part in "people-to-people" programs, and in the first half of 1998 some 5,800 delegates from diaspora communities "interacted with an estimated 4,000 in their partnered regions." All indications are that diaspora participants in P2K favor increasing the scope and depth of this program component. One predicted that "there will be increased 'kesher' programs; we ultimately would like the P2K budget to change to a 25-25-50 percent formula, whereby 25 percent = social services/immigrant absorption; 25 percent = economic development; and 50 percent = people-to-people programming."

Rather conspicuous is the relatively low priority accorded by diaspora community leaders to economic development, especially given its centrality to the very definition of P2K. The relative proportion of allocations devoted to economic development/employment has decreased steadily

over the past four years, while the proportion devoted to people-to-people programs has increased (to over 15 percent in 1998).

Despite recent massive cuts in both JAFI staff and activity, the overall sums allocated to P2K (today totaling approximately \$18 million) have not been reduced in the slightest, suggesting that JAFI recognizes P2K as its flagship project.

Reaching Out Beyond Traditional Partners

P2K seeks to engage a variety of institutions, not formally linked to either the organized Jewish community (Federation) in the diaspora or to the local authorities in the region, in the collaborative programs undertaken by the partners.

Those institutions listed by the diaspora leaders as having played a role in their partnership's efforts sketch a rich variety of Jewish communal and non-sectarian institutions:

- Jewish Day School(s)
- JCC/community centers
- Bureau/Commission of Jewish Education
- Mayor/Governor/County Exec. Office or staff
- Chamber of Commerce
- Federation Young Leadership Division
- Synagogues
- Public schools/school system
- Colleges/universities
- Jewish Family Service
- Local businesses
- Yeshivot
- Federation/Regional Women's Division
- College students
- Other Federation departments/divisions
- Hospitals/healthcare facilities
- Museums
- Summer camps
- Foundations

A strong emphasis is placed on those institutions with a formal and/or informal educational focus. Also notable is the frequency of references to chambers of commerce, suggesting that despite their ambivalence toward economic development, communities do seem to be pursuing contacts designed to advance that agenda. The results also point to serious attempts to enlist

North American mayors and municipal officials.

One good example of a P2K success in this direction is the relationship forged by the partnership of one Midwestern Jewish community linked to a region in the Galilee with a major American university located near the community. Through the linkage with an institution external to the Jewish community, this partnership has succeeded in creating a variety of collaborative efforts between the university and institutions in the region in the fields of social welfare, small business development, archeology, and water purification. Even more instructive was that through this connection, the local Jewish communities in a few instances were able to secure the support and participation of community members who were more closely affiliated with the university than with the Jewish Federation. In addition, it served as a vehicle to engage the general (non-Jewish) community as well.

How P2K Differs from PR

P2K differs significantly from PR in a number of key respects. First, P2K marked the expansion of the scope of intervention from the neighborhood or urban arena to include the rural sector as well.

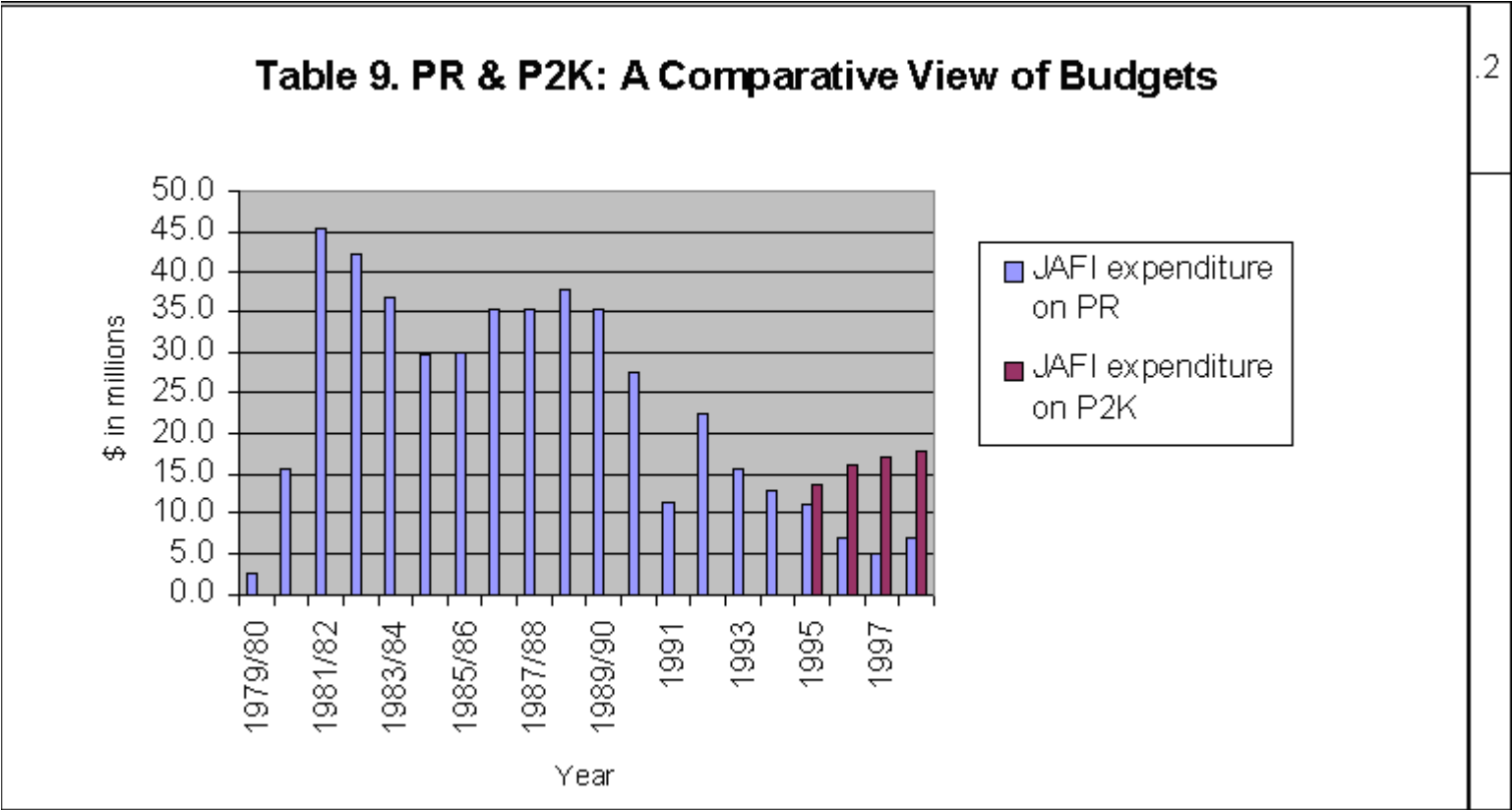
Second, it witnessed the elimination of the formal role of the Israeli government in PR. In P2K, the state government does not match funds raised abroad, nor is it represented on the joint steering committee of the regions. P2K is effectively limited to *local government input only*.

Third, diaspora communities sit together with their Israeli partners on joint steering committees, thereby achieving a parity in governance, as it were. In PR, diaspora communities did consult but were not formally represented on the local steering committees. The basic unit of governance of P2K is the joint steering committee composed of roughly an equal number of representatives from the region and the diaspora community(ies). JAFI is also represented on each steering committee by its regional project manager. Israeli members of the committee include political leaders from the region's constituent municipal and rural jurisdictions (mayors and regional council heads) as well as business and civic leaders. The joint steering committee defines the needs, devises strategy, approves programs and budgets, and conducts evaluation for the partnership. The funds at the disposal of the joint steering committees are derived from the regular annual allocations of diaspora communities to JAFI.

Another important difference involves the method of funding. Funds for P2K are not raised through a separate or additional campaign line, but instead are part and parcel of the regular campaign.

Furthermore, there is a considerable difference in the sheer volume of funds expended and the

size of areas and populations affected. The annual amount spent by JAFI on PR during its peak years was more than double the current amounts allocated to P2K. When adding to this the funds provided PR by the Israeli government, which matched (and often exceeded) those provided by JAFI, this budgetary discrepancy is accented still further. However, PR's emphasis on the physical construction of residential and public structures no doubt made its programmatic repertoire a much more "expensive" one.



While PR incorporated over 80 urban neighborhoods and development towns with a combined population of over 520,000, P2K includes under its purview 63 jurisdictions (37 municipalities and 26 regional councils) with a population of 1.65 million, 45 percent of whom reside in the two cities of Jerusalem and Beersheva. Therefore, in very simplistic terms, in P2K, significantly fewer funds are being spent on considerably more people.

Diaspora Volunteers Seek Israeli Counterparts

One issue of significant concern to diaspora participants was the nature of Israeli participation in P2K. Indeed, more than one respondent bemoaned the central role accorded regional politicians in the partnership and appealed for "more participation from 'volunteers' [sic] not as much the local power brokers." Others have also pointed to the overly politicized leadership in the regions

and the dearth of volunteers.

According to the North American participants, the "pure" volunteer represents the project's ideal and preferred participant. "Pure" refers to a participant, at least in the Israeli context, whose involvement in the project is wholly independent of his or her vocation and whose subsistence is unrelated to partnership funds. The status of elected officials or political appointees is clearly not consistent with this notion of "volunteer." As one diaspora activist opined, "we're interested in people with a commitment to where they live and not where they work." A true Israeli volunteer, by implication, is presumed to acquire a certain existential parity with his or her diaspora counterpart and thereby make for a more equal and balanced partnership.

It may be that Israeli participants in the regions conceive of the ideal and preferred project participant in very different terms. Those currently empowered by the region to manage the partnership very likely view elected officials from the constituent jurisdictions as the appropriate and legitimate agent of authority for the project.

Despite these presumed differing notions of participation, attempts have been made in a number of the partnerships to cultivate a core of activists from the region who are not part of the municipal or regional council structure.

A Relationship More Suited to Americans

It appears that the type of relationship with Israel and Israelis underpinning P2K is somehow more suited to the assumptions and expectations of American Jews than those of non-Americans. One JAFI professional noted that, "though KH communities have joined in, [P2K] requires a mindset that more closely approximates the American Jewish communal model than that of the Europeans." Another informant, in explaining this difference, posited that Americans are "further along in their philanthropic development" than their KH counterparts. The latter were described as "still living in an environment in which Israel is perceived as a 'safety net,'" implying that Americans are more secure in their country of residence.

The distinction between UJA and KH participation relates to their differing conceptions of Israel-diaspora relations. These, in turn, may be traced to the radically different philosophies and concomitant structures of these two national institutions. Simply put, KH is an Israel-based agency operating essentially along a classic Zionist model. Consequently, funds are raised locally by Israeli emissaries and sent directly to Jerusalem. UJA, by contrast, is an American-based institution that raises funds in conjunction with local community Federations and distributes them among a few international recipients - the most prominent of which is JAFI. According to the KH model, Israel is the sole unequivocal repository of diaspora philanthropic efforts. In the UJA model, however, Israel is one of a number of targets competing for the

attention of American Jewish philanthropic activity. According to this admittedly simplistic dichotomy, it seems evident that P2K, with its credo of reciprocity, would be more compatible with the approach of the American Jewish community. It should come as no surprise, then, that the plan to radically restructure JAFI enjoyed the complete backing of the Americans. According to one JAFI official, "they were all united in this effort" (national institutions, Federation executives, lay leaders, etc.), whereas KH was decidedly more ambivalent.

What has been described as an American Jewish hegemony within P2K is a trend likely to intensify as their contribution to the JAFI budget, relative to that of KH, is ever-expanding. (Consequently, the ratio which used to be two-thirds to one-third respectively, is becoming increasingly skewed.)

In addition to *people-to-people programs*, programming categories most important to North American participants in P2K included *education, social welfare, youth programming, leadership or volunteer development*, and *religious/Jewish identity programming*. While social welfare and education (to some degree) are consistent with the traditional mode of philanthropic involvement, the orientation underlying most of these priorities represents a significant departure from that mode. This, coupled with the aspiration of a number of diaspora communities to create in their partnered region a volunteer leadership structure "in their own image," might indeed herald the emergence of a new agenda for (North American) diaspora Jewry - one that may be termed the "domestication" of their overseas (Israel) agenda. This means that while they appear to remain committed to pursuing activity in Israel that is consistent with the traditional philanthropic model, a no less potent impulse seems to be at work whereby communities seek to replicate (or perhaps even "superimpose") their own spiritual concerns, structural attributes, and programmatic priorities in their twinned locale in Israel.

Pursuing "Complementary" Goals?

According to a 1998 JAFI booklet, "Israel has recognized the need to develop its vast peripheries as a national priority. Concurrently, the diaspora leadership has recognized the need to focus on Jewish continuity, combating assimilation and indifference. Through Partnership 2000, [JAFI] entwines the two in pursuit of the complementary goals." Yet to portray these goals as "complementary" strikes one more as wishful thinking than as a sober assessment of the project goals. To be sure, the goal of developing Israel's periphery reflects the very real needs of a significant portion of the population residing in these regions. Indeed, in 15 of the 37 municipalities included under the rubric of P2K, the average number of 12th grade students passing matriculation exams is one-third less than the national average, and in 15 the rate of unemployment is double the national average.

The goal of "Jewish continuity," on the other hand, relates to the concern of North American

Jewish communities wishing to stem the tide of assimilation and intermarriage as exemplified in the much touted CJF 1990 National Jewish Population Survey. This goal, however, would much more aptly be termed "spiritual." The notion that these two discrete sets of overarching goals are somehow complementary is not only logically untenable, but is also belied by the responses in this study. Diaspora participants assigned a conspicuously low priority to the program area of economic development (the objective which perhaps most tangibly expresses the goal of developing Israel's periphery), even as they rated this as highest among the priorities of their partnered region. In addition, a number suggested that it was not even an appropriate program area for the partnership at large. One community representative went as far to propose that "P2K was sold by JAFI to communities abroad under the heading of 'strengthening your Jewish community and Jewish identity' [and] was sold to Israeli mayors as a way of obtaining budgets even for buildings."

What is JAFI's Role?

In Israel, the collective ethos of "nation-building" has slowly given way to a rising individualistic impulse. Concurrently, in the (North American) diaspora, the processes of cultural/religious assimilation, a waning overseas focus, and institutional decentralization are very much in force. Under these conditions, the role of JAFI as the quintessential mediator between the two invariably becomes less central and more obscure. One operational and telling reflection of this is the issue of consultations held between JAFI and visiting diaspora community delegations. Under PR, such delegations conducted JAFI-brokered consultations in the neighborhood and with JAFI officials on a national level in Jerusalem. In P2K, the interface of diaspora community delegations with JAFI is limited to the region only.

JAFI has been described as the instrumentality ideally placed to serve as the critical conduit between Israel and the diaspora. However, this role becomes problematic in the context of P2K by virtue of that project's nature and structure. Here, JAFI is clearly not a direct provider of services nor primarily an implementing agent. Acting first as *shadchan* (matchmaker), JAFI theoretically strives to facilitate partnerships between communities and regions that will grow and flourish in a manner deemed desirable and suitable by both partners. One ironic, though conceivable, consequence of this role is to become functionally obsolete once the partners forge a successful *modus vivendi*.

The seemingly untenable predicament of JAFI finds expression in the remarks of one community representative: "I am pessimistic about the future development of the project through the JAFI setup; eventually, the more motivated communities will develop their own brand of relations with their Israeli counterparts - totally independent of any agent including JAFI."

When polled about what role in the project they felt JAFI ought to assume, diaspora leaders

interviewed identified a number of points. One insisted that JAFI provide direction ("that's what they do well") and exercise control in the field ("despite all the criticism, their field people are great; their heart and soul are truly in their work." Another offered a slightly more tempered view: JAFI should: "Provide information on the ground to help understand the dynamics of the local authorities and projects; perform the technical function of transmitting funds, reports, monitoring, interpretation; facilitate the flow of information and knowledge; and consult or help find consultants in a particular area of expertise but not to control decision-making."

Implications for Fund-Raising

Many have acknowledged the positive effects PR had on local Federation campaigns. One professional explains that this "was a very direct, straight-forward treatment of a series of symptoms of social and economic ills. It meshed well with the exigencies of campaign." However, P2K from the outset was never to be featured in a separate campaign. "As such, it loses the appeal that a community would see with a new project. If there's no specific aim for which to raise money in a purposive way, it becomes...like any other - even local - need, not requiring specific attention." It was intimated that while P2K offers a challenge to engage in a new form of diaspora-Israel relations, as a campaign tool it is ineffective since "communities need specific financial goals." "Even younger donors want to be moved. They're not always moved by people-to-people programs. The physical, material needs of Israelis still resonate with them."

When a member of the JAFI executive was meeting with a group of donors during the early years of P2K and spoke to them about the challenges of "partnership," one donor retorted, "I have enough 'partners' - I want to help my brothers and sisters in Israel who need help." It continues to be that "social welfare and human service causes remain integral motivating forces for Jewish philanthropy." Hence, for many, P2K in diaspora communities presents a genuine fund-raising problem.

Looking Toward the Future

Generally speaking, the rise of P2K may be interpreted as a reflection of the shifting balance of power within the North American Jewish community, according to which the local Federations are gradually overtaking the UJA in fashioning the Israel agenda of the American Jewish community. This perhaps explains the more decentralized and diffuse nature in which communities were enlisted to the project. If this tendency continues, a scenario might arise in which communities independently formulate their own Israel agenda and work in tandem with JAFI in order to implement it. Another scenario might witness the disappearance of JAFI as the

central authority through which P2K activity is conducted, even as communities remain collectively determined to pursue collaborative activity with their partners in the regions.

Precisely which form P2K will assume and toward which hypothetical scenario it will gravitate no doubt depends on a myriad of factors, internal to the various institutions involved as well as environmental. Nonetheless, as it is presently configured, P2K offers a glimpse into the future of a diaspora-Israel relationship in which the role of the intermediary national institutions might become drastically reduced.

P2K may be likened to a stage upon which all of the cooperative impulses and conflictual tensions (institutional and spiritual) are brought to bear on the unfolding drama that is diaspora-Israel relations. What remains to be seen is whether this drama will move on to a different stage over the course of time, or perhaps will be altered by the opportunities and limitations of this same stage. Another way of understanding this question is whether P2K will have ultimately been an ephemeral snapshot of diaspora-Israel relations or, alternatively, a harbinger of an emergent model thereof.

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