

The Democratizing Impact of Governance Networks

From pluralization, via democratic anchorage, to interactive political leadership

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Abstract

Governance networks emerged as tools, not for strengthening democracy, but for making public governance more effective. Nevertheless, it has been argued that governance networks carries a potential for democratizing public governance by enhancing democratic participation of intensely affected actors in policy making, stimulating democratic deliberation, and recruiting and empowering sub-elites who can challenge the ruling elites. Initially, governance researchers argued that governance networks provide democratic arenas for collaborative self-governance that supplement and supplant the formal institutions of representative democracy. Governance networks are alternative sites of counter-democracy and not easily combined with more established forms of democracy. Later, governance researchers began to question the democratic deficit created by the apparent gulf between the democratic institutions of government and the new arenas of networked governance. Indeed, some researchers called for a democratic anchorage of governance networks in representative democracy through the exercise of administrative and political forms of metagovernance. While the notion of democratic anchorage directed our attention towards the democratic legitimacy that elected governments can bestow on the relatively self-governing networks, it still saw politicians as external to the networked governance arenas and failed to see governance networks as a tool for strengthening democratic political leadership. To remedy this problem, our paper endeavors to connect governance and government by showing that governance networks can help to democratize elected governments by involving politicians in collaborative interactions that enhance their capacity to develop innovative and politically robust responses to wicked and unruly policy problems. The paper provides an overview of the theoretical argument about the democratizing impact of governance networks and presents the findings from an empirical study of how interactive governance in local networks can help to strengthen and democratize political leadership in ways that drastically reduce the distance between elected officials and the collaborative arenas of participatory governance. The paper concludes by demonstrating how the interface between governance and government may transform our thinking about democracy.

1. Introduction

Since the early 1990s, we have seen a growing appreciation of the role of network forms of governance in public administration research, public policy analysis and organizational studies (Ansell and Torfing, 2016). The scholarly interest in networks reflects their central role in local problem-solving, regional development, national policy-making and transnational regulation and governance. The discovery of governance network has had a huge impact on our understanding of modern governance (Kooiman, 1993). Hence, scholars across disciplines seem to agree that pluricentric governance networks provide an alternative to classical forms of unicentric top-down government and multicentric market competition (Kersbergen and Waarden, 2004). While interaction between public and private actors is by no means a novel phenomenon, governance networks offer a new way of conceptualizing the relatively institutionalized forms of collaborative interaction between relevant and affected actors that aim to produce public value by exchanging resources, coordinating actions and creating joint solutions based on mutual learning (Sørensen and Torfing, 2007).

Governance networks have their particular strength when it comes to aligning dispersed actors with different roles and interests (Rhodes, 1997), mobilizing resources across organizational and sectoral boundaries (Koppenjan and Klijn, 2004), and finding robust solutions to wicked and unruly problems through collaborative innovation (Hartley, Sørensen and Torfing, 2013). Hence, the new and emerging governance literature claims that governance networks contribute to making public governance more effective (Provan and Milward, 1995; Kickert, Klijn and Koppenjan, 1997). This paper takes a different perspective on governance networks by exploring their democratizing impact (Sørensen and Torfing, 2005a). Governance networks expand the range of public and private actors that may influence public policy and governance. They involve actors with relevant experiences, ideas and resources in joint decision-making based on a combination of hard-nosed bargaining and open-ended deliberation. They also provide opportunities for intensely affected actors to influence public decision-making. Governance networks might suffer from a too selective and biased participation of the 'usual suspects' that often consist of the most outspoken, active and resourceful societal actors (Young, 2000; Hansen, 2007). Nevertheless, they tend to widen and pluralize political participation beyond the ruling elites, while simultaneously stimulating public debate and contestation and building joint ownership over new and bold solutions. Although governance networks sometimes lead to de-politicization as policy problems become subject to pragmatic processes of technical problem-solving involving a limited number of policy experts, they hold a strong democratizing potential by producing and disseminating information, knowledge and ideas and by inviting societal actors to discuss and contribute to the development and implementation of new policy solutions. In short, governance networks provide an essential ingredient in the current attempt to open up government and promote integrative and deliberative forms of democracy as a supplement to the aggregative and majoritarian forms of democracy that fail to meet the increasingly assertive citizens' demand for more active and direct participation (Warren, 2002; Nye, 2008; Norris, 2011; Dalton and Welzel, 2014).

This paper aims to advance our understanding of the democratizing impact of governance networks. This objective is achieved by showing how the scholarly debate has moved from an initial appreciation of the *pluralization of governance* through the formation of relatively self-governing networks, via a growing interest in how governance networks can be *democratically anchored in metagoverning politicians*, to a

novel focus on how governance network can *strengthen democratic political leadership*. Our claim is that the governance debate that once sprang from the recognition of the limitations of the formal institutions of government has come full circle and can help us to understand how interactive forms of governance can improve the functioning of democratically elected governments. Hence, while some scholars have argued that the rise of new forms of network governance has led to a decline in the conventional forms of democratic government (Mair, 2013), we argue that interactive governance is a potential remedy for the current crisis of democratic political leadership and may help to restore the trust in government.

The paper proceeds in the following way. First, we define the central notions of 'governance', 'interactive governance' and 'governance networks' and briefly rehearse the explanation of the surge in network forms of governance and the standard caveats that apply to the study of governance networks. Next, we provide a theoretical account of the progressive unfolding of three different versions of the argument about the democratizing impact of governance. The third version advances and defines the notion of interactive political leadership that seem to provide a new bridge between interactive governance and democratic government that emphasizes how the former can improve the latter. The next section offers an empirical illustration of what interactive political leadership might look like in practice. Here we present the findings from a contemporary case study of interactive political leadership in the Danish municipality of Gentofte. We describe and assess the Gentofte Model in order to see how interactive governance helps to strengthen the political leadership of the local councilors and we discuss the scope conditions for interactive political leadership to emerge. The discussion section reflects on the lessons that we can draw from the case study and discusses how interactive political leadership may change our understanding of democracy. Finally, the conclusion summarizes the argument and points out some avenues for further research into the democratizing impact of governance networks.

2. From governance to governance networks

Hugh Heclo (1978) was one of the first scholars to discover that public governance and policy-making was not fully congruent with what goes on in the formal institutions of government. In his study of the US Congress, he found that policy-making is often moved from the formal institutions of government to more informal policy subsystems involving a broad range of issue-specific actors. In the beginning of the 1990s, British, German and Dutch scholars confirmed the role of issue networks and policy communities in public regulation and governance (Marsh and Rhodes, 1992; Marin and Mayntz, 1991; Kooiman, 1993). The seminal work of Elinor Ostrom (1990) played a key role in showing the strength of collaborative forms of governance vis-à-vis hierarchies and markets. Soon everyone talked about governance networks as a new third way of governing society and the economy (Rhodes, 1997; Kickert, Klijn and Koppenjan, 1997; Pierre, 2000; Sørensen and Torfing, 2007). The governance debate gradually spread from local and national levels to global and transnational arenas (Kohler-Koch and Rittberger, 2006; Djelic and Sahlin-Andersson, 2006), from the North America and Western Europe to other parts of the world (Torfing et al., 2012) and from public administration and public policy to other social science disciplines (Chhotray and Stoker, 2009). As a result, 'governance' has become one of the most frequently used terms in the social sciences.

Governance is a popular but notoriously slippery term, as the lack of agreement on its definition readily attests. The conceptual difficulties stem from the fact that governance is both defined generically as the process of steering society and the economy in accordance with common goals and as a particular form of networked governance based on collaboration between a plethora of public and private actors rather than hierarchical command and control or market-based competition. Hence, as Claus Offe (2008) rightly observes, 'governance' is both an *Überbegriff* that captures competing modes of governance and a *Gegenbegriff* that highlights the role of networks as opposed to hierarchical rule and market competition.

To escape the conceptual confusion, we shall first define 'governance' as a general term and then proceed to define the subspecies of governance in terms of 'interactive governance' and 'network governance'. Whereas the classical notion of government refers to the formal institutions of government including parliament, cabinet, ministries, courts etc., *governance* denotes the formal and informal processes through society and the economy are steered in accordance with common goals (Torfing et al., 2012). The steering process can be organized in a hierarchical way based on imperative command, as a competitive process in the market place, or as an interactive process based on multi-actor collaboration. Pursuing the last option, *interactive governance* can be defined as the complex process through which actors from state, market and civil society interact in order to formulate and achieve common goals through collective action (Torfing et al., 2012). Interactive governance involves public and private actors in formulating and realizing societal goals and may take the form of public hearings and consultations based on deliberation, risk-sharing public-private partnerships, or collaboration in networks of interdependent actors. Drawing on the burgeoning research literature, we can define *governance networks* as a horizontal articulation of interdependent, but operationally autonomous actors from the public and/or private sector (Sørensen and Torfing, 2007). The actors interact with one another through ongoing negotiations that take place within an institutional framework of rules, norms, values and specialized forms of knowledge. The networked interaction facilitates self-regulation in the 'shadow of hierarchy' (Scharpf, 1994) and contributes to the production of public value in a broad sense of the term.

The research literature frequently cites societal transformations leading to an increasingly complex, fragmented and multi-layered society as the main explanation of the recent surge in pluricentric governance in and through networks (Kooiman, 1993, 2003). However, the reference to the functional effects of governance networks in terms of unifying and aligning different organizational actors and coordinating their actions does not explain why governance networks emerge in the first place. Governance networks are not functional prerequisites, but results of strategic action and, thus, conditional upon the mutual recognition of the need to exchange or pool resources, knowledge and ideas in order to solve a given problem or carry out a particular task (Kickert, Klijn and Koppenjan, 1997). As such, the key driver of the surge in governance networks is the growing realization among public and private actors that no individual actor possess all the skills, knowledge and resources necessary to solve the wicked and unruly problem that we are currently facing at the local, national and global level. Hence, the recognition of the limitations of both insulated hierarchical authorities and competitive market actors is the key driver of the surge in collaborative governance in networks (Roberts, 2000).

Finally, we shall like to flag a few caveats in order to avoid some common misunderstandings (Torfing et al., 2012). The first caveat is that the surge in governance networks does not result in a 'hollowing out of the

state' (Milward and Provan, 2000). The growth of governance networks does not mitigate the role and impact of the state, but rather transforms its *modus operandi* as it increasingly finds itself in a situation where it must govern in and through the initiation, orchestration and direction of governance networks (Pierre and Peters, 2000).

The second caveat is that governance networks, despite the recent surge and scholarly attention, are not an entirely new phenomenon. In many countries and policy areas there are long traditions for the involvement of the social partners and other relevant actors in the formulation and implementation of public policy. What *is* new, however, is that political scientists and central decision makers increasingly view governance networks as both an efficient and legitimate way of governing of complex and multi-layered societies. This tendency is evidenced by the increasing reliance on governance networks within and across different levels of government (Marcussen and Torfing, 2007).

The final caveat is that governance networks do not provide a panacea in terms of a universally applicable tool for solving all public problems and challenges. When it comes to the exercise of public authority such as tax collection and taking children into care, there are good reasons for placing such tasks in the hands of public bureaucracies that operate in accordance with legal rules and can be held accountable for their action and inaction. Likewise, when it comes to the production and delivery of standardized public goods and services such as public roads and meals for elderly people who cannot take care of themselves, private markets will often give us the best value for public money. By contrast, governance networks have their ultimate strength when it comes to managing complex problems that are hard to define and even harder to solve and require the development of new and innovative solutions (Klijn and Koppenjan, 2004).

3. Democractizing governance

The primary reason for creating governance networks is to benefit from 'collaborative advantage' (Huxham and Vangen, 2005) and to exploit the 'flexibility gain' associated with informal interaction in networks (Milward and Provan, 2006). Cultivating collaborative relations between network actors is time-consuming and decision making in network arenas is sometimes succumbing to inertia. However, alignment and coordination of different actors, mobilization of their resources and energies, and production of joint solutions tend to make public governance more effective (Ansell and Gash, 2008).

Although it is seldom the primary motive, governance may also contribute to making public governance more democratic. In this section, we provide an overview of the debate on the democratizing impact of governance networks. Hence, we aim to show how the scholarly debate has moved from an initial appreciation of the pluralization of governance, via the insistence on the democratic anchorage of governance networks through metagovernance, to a new focus on how governance networks may help elected politicians in representative bodies to strengthen their political leadership.

3.1 Version 1.0: the pluralization of public governance

Already Tocqueville (2013 [1835-40]) appreciated the active participation of citizens in the local democracy in the New England townships. Much later, Mills (1956) claimed that the privileged access of a particular set

of interest groups to influence government decisions was leading to an undemocratic elitism, whereas Dahl (1961, 1989) insisted that the involvement of a variety of intensely affected actors in shifting policy coalitions would help exposing government to a plurality of legitimate demands. Although the original debate between elitists and pluralists did not focus on governance networks *per se*, it fostered a growing recognition of the democratic potential and danger of involving societal actors in public governance. In the current debate on governance networks (Pierre, 2000), we find a similar ambivalence in the assessment of their democratic impact (Klijn and Skelcher, 2007). Some argue that governance networks undermine political equality and the democratic transparency of public governance (Papadopoulos, 2007; Bexell and Mörtz, 2010), while others claim that governance networks provide new arenas for empowered participation that help to narrow the gap between what governments do and what citizens want (Hirst, 2000; Fung and Wright, 2003; Warren, 2009).

Despite the warnings that governance networks might undermine the institutions of representative democracy by moving policy decisions into collaborative arenas in which the participants are appointed rather than elected and thus impossible to hold to account in the next election (Mair, 2013), many scholars have welcomed the different ways that governance networks supplement the traditional forms of representative democracy. The democratizing impact of governance networks has three components.

The first is that governance networks help to enhance participation on the output side of the political system (Hirst, 2000; Fung and Wright, 2003). Whereas the institutions of representative democracy allow people to express their political preferences on the input-side of the political system, governance networks allow citizens and organized stakeholders to participate directly in the formulation, implementation and adjustment of public solutions at the output-side. The active and direct participation in collaborative governance arenas charged with solving public problems tends to make government more responsive to the preferences of the people.

The second component of the democratizing impact is that governance networks introduce a supplementary criterion for inclusion in political decision making. Whereas representative democracy distributes the right to participate in general elections based on citizenship and geographical location, governance networks give relevant and affected actors an additional channel for political influence. The involvement of stakeholders is often motivated by the wish of public administrators to improve the quality and effectiveness of public governance (Warren, 2009). Nevertheless, it has a democratizing effect because it involves a plethora of actors with relevant ideas and resources and legitimate interests in securing acceptable outcomes. The widening of participation based on relevance and affectedness helps to realize the Tocquevillian conception of democracy as the self-government of the people.

The final component is that governance networks help to recruit and empower a growing number of sub-elites that challenge the ruling elites. Political participation used to be organized by political parties, but with the decline of party membership and voter turnout and the tendency of political leaders to retreat into the formal institutions of government (Mair, 2013), there is a growing risk that the political elites become isolated from the population and difficult to hold to account for their actions and inactions. Governance networks provide a way out of this impasse by facilitating the recruitment of ordinary citizens as members of competing sub-elites that are empowered by their participation in various governance

networks and can put pressure on the established elites to become more responsive and to provide solid accounts for their political decisions (Etzioni-Halevy, 1993; Esmark, 2007). Governance networks not only allow citizens to become members of different sub-elites, but also enhance elite competition when the established political elites are challenged by the sub-elites.

In sum, governance networks may democratize public governance by enhancing the participation of plurality of societal actors based on relevance and affectedness and thereby enhancing the competition between elites and sub-elites.

3.2 Version 2.0: Democratic anchorage of governance networks

The initial appraisal of how governance networks may contribute to democratizing public governance by building participatory and collaborative arena was soon followed by worrisome concerns for the closure and seclusion of governance networks, the lack democratic accountability, and ultimately the absence of government control. Governance networks are effective governance mechanisms because they bring together interdependent actors in a relatively self-regulated process through which problems and solutions are negotiated and flexibly adjusted to changing contexts and emerging events. However, the self-regulated character of networks poses a democratic problem. There is an eminent risk that governance networks may take the form of 'private interest governments' (Streeck and Schmitter, 1985) that undermine the ability of democratically elected governments to govern society and the economy.

To put it in a slightly different way, governance networks may have a democratizing effect on public governance, but their composition and functioning might not be very democratic (Sørensen and Torfing, 2005a). Governance networks may enhance the input and output legitimacy of public governance by spurring the participation and collaboration of relevant and affected actors (Skelcher and Torfing, 2010), but the network arenas themselves might not have much democratic legitimacy as they may fail to respect core democratic principles and escape a whole set of democratic controls. To solve this problem, it has been suggested that governance networks ought to be analyzed in terms of their democratic anchorage in a set of rules for democratic participation and interaction and a number of territorially and functionally demarcated political constituencies (Sørensen and Torfing, 2005b).

There are four sources of democratic anchorage that in each their different way can lend democratic legitimacy to governance networks. The first anchorage point is the commonly accepted rules and norms for democratic interaction. Hence, governance networks will gain democratic legitimacy if they are anchored in a commonly accepted grammar of democratic conduct specifying some basic rules and norms about democratic inclusion, deliberation and democratic self-reflexivity. The second anchorage point is the territorially defined citizenry affected by the actions and inactions of the governance network in question. Hence, governance networks will gain democratic legitimacy if they are anchored in a competent and critical citizenry that assesses and scrutinizes accessible narrative accounts produced and made publicly available by the governance network. The third anchorage point is provided by the different groups and causes that the network actors claim to represent. Hence, governance networks will gain democratic legitimacy if they are anchored in the represented constituencies and these have the ability and opportunity to evaluate and influence the way that their views and interest are constructed and pursued by

those who claim to represent them in the networked policy arena. The last and perhaps most important anchorage point is the elected politicians. Governance networks will gain democratic legitimacy if they are anchored in elected politicians that are capable of metagoverning the relatively self-governing networks.

Torfinn et al. (2012) define metagovernance as the attempt to influence the process and outcomes of governance networks without reverting too much to traditional forms of hierarchical command and control. Research shows that politicians are playing a limited role in managing complex networks and that the exercise of metagovernance is typically left to public managers (Sørensen, 2006), even when politicians are formally in charge (Klijn and Koppenjan, 2000; Koppenjan, Kars and Voort, 2011). Part of the reason why politicians play such a weak role in metagoverning governance networks is that metagovernance tends to be defined in managerial terms and equated with the efforts of administrative facilitators to optimize the efficiency and effectiveness of the networking process. As such, governance network researchers have failed to recognize that metagovernance involves political decisions that only elected politicians have sufficient legitimacy to make. New research solves the problem by distinguishing 'political metagovernance' from 'administrative metagovernance' (Sørensen and Torfinn, 2016a). Whereas the latter focusses on making interactive governance smooth and efficient, the former focuses on the political questions about agenda setting, the inclusion and exclusion of network actors, the resolution of political conflicts, and the handling of political and normative trade-offs inherent to the outcomes.

The concept of metagovernance provides an important addition to the concept of governance networks. Metagovernance involves the regulation of self-regulation (Jessop, 2002) and thus mitigates the problem of governance networks becoming ungovernable due to their self-regulating character and the absence of joint utility function. When elected politicians engage in the metagovernance of governance networks, it becomes possible to maintain the idea of the primacy of politics, i.e. the idea that elected governments have sway in public policy and governance, at least in the final instance.

In sum, the second version of the argument moved from the initial celebration of governance networks for their contribution to enhancing and widening participation to take a more sober look at the need for democratic anchorage of self-governing networks through political metagovernance, which provides a bridge from the traditional forms of elected government to the new forms of interactive governance.

3.3 Version 3.0: Interactive political leadership

The democratic anchorage of governance networks in metagoverning politicians allow government officials to reap the fruits of interactive governance in networks of interdependent actors that both can improve the effectiveness and democratic quality of public governance. Hence, the elected politicians' active role in designing, framing and managing governance networks mitigates the risk that governance networks run stray, become captured by private interests, or produce politically unacceptable decisions. Elected politicians might even participate themselves in the governance networks in order to influence their agenda, the goals and the final decisions. As such, metagovernance helps to turn governance into a tool of government to be used whenever politicians believe that the nature of the problem or task calls for the involvement of a broader range of actors in order to understand the problem, find a solution and build a broad-based ownership that enables implementation.

While this is all fine, the problem is that the argument about political metagovernance overlooks the fact that elected politicians might not only consider to delegate political decision-making power to relatively self-governing networks that they can metagovern at some distance. Indeed, they might also consider using governance networks to strengthen their political leadership that essentially involves: 1) identifying and defining the most pressing problems and challenging confronting the political community; 2) giving direction to and participating in the design of feasible and robust solutions; and 3) mobilizing support for the implementation of the new and bold solutions (Tucker, 1995).

Western societies are currently facing a large number of wicked and unruly problems such as climate change, immigration of refugees, economic slump, growing health care expenditure, traffic congestion in big cities, acts of terrorism, etc. These are all problems that call for the exercise of political leadership. However, the conditions for political leadership are far from favorable since the European populations are divided along numerous socioeconomic and post-materialist cleavages, the membership basis of political parties is dwindling, the trust in government is low, and political power is dispersed between a growing number of organizations, sectors and levels of governance. The unfavorable conditions for political leadership are exacerbated by the fact that elected politicians continue to be locked into specialized political committee work (Strøm, 1998), administrative processes of technocratic policy adjustment (Katz and Mair, 1995; Page, 2012) and public blame games played out in the mediatized drama-democracy (Hood, 2011; Klijn, 2014). As a result, many politicians end up suffering from tunnel vision, lack of opportunities for engaging in policy formulation, and insulation from citizens and societal actors that can help them to understand the problems at hand, inspire them to find new solutions and provide support to their implementation (Kjær and Opstrup, 2016). To put it bluntly, politicians are casted in the role as elected kings. They sit in their castle with the drawbridge pulled up and are forced to rely on the advice that their administrative aides whisper in their ears.

In order to strengthen their political leadership role, elected politicians need to engage in problem-focused interactions with relevant and affected actors that can provide the inputs they need to define and solve the problems and tasks they are confronting and can help them to implement the solutions through joint and coordinated action. A recent study based on interviews with leading politicians in five Anglophone countries shows that political leaders increasingly respond to their need for information, knowledge and ideas by seeking input from external actors (Lees-Marshment, 2015). The politicians solicit inputs from actors inside and outside government, evaluate the quality of this input, and integrate new ideas into their deliberations about how to solve important policy problems. Empirical examples of how politicians interact with relevant and affected actors are provided by Bingham, Nabatchi and O'Leary (2005), Sirianni (2009), Hendricks (2013), Ercan (2014) and Crosby, Hart and Torfing (2017). The studies clearly demonstrate the benefits of an interactive political leadership defined as the process through which politicians identify, define and solve important policy problems through a sustained interaction with public and private actors that provide the input and support that they need for taking the political community forward.

The formation of and participation in governance networks provide an excellent tool for politicians who seek to develop a more interactive political leadership. Governance networks prevent the risk that policy interaction becomes diffuse and sporadic by bringing together a diverse set of interdependent actors in a

systematic, issue-oriented and sustained dialogue in which politicians can gather information and inspiration, formulate and test their own ideas, and engage in processes of mutual learning. There is no guarantee that politicians use the input they get from participation in governance networks, especially not if the networks are informal, the network actors are weak and the amount of power delegated to the networks is limited. However, in the right circumstances, the input politicians get from the other networks actors may provide an invaluable resource for making well-informed, creative and bold solutions that enjoy widespread support.

In sum, governance networks might help to reinforce and democratize the political leadership exercised in and by elected politicians in the formal institutions of government. Hence, rather than weakening political decision-making in representative democracy (Mair, 2013), governance networks might actually strengthen political leadership and the ability of government to govern. Participation in governance networks fosters an interactive political leadership that decenters the role of the politicians while simultaneously providing the resources they need to bring the political community forward. In this process, politicians are transformed from 'elected kings' to 'team captains' that select and empower their team and spur joint deliberation while themselves becoming better informed and more inspired in return.

4. The Gentofte Model for enhancing interactive political leadership

In order to illustrate and explore how governance networks can help strengthening and democratizing political leadership, we report the findings from an empirical case study of institutional reforms of the conditions for exercising local political leadership in the Danish municipality of Gentofte (Sørensen and Torfing, 2015a, 2015b, 2016b, 2016c). After several years of experimentation with different forms of participatory governance and citizen engagement, the City Council discussed the need for institutional reform of the political working conditions in March 2014. A year later, the mayor and the city manager called a meeting in the Economic Committee in which they presented a concrete model for how to strengthen policy development in close dialogue with local citizens and stakeholders. The model was discussed, amended and finally approved by an overwhelming majority in the City Council's meetings in May and June with effect from August 2015.

The municipality asked us to evaluate the new model that was inspired by ideas that we had presented in a seminar in the beginning of 2013. We conducted the research-based evaluation study in the period from September 2015 to June 2016. Data collection included available documents (agendas, minutes, reports and policy documents from meetings and events), observation of meetings, 28 qualitative interviews and an online survey with politicians, public administrators and citizens. The response rates in the survey were 94 % for the politicians (n = 18), 100 % for the administrators (n = 27) and 80 % for the citizens (n = 95).

In the subsequent analysis of the empirical findings, we first explain the drivers and political objective of the design and implementation of the 'Gentofte Model', which the new institutional design is commonly referred to by other municipalities. This explanation is followed by a careful description of the form and functioning of the new model of collaborative governance and an assessment of its democratizing impact

on the exercise of political leadership. We conclude the analysis by reflecting on the national and local scope conditions for the process and outcomes that we have analyzed.

4.1 The drivers and political objective of the institutional reform in Gentofte Municipality

Gentofte is an affluent, well-managed and innovative municipality north of Copenhagen. It is led by the long-time, conservative mayor, Hans Toft, who commands an absolute majority in the City Council and leads a broad coalition consisting of social democrats and liberal and social liberal parties. The interviews reveal three important anecdotal events that seem to have fueled the reform of the political working conditions in Gentofte. The first took place in a meeting in the standing political committee for Culture and Leisure. The public managers arrived to the meeting with a stack of applications for financial support from the Cultural Fund and asked the politicians to assess the applications and make the final recommendations. The chair of the standing committee looked at the pile of applications and said that he thought that case processing was an administrative task that should not be carried out by elected politicians. What the politicians could do instead was to issue political guidelines for the public administrations decisions. Both politicians and administrators accepted the new procedure that gradually spread to other areas as well.

The second event happened in a City Council meeting where the councilors asked the administration to go through the minutes from all the ordinary meetings in the City Council from the previous year in order to find out how often the politicians endorsed an administrative recommendation without any political discussion in the City Council. When the politicians later discovered that they had accepted 96.7 % of all the administrative recommendations without any political debate, they agreed that the working conditions needed to be changed to allow more time for political discussion of local problems and challenges.

The third event was relayed to us by the Mayor. The City Council had decided to build a new indoor skater arena and found the winner of an architectural competition. The mayor, who has an exceptionally good relation with the local youth, went down to the local square to show the skaters the drawings from the winning project. The surprising response that he got was that 'it looked great, but did not work as an indoor arena for skating'. The dimensions were wrong, he was told. The mayor went straight back to the City Hall and cancelled the winning project and invited the skaters to co-design a new version with the right dimensions. The lesson drawn from this was that problems can only be properly solved, if the users are involved in the design process.

The three events were important drivers for the politicians in redesigning the institutional set-up for how they work as politicians. Another important driver was that public managers were interested in finding new ways of mobilizing the local citizens and stakeholders as an active resource and constructive force in public problem solving. Far too often, the citizens came across as exceedingly demanding and dissatisfied. Finally, the city manager thought that there had been an 'unfortunate role-switch according to which the politicians had assumed responsibility for a broad range of administrative decisions while the administrators had assumed responsibility for policy development'. This trend had to be reversed.

Based on these events and experiences, the primary political motive for the introduction of the Gentofte Model was to improve the knowledge basis of the elected councilors and provide better opportunities for

them to engage in policy development through a close dialogue with local citizens and stakeholders (City Council, 2015). This political objective was to be achieved without increasing the amount of time that the councilors spend on their work as councilors. They all have a limited and over-stretched time-budget since they are all spare-time politicians, except for the mayor who is the only full-time and fully employed politician.

4.2 The core features of the Gentofte Model

The new institutional design in Gentofte transforms the operation of the City Council and its Standing Committees and introduces a new kind of open, thematic, ad hoc committees called Task Committees. When the City Council introduced the new model, it formed 8 Task Committees, typically consisting of 5 councilors and 10 appointed citizens and assisted by 3-4 administrators acting as facilitators and resource persons that provide relevant information when need be. The City Council formulated, discussed and approved a written mandate for each Task Committee. The mandate describes the political and socioeconomic background, the problem or challenge to be solved, the political premises for solving it, and the nature and time of expected delivery (a vision, policy, strategy, vision, action plan, etc.). Most importantly, it defines the 'competence profiles' of the citizens to be appointed to the Task Committee in order to ensure input from a varied group of citizens with different backgrounds and voices. The City Council decided that stakeholder organizations could participate as individual citizens with a special voice, but not as formal representatives of their particular organization.

The mandate for each of the Task Committees, including a call for citizen participants matching the competence profiles, was widely advertised in local newspapers and magazines, on posters in libraries and supermarkets, and at different websites. The advertisement urged citizens to registers at the municipal website if they wanted to participate in one of the Task Committees. In a subsequent City Council meeting, the councilors appointed the citizen members by the matching the registered would-be citizen participants with the competence profiles for each Task Committee. The registered citizens that were not appointed would later have the chance to become involved in sub-committees, public hearings, workshops and camps organized by the Task Committees. The City Council also decided which of the councilors should participate in which Task Committee. The politicians were distributed based on a mathematical model that ensures proportional representation according to party size across all task committees. This meant that the two small parties with only a single seat in the City Council get to participate several Task Committees, the exact number depending on whether they form an alliance.

The Task Committees meet for 2-3 hours at fixed dates over a number of months (typically 3-6 months but some of them have a longer endurance). A politician chairs the meeting by welcoming everybody at the beginning of the meeting and drawing the conclusions at the end. Between the opening and the closing the meeting is facilitated by an experienced administrator that aim to get everybody involved in open-ended discussions about the problem or challenge at hand and the ways it can be dealt with or solved. The meetings are relatively informal, short presentations alternate with joint discussions and groups discussions and different deliberative techniques are used to drive the process forward. Guests are invited and the Task Committees occasionally make site-visits to local neighborhoods or service institutions. Several interview persons remarked that the process at some points seemed rather chaotic, but that it, nevertheless, ended

with a satisfactory result. When the work was completed, the Task Committee presented its results to the City Council that after a formal deliberation in an ordinary council meeting made the final decision about whether to endorse, amend or reject the recommended policy solution and eventually how to finance and implement it.

In order for the councilors to find time to participate in one, two or more Task Committees the time spend on meetings in the Standing Committees has been drastically reduced. The number of meetings is reduced from eleven to four per year and the meetings are only supposed to last for two hours whereas before they could be much longer. At the same time, the task of the Standing Committees is re-defined so that they no longer have to do administrative case processing, but instead can focus on strategic monitoring of the policy area and the policy programs for which they are responsible. If the Standing Committees detect particular problems and challenges, they can respond either by developing a new set of political guidelines for the administration or by proposing the formation of a new Task Committee. In order to facilitate this transformation of the Standing Committees, the direct responsibility for administrative operations is transferred to the City Council and the Economic Committee and in some cases delegated to the administration itself.

To facilitate communication and make sure that the elected councilors have all the information they need, a new digital information platform was created. In addition, the political statutes governing the operation of the City Council were redrafted to fit the new institutional design. Only the remuneration of the councilors for chairing and attending meeting in the Standing Committees was retained in order not to rock the boat too much and generate unnecessary opposition to the reform.

The new institutional design in Gentofte creates a new division of labor among the key actors. The public administrators – after consultation with the political chairs – prepare and facilitate the meetings in the Task Committees. The elected politicians spend most of their time on policy development in relation to salient issues. The citizens co-create new policy solutions together with the politicians. There is a shared responsibility for policy implementation, although the administration has the formal responsibility. The Gentofte Model shifts two thirds of the politicians' time consumption from administrative case processing to political deliberation and policy development. Policy problems are defined, discussed and solved in collaborative networks in which the politicians get input from a broad range of citizens with different experiences, ideas and resources, but the political agenda is set by the City Council that also retains the right to amend or reject the recommendations from the Task Committees. In other words, the elected politicians act as metagovernors that initiate and participate in governance networks that help to provide knowledge, ideas and support that help strengthening their political leadership.

4.3 Assessment of how interactive governance strengthen and democratize political leadership

The Task Committees will help to strengthen the political leadership of the local councilors if the networked interaction and policy deliberation with the citizens contribute to understanding and defining the problems at hand, provide relevant input and stimulate learning, and generate support for the implementation of new and bold solutions. While the written mandate specifies the problem or challenge that the Task Committees should address, there seems to be considerable room for reframing the problem in course of

the discussion. The problem definition in the mandate is often formulated in general terms and the Task Committee is expected to provide a deeper understanding on the problem and if necessary to re-define it. The surveys show that 60 % of the politicians agree that the Task Committees gave them a better understanding of the problems and challenges that they were supposed to deal with. To illustrate, the politicians from the Task Committee charged with developing a new youth policy report that the discussions with the youngsters in the first couple of meetings completely changed their perception of the problem that a new youth policy should aim to tackle. However, there were also politically enforced limits to the reframing of policy problems. Hence, the Task Committee charged with integration of refugees was not allowed to include questions about the housing situation for refugees that was a political hot potato.

Moving on to the design of new solutions, the written mandate clearly signals that this is the most important task for the new collaborative arenas. One of the councilors argues that the dialogue with the local citizens and stakeholders is important because 'we cannot get all the new ideas ourselves from inside the City Hall'. The networked policy deliberations appear to have been successful in generating new ideas and stimulating learning. The survey reveals that 53 % of the politicians agree that participation in the Task Committees have given them new inputs and ideas. In addition, 54 % of them agree that the Task Committees have fostered a constructive and crosscutting dialogue that they have learned a lot from participating in. New inputs and mutual learning seem to translate into improved problem-solving capacity. Hence, 59 % of the politicians agree that the Task Committees have improved the ability of the City Council to solve important societal problems and 48 % of them agree that the Task Committees have contributed to the development of new and better solutions that would not have been developed in the Standing Committees and at the meeting in the City Council. Importantly, the citizens tend to agree with the politicians' positive assessment: 97 % of them agree that both politicians and citizens have learned a lot about the policy problem and the possible solutions through their participation and 88 % of them agree that the dialogical interaction has led to the development of good and feasible solutions. An executive public manager from the municipality puts it this way: 'I hear both politicians and citizens saying that the quality of the political solutions has improved and there is a shorter distance from idea to action'. In addition, there are several reports of the joint development of innovative solutions. For example, the new traffic policy draws on behavioral 'nudging' insights instead of calling for investments in expensive infrastructures and the strategy for integrating refugees creates a novel combination of language and job training.

Finally, when it comes to the mobilization of support for the implementation of the new solutions, the Task Committees exceed the expectations. Hence, 70 % of the politicians agree that the Task Committees have given the citizens a greater understanding of the difficult political choices and 79 % agree that the Task Committees have contributed to involving citizens more actively in the implementation of new policies. In addition, there are several reports in the interviews about how the citizens that participated in the Task Committees have played an active role in the implementation process or want to follow the implementation process in order to monitor progress. A good example is that two young girls from the Task Committee on youth policy have been touring around to schools, high schools and youth clubs to tell about the new youth policy. In some cases, the local youth have started to implement the new policy without any support from the municipality. More generally, the participatory and collaborative process in the Task Committees seem to have enhanced the legitimacy of the new policy solutions. As one of the leading

administration states: 'I think that we could easily have made most of policies that are developed in the Task Committees in the administration. However, it gives a much higher legitimacy when they are developed in the Task Committees'. Legitimacy is crucial for securing support for implementation.

As such, the political leadership of the local councilors has been strengthened by their participation in local governance networks. The politicians have benefitted from the input and support from the citizens and that has led to a strengthening and democratization of their political leadership. Hence, the survey shows that 82 % of the politicians agree that the Task Committees have given the citizens more influence on the political decisions. There is always a risk that citizen engagement give more influence to the active, outspoken and resourceful middle classes than to the less advantaged parts of the population. However, the new procedure for recruiting the citizen participants in the Task Committees seems to have solved that problem. Hence, the survey indicates that 65 % of the politicians agree that a broad range of citizens with different background and opinions were recruited to the Task Committees. A local councilor concludes: 'for me the introduction of the Task Committees is an important democratization process. The only bad thing about it is that the local press does not write about all the positive aspects'. The last bit is interesting. The networked interaction with local citizens and stakeholders has strengthened and democratized their political leadership, but not helped them to become more visible in the mass media. Good stories about collaboration and democratic governance do not sell newspapers.

4.4 The national and local scope conditions for the Gentofte Model

Both in a Danish and Scandinavian context, the Gentofte Model stands out as a bold and comprehensive attempt to strengthen the political leadership of local councilors by creating collaborative arenas of networked interaction with local citizens and stakeholders. For that reason the municipality of Gentofte has recently received an endless stream of interested delegations from Denmark and abroad. The significance of the Gentofte Model begs the question of the scope conditions for the relative successful attempt to build an interactive political leadership. There is no reason to hide the favorable conditions for the emergence of the Gentofte Model. Three important country specific conditions of emergence springs to mind.

First, Denmark has a unique combination of a strong and well-functioning state with a low level of corruption and a strong and well-organized civil society with plenty of social capital. The concurrence of a strong state and a strong civil society has generated a longstanding tradition for public-private collaboration in formalized corporatist systems at the national level and more informal forms of co-creation at the local level.

Second, there is a high degree of devolution of public tasks to the local municipalities. As such, the Danish municipalities deliver most of the public welfare services and social transfer payments to the citizens, and they provide local infrastructures, regulation and support for culture, business and leisure activities, partly financed by municipal taxes. As such, they both have formal competences and economic resources to affect the lives of local citizens and stakeholders and that makes it both important and worthwhile for citizens and

local associations to participate in collaborative decision-making arenas and try to influence the decisions of local government.

Last but not least, there is a long tradition for collaborative responses to crises that goes back to the cooperative movement that helped Danish farmers to make the shift from crops to livestock farming when the new railroad brought cheap wheat from Russia to Europe in the 1870s. Later, the cooperative movement enabled the workers movement to mitigate the dislocating effects of the rapid industrialization from the 1890s onwards. The idea of collaborating to overcome crisis and dislocation has since been a central part of the Danish political DNA.

There also seem to be a number of conducive factors at the local level. First, the fact that Gentofte Municipality is economically consolidated and well managed is important as it creates a room for risk-taking reforms that might not have seen the light of day in a municipality with deep economic and managerial problems. Second, an above average educational and income level in the local population, with many academics that have experience with collective problem-solving from their work in public and private firms and organizations, tend to facilitate empowered participation in collaborative policy innovation. A third factor is the densely populated urban area that makes up the Gentofte Municipality. The social geography of Gentofte means that it is easy for everybody to come and participate in meetings in the city hall. Travel time will not exceed 15 minutes. The final factor is the presence of a stable political majority that means that the Mayor controls all the decisions in City Council. However, while the stable majority clearly mitigates the political risks, it also begs the question of why the mayor wants to involve the other councilors and the local citizens and stakeholders. On the one hand, this decision might lead to increased power sharing. On the other hand, it also tends to enhance the overall political governing capacity, and by that the political power of the mayor, by mobilizing local resources and creating a higher degree of input and output legitimacy that enables the municipality to do things it could not otherwise have done.

5. Democratic perspectives

Governance networks provide formal and informal arenas for participatory and collaborative governance that are democratically anchored to the extent that the elected politicians engage in political metagovernance of the relatively self-governing network arenas. However, the Gentofte Model reveals an entirely different use of governance networks, which instead of being a semi-detached supplement to the formal political institutions assist elected politicians and their administrative aides in tackling wicked and unruly problems in relation to which there is a huge need for inputs in terms of experiences, ideas and support. As such, the empirical case study shows that governance networks can be an integral part of local government and help to foster a more interactive political leadership.

Interactive political leadership based on sustained dialogical interaction between elected politicians and local citizens and stakeholders in formal and informal network arenas may help to improve the problem-solving capacity of local government. However, the tentative shift from sovereign to interactive political leadership also has a democratizing impact by anchoring the decisions of elected politicians in deliberative

interaction with relevant and affected actors that are selected by the politicians because they are believed to have something to offer.

The enhancement of interactive political leadership also has some wider implications for the way that we think of democracy. Indeed, it urges us to rethinking the core concepts of democratic mandate, democratic participation and democratic governance.

First, we need to rethink what it means to get a 'democratic mandate' when you are elected in a democratic election. The classical conception is that a democratic mandate gives elected politicians the right to govern on behalf of the people until Election Day where he or she will be held to account and may risk being ousted from office if the voters are dissatisfied with his or her political performance. The development of a more interactive political leadership change the conception of the democratic mandate since the elected politicians are not supposed to govern on behalf of the people, but in and through an ongoing dialogue with the citizens (Rosanvallón, 2011).

Second, the theory and practice of interactive political leadership challenge the traditional idea about 'citizen participation'. Since citizen participation in urban planning, environmental regulation etc. became fashionable in the 1970s we have seen citizen participation as a good thing in itself. It helps to give the intensely affected citizens democratic influence and that is good for democracy. With the development of an interactive political leadership citizen participation is no longer good merely because it enhances the political influence of affected citizens. Rather, it provides as a precondition for strengthening and democratizing political leadership (Lees-Marshment, 2015). Input from, and critical and learning-based interaction with, different kinds of citizens help elected politicians lead the local community in hard times.

Third, interactive political leadership may alter the way that democracy is conceived and practiced at the local level. The last 30 years there has been a strong tendency to develop a local 'counter-democracy' in Western societies. Hence, citizens increasingly have the right to criticize and oppose local plans in public hearings, express their dissatisfaction with public schools and other public service facilities through participation in user boards, exercise their free choice of service provider by voting with the feet, reject new policy proposals via participation in electronic citizen panels, and trash local politicians via social media. Thus, citizens are casted in the role of irresponsible veto actors with a license of criticize without seeing themselves as a part of the solutions. The cultivation of an interactive political leadership may change this completely unsustainable conception of the citizens by creating an 'interactive democracy' (Rosanvallón, 2011) in which citizens and local stakeholders participate in designing and implementing innovative policy solutions. Hence, the new Task Committees in Gentofte are not only bringing politics out to the citizens so that they can understand its complexity, but also bring the citizens into politics so that they can participate in and take responsibility for the formation of public policy decisions (Stoker, 2006).

Finally, the rise of interactive political leadership helps us to move beyond the longstanding conceptual bifurcation between an aggregative representative democracy in which politicians make democratic decisions based on majoritarian principles and an integrative participatory democracy in which a plethora of public and private actors make joint decisions based on deliberation in collaborative governance arenas. The integration of governance networks as a part of the local institutions government provide a hybrid

mechanism for co-creation of public policy solutions and thus helps to bridge gulf between representative and participatory democracy.

6. Conclusions and ways forward

This paper has explored the democratizing impact of governance networks that bring together interdependent actors from state, economy and civil society in a sustained, problem-focused interaction. We have argued that networked interaction between public and private actors may not only create participatory and collaborative arenas that are democratically anchored by political metagovernors, but also provide a source of information, inspiration and learning for elected politicians aiming to define policy problem, create new and better solutions and muster support for their implementation. We have dubbed the attempt to strengthen and democratic political leadership through sustained interaction with citizens and local stakeholder 'interactive political leadership'. Our hope is that the identification of empirical examples of interactive political leadership in Gentofte and elsewhere will inspire researchers and public decision makers to pay more attention to the way that elected politicians and their exercise of political leadership can benefit from participation in governance networks.

The main contribution of both our theoretical argument about interactive political leadership and the illustrative example from Gentofte is the rapprochement between the classical research on government and the new research on governance. While, originally, governance research established itself through an antagonistic dissociation from government, we now need to understand the impact that governance may have on the crisis-ridden democracy associated with the traditional institutions of government. As such, we believe that the concept of interactive political leadership holds the key to provide such an understanding and thus may reinvigorate and enrich the research on interactive governance as well as the theory and practice of political leadership.

However, the research in this area is still in its infancy and there is a profound need for further theoretical and empirical studies. In closing, we shall like to point to three questions that call for further research. The first question concerns the conceptual status of the concept of interactive political leadership. Is it a normative concept telling us what we need more of in the present political and democratic crisis, or is it an analytical concept enabling us to distinguish between different forms of democratic political leadership? The second question concerns the impact of interactive political leadership. How and to what extent can interactive political leadership contribute to solve complex problem and break policy deadlocks while building popular trust and democratic ownership to innovative policy solutions? The final question concerns the scope conditions for the successful expansion of interactive political leadership. What are the societal, institutional and political conditions for finding and enlarging practical examples of interactive political leadership and what does it take to change the role perceptions of citizens, politicians and public administration in order to support and sustain the exercise of interactive political leadership? Answering these pertinent questions will most likely require collaboration between groups of researchers that have been separated by the ongoing fragmentation of political science into isolated sub-disciplines. However, there seems to be a lot to gain from a reconciliation between governance research and political leadership theory (Helms, 2012).

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