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**Democratic performance in collaborations, hybrid
governance and networks¹**

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INTRODUCTION

This paper focuses on an analysis of two powerful dynamics that are at work in the governance of public policy in western Europe. The first is the use of alternatives to representative government as the instrument for developing policy and managing implementation. New jurisdictions are being created in which a non-elected governmental institution has the authority to formulate, determine and implement public policy within a specified policy and spatial domain. These include governance networks of various forms (incorporating public partnerships), quasi-governmental agencies and special purpose bodies, all of which have become established features of sub-national governmental systems (De Rynck and Voets 2006; Marcusson and Torfing 2006; Sullivan and Skelcher 2002).

The second dynamic is the increased interest in the democratic engagement of citizens in the governmental process. This is reflected in theoretical and applied debates about participative and deliberative democracy, and the possibilities for the creation of new spaces for constructive dialogue between civil society, business, and the state (Barnes, Newman and Sullivan, 2007, Cornwall et al, 2004). The result has been the growth of citizens' juries, on-line interactive forums, advisory groups of public service users, and other means of direct democratic expression.

The two trends present an apparent paradox. How can institutions with a public policy role, but having only an arm's length connection with representative government, be reconciled with demands for greater citizen engagement? These new jurisdictions emphasise a guardianship rather than democratic form of government (Dahl 1989). They bring together technical and professional experts, sometimes in alliance with expert citizens, to exercise their judgement in relation to the policy and spatial domain over which they have competence. Empirical research shows that these forms of governance have a democratic deficit (Koppell 2003; Skelcher, Mathur and Smith 2005). They have (sometimes considerable) autonomy from elected office holders; and the institutional safeguards for transparency and accountability are frequently less than those applying to the organs of representative government.²

However an alternative view is that this is not a paradox, but two sides of the same coin. This rests on the idea that the creation of jurisdictions outside the formal structures of representative democracy provide new dialogic spaces that are better able to accommodate citizen engagement, reach a wider range of publics, and be more responsive (Barnes et al, 2004; Lowndes and Sullivan, 2004; Fischer 2006). Here, new governance designs can be co-produced with citizens and evolve in ways not possible with the more constitutionally-defined institutions of representative government. Others, for example Swyngedouw, would contest this position, arguing that:

These forms of governance are innovative and often promising in terms of delivering improved collective services and they may indeed contain germs of ideas that may permit greater openness, inclusion and empowerment of hitherto excluded or marginalised social groups. However, there are equally

² There is also an argument in the literature on European institutions that the extent of the democratic deficit has been overstated (e.g. Moravcsik 2002).

strong processes at work pointing in the direction of a greater autocratic governmentality...and an impoverished practice of political citizenship' (2005:1993).

Sorting out whether we are facing a paradox or two sides of the same coin presents a challenging problem for researchers. This is a key task for scholars in the public policy field. Thus far, there has been limited academic attention to the democratic analysis of governance other than in respect of the constitutional design of representative democracy. Theory-building to explain or predict the democratic consequences of different governance designs beyond representative government is following active experimentation by policy makers, public managers, and a variety of stakeholder groups.

Establishing whether and to what extent we can regard these new jurisdictions as democratic requires theoretically-based but empirically-grounded democratic analysis of governance. This mandates methodological development to enable researchers to establish the relationship between democratic principles on the one hand, and on the other hand institutional designs for governance as they are enacted in different settings.

In addition, the literature in the field is often highly normative and uncontextualized, an issue noted by a small group of 'governance critics' including Davies (2007) and Marinetto (2003). We were interested in exploring the issues from a comparative dimension.

This paper provides an overview of recently completed research into the democratic performance of forms of participative governance in three European cities. The aim of the research was: To explain the extent of governance networks and their democratic performance through comparative analysis, and to identify normative principles and approaches that can strengthen their institutional design and resultant democratic practices. The paper sets out the methodology employed and draws out the main conclusions.

RESEARCH DESIGN

Conceptualisation and operationalisation

Our core issue was to analyse democratic performance. By democratic performance, we refer to the way in which the institutional hardware (codified rules) and institutional software (emergent practices) of specific forms of governance embody and express the basic conditions of democracy:

- How to provide legitimacy for the institution itself
- How to enable consent for its policies, programmes and budget, and
- How to ensure accountability for its actions (Skelcher, de Rynck, Klijn and Voets 2008).

The quality of democracy method used in comparative analysis of political and governmental systems is based on an 'old' institutionalist approach that privileges the institutional arrangements for ex ante legitimacy, procedural regularity, and ex post accountability (Mathur and Skelcher 2007). However the new jurisdictions we are

studying have a less exacting constitutional design than typically applies to representative organs of government. They have been created outside representative government in part because this offers institutional flexibility to create more effective or efficient ways of making and implementing public policy within their domain and/or allows for the varied engagement of a range of actors including citizens.

Thus, forms of governance evolve and are performed through the interaction between actors and their context. Consequently ‘the joint *experience* of collaboration becomes the key reference in securing such essential components as ‘good’ governance’. (Hajer 2005: 342, emphasis in original). Thus quality of democracy methods tells us something about the gap in relation to formal institutional design – the *hardware* of the structure – but nothing about the informal practices through which actors exercise agency – the *software* that operates in and around the hardware. For example, what views about democracy do public managers bring to their role in working within collaborative or participatory forms of governance?

We addressed these issues through an interpretive research strategy due to the exploratory nature of the study and the small number of cases. This involved qualitative and quantitative methods.

Comparative research

We sampled two policy issues (integration of migrants; neighbourhood regeneration) in three cities (Birmingham, Copenhagen and Rotterdam).

The two policy areas were sampled on theoretical grounds. The conventional wisdom in the literature is (a) that network governance is universal in Western nations (in the sense that it is not confined to particular countries) and (b) it is adopted by politicians because it enables them to meta-govern at a distance. Consequently our hypothesis was that we would expect to find evidence of its presence across policy issues, and particularly being deployed where new, complex issues had arisen. The regeneration policy sector was selected because it is a longstanding issue involving a wide range of public policy questions, including the level of community self-governance. Integration of migrants was selected because it has emerged as a new, complex and politically contested issue.

The cities were chosen because:

1. Regeneration and integration of migrants were significant policy issues.
2. There were differences in their governmental and democratic traditions.
3. Strong relationships with and support from Erasmus/ Roskilde Universities.
4. English widely spoken in Netherlands and Denmark.

Mapping

We used the Governance Assessment Tool to classify the formal features of the organisations at the heart of each governance network. This enabled us to establish the explicit institutional design in terms of rules covering four aspects of the design: transparency, internal governance, ethical conduct and external accountability.

Case studies

We conducted interviews with 66 government, third sector, community and business actors across the 2 policy sectors and three cities. Interviews followed a topic guide and were digitally recorded, professionally transcribed, and then analysed using NVivo. Interviews were easy to arrange and conduct, other than in relation to actors from organisations representing migrants where we were unable to obtain as many interviews as we wished, despite the assistance of experts in this area. This low response rate is to be expected given the social and political status and experience of these individuals.

We obtained significant assistance from academic colleagues in the collaborating universities in identifying relevant actors and organisations, translation of key terms, and induction into each city/policy sector's governance. These contacts also assisted in piloting the Q Sort with academic and policy colleagues.

Q Methodology study of public managers' attitudes to democracy and network governance

Early in the study we set out a normative agenda for achieving a higher level of methodological rigour and transparency in the democratic analysis of governance networks (Mathur and Skelcher 2007). We argued that Q Methodology was a potentially valuable technique to complement other research methods, enabling us to identify the patterns of subjective perspective held by actors involved in governance networks.

We made considerable investment in developing a robust and effective application of Q methodology. This involved identifying statements reflecting the scope of the debate on 'democracy and network governance'. We used systematic sampling to reduce our initial pool of 250 statements down to 36. We used web-enabled Q Methodology software, and selected FlashQ after piloting. This simulates the 'Solitaire' method where respondents sort each statement into a quasi-normal distribution in terms of their level of agreement/disagreement.

We had a poor response from participants in the sample networks, insufficient to undertake a full analysis. To compensate, we subsequently ran the Q study with a sample of approximately 100 public managers involved in network governance who were studying part-time for masters' degrees at the University of Birmingham and Erasmus University, Rotterdam respectively.³ This at least gave us a sample involved in participative/collaborative institutions in the two cities.

Q methodology requires a smaller response n than other forms of quantitative analysis, with 40-60 being regarded as sufficient (Watts and Stenner 2005). We had responses from 49 managers, of whom 22 were from England and 27 from the Netherlands. The samples were easy to access. Our collaborators in each university briefed the participants and encouraged them to respond. They also forwarded our e-mail invitation to participate, which included a web link to the Q sort software, directly to each individual through their masters' programme e-mail list.

³ We also sampled managers at Danish universities, but had a small response.

RESULTS

Our overall conclusion is that the connections between the institutions of network governance and those of representative democracy vary much more than the literature suggests. The democratic milieu of each nation and the political salience of the policy issue are important in determining the extent to which institutional arrangements tend towards network governance and away from representative government through public bureaucracies, and also the extent of involvement by politicians. In addition, it cannot be assumed that network governance forms a major part of the response to new complex policy issues, as the theory suggests. The deployment of network governance solutions is more contingent.

Our findings are:

Finding 1: The theoretical relationships between representative democracy and network governance can be clarified through their representation as four conjectures

Our literature review found that the relationship between network governance and representative democracy has lacked theoretical precision. The debate has been framed largely in terms of the consequences for accountability and transparency of relocating governmental decisions to arenas at arm's length to elected politicians. The theoretical debate is polarised. One view, often associated with a normative perspective on deliberative democracy, sees networks as arenas that offer new ways of connecting public policy-making to citizens, overcoming the limitations of representative democracy. The contrasting view is that networks give private interests a structural advantage in the public policy process.

We identified four conjectures (Klijn and Skelcher 2007):

1. **The incompatibility conjecture** argues that representative democracy and governance networks conflict because each is predicated on a different set of institutional norms. Representative democracy is premised on the primacy of electoral politics and a conception of the general (i.e. public) interest, represented through rules for transparency and accountability. This is threatened by governance networks whose norms are to do with flexible institutional designs that enable involvement of a variety of actors through self-selection, nomination, appointment and – only occasionally – election. The institutional designs are associated with lower levels of transparency and accountability.
2. **The complementarity conjecture** proposes that governance networks oil the wheels of representative democracy as it struggles to govern in a complex environment. Governance networks engage a wider range of actors in the policy process, connecting them in new ways with elected politicians and public managers and thus increasing the sensitivity of public decisions and programme implementation.
3. **The transitional conjecture** posits a wider evolution of governance forms from state-centric government to a network form consisting of decentred, distributed nodes of authority. Globalization, digital society, value plurality, and diminishing social capital in Western societies are causing representative democracy to lose its importance as a governing system.

The emergent network society is generating new forms of governance that more effectively enable collective choices to be made across overlapping jurisdictions.

4. **The instrumental conjecture** rests on the view that governmental actors increase their impact through the instrumental use of networks. Networks provide an instrument to structure the inputs to and outcomes from the policy process so that their alignment with dominant agendas is increased. This perspective applies a more critical reading to the relationship between governance networks and representative democracy, and can be located either in a notion of local elite strategies or the wider debate about changing forms of societal regulation in a neo-liberal context.

Finding 2: The form and extent of network governance is mediated by the democratic milieu at national or sub-national level

Our empirical analysis develops the critical position of Davies (2007), Marinetto (2003) and others, who argue that talk of the end of government in the face of governance has been overstated. In this age of globalisation and regionalisation, as Hay (2004) and others have argued, we cannot assume a convergence either of the trajectories of change or their outcomes.

In the migration policy sector, Copenhagen City Council governs through an executive politician working through traditional public administration, linked to an advisory Integration Council of elected migrants and nominated social partners and experts. Birmingham has a network governance solution, with an evolving multi-sector partnership board in which a wide range of stakeholders negotiate and take executive responsibility for the policy, with (until recently) no direct involvement of elected politicians and weak links to political steering mechanisms. Rotterdam has elements of institutional designs expected from network governance but also a clear relationship to elected politicians and city council departments.

These differences are reflected in the institutional designs (an example from Copenhagen is given in table 1), which can then be aggregated (table 2).

Table 1: Governance Assessment Tool analysis of Copenhagen Integration Council

Dimensions of democratic performance	Criteria present	Criteria absent	Criteria not applicable to this body
Legitimacy	*Legal Status *Statement of purpose and powers *Constituted membership *Relevant public representation *Transparent and Fair election/selection *Minutes made public	*Participative activities *Meeting in public *Board reports made public	
Consent	*System to avoid conflict of interest	*Written internal conflict resolution procedures	*Decision making abilities *Consultation *Mandate to relevant publics *External conflict resolution procedures
Accountability	*Annual Report *Report to a government *Membership can be recalled *Requirement to prepare annual accounts *Subject to external audit *Public profile for board members	*Annual general meeting	*Complaints procedure *Under ombudsmen/inspectorate

Table 2: Comparison of integration bodies in three cities, based on Governance Assessment Tool analysis

	Rotterdam		Copenhagen		Birmingham	
	<i>Advisory Platform</i>	<i>Stakeholder network</i>	<i>User council</i>	<i>Council committee</i>	<i>Multi Organisation Partnership</i>	<i>Executive Group</i>
Legitimacy	Low	Medium	Medium	High	Medium	Low
Consent	Low	Medium	Low	High	Low	Low
Accountability	Medium	Medium	Medium	High	Medium	Medium

In the neighbourhood regeneration policy sector, there is a greater uniformity of approach. Each city uses a multi-sector structure at neighbourhood level, involving residents, third sector agencies, government and business actors. These agencies operate within national and city guidelines, but have considerable discretion in establishing local policy solutions and programme implementation structures.

We use the concept of democratic milieu as the explanatory variable. This refers to the norms of governance and democracy found in a particular nation or region. We use this instead of 'political culture', since conventionally this concept tends to be associated with the predominant form of representative politics (although Almond and Verba's and Dahl's definitions are somewhat wider). This reflects the problem of developing a conceptual language and methods for undertaking research where representative democracy is not privileged, as discussed above.

Our empirical research enabled us to further identify dimensions of democratic milieu:

1. Structural - the power and authority enjoyed by local government and its relationship with national government, e.g. Danish local government is more secure in its constitutional position than English local government.
1. Constitutional - the capacity for flexibility and pragmatism in the legal and administrative foundations of governmental structures
2. Salience - policy issues such as integration of migrants were more politically salient in some cities than others such as neighbourhood renewal
3. Discursive - the shared narrative about how democracy is enacted, e.g. Denmark and the Netherlands have democratic discourses that are more 'consensual' than that in England.

Thus, Birmingham case is explained by a strong English discourse of 'partnership' and interactive policy making that has been current since the early 1990s, and by a pragmatic approach to constitutional questions. The prevailing governance discourse prescribes network forms as the norm for new policy issues. So, there is a process of *transition* from traditional public administration to network governance, and of seeking a new settlement between the role of elected politicians and that of other actors.

The Netherlands, by contrast, has a longstanding tradition of negotiated political solutions drawing from the discourse of consociationalism. It has traditionally been a pillarised society in which elites negotiate through a consociational bargaining system, although this is now becoming a more explicitly politicised system (Andeweg 2008). Thus, the Social Platform has an *instrumental* role in relation to representative democracy, in particular as a mechanism to support the implementation policy priorities and to maintain political legitimacy.

In Denmark, representative democracy is understood in the context of civic associationalism. It has a long tradition of interaction between government and civil society associations, and of consensus seeking in politics (Kristensen 2005). Alongside elected politicians, individuals engage indirectly in political activity through their membership of sports clubs, trade unions, and other interest- and identity-based organisations, who are represented in government advisory bodies.

This is precisely the model for Copenhagen's Integration Council. Network governance thus *complements* and fosters representative democracy.

Our study reinforces the contingent position taken by Kriesi et al (2006), who argue that a mix of country- and policy-specific variables determines power configurations.

Finding 3: Network governance reshapes the roles of elected politicians, but does not necessarily marginalise them

Neoliberal critiques propose a marginalisation of elected politicians due to a diminished role for 'the political' (Leitner et al 2007), leading to a democratic deficit in societal governance. This conclusion was supported by our previous ESRC research in the UK. However our comparative analysis reveals a more complex picture.

We identified a number of different roles that elected politicians play in contributing to the democratic performance of governance networks. As meta-governors elected politicians govern from a distance, setting the framework for undertaking and regulating activity. We found evidence of meta-governance in Birmingham's regeneration and integration networks. Elected politicians were members of strategic partnership bodies, responsible for setting the framework for local activity but at arms length from the delivery of specific programmes. They provided, in the words of one public manager, a 'political steer'.

The executive role has politicians as decision takers closely involved with the delivery of services or the development of new policy initiatives including cross sector initiatives. In Copenhagen's policy for the integration of migrants, elected politicians were involved in all aspects of decision making and the council committee was the key forum for policy making and resource allocation. The mayor reorganised the administrative infrastructure in an effort to increase control over the policy agenda and to coordinate the work of other parts of the city council.

In the context of governance networks the representative role is about ensuring that citizens and other relevant actors are able to participate and, through their involvement, can engage in the co-production of solutions. We found evidence of both these roles in the neighbourhood regeneration scheme in Copenhagen. In one neighbourhood programme the local elected politician saw her role as enabling citizens to contribute to the programme both by helping those who sat on relevant committees have their say, but also taking sounding from those who were not directly involved, for example older people's groups and representing those views in the deliberations.

We think that there are also less formal but nevertheless influential roles played by politicians, even though they may not be members of these extra-governmental institutions, i.e. as reference points for public managers. This, however, requires additional research.

Finding 4: Public managers have enhanced autonomy in governance networks, but retain an alliance with representative democracy

Neoliberal reforms promote the autonomy of public managers, and the empirical data from the three cities demonstrates that the greater flexibility offered by network forms of governance support this managerialisation. However our Q methodology study reveals that public managers remain positive about democracy in general and the place of representative government in particular (Jeffares and Skelcher 2008).

The factor analysis of results reveals two principal viewpoints:

1. **Networks develop new forms of democracy and do not pose a threat to local government:** Participants clustering on this factor view networks as new opportunities for inclusion, especially where policy processes lack effective internal debate. They do this by offering a flexible approach to policy making in contrast to traditional bureaucratic methods, and allow actors to get things done where traditional methods have failed. As a Dutch manager commented: 'It's up to the people to bring their own ideas into networks directly, you don't want the distorted version of the people's ideas as told by a politician'.
2. **Representative democracy should be the main way of making decisions:** Participants clustering on this factor regard networks as exacerbating rather than alleviating problems of representative democracy, for example by including actors 'who have simply put themselves forwards', as one respondent put it. They think that representative democracy brings – in the words of one English manager – 'a direct albeit imperfect line of legitimacy and accountability'. In this context, these participants viewed networks as a complementary platform for inclusion in order to enhance existing structures of representative government.

Public managers in the Netherlands are slightly more disposed to the second factor, in comparison with their colleagues in England. However the differences between nations are not clearly defined. This may indicate attitudinal cleavages within the population of public managers across countries.

Finding 5: Public managers should have a stronger appreciation of democratic principles when designing new forms of governance

Our normative implications focus on public managers holding the first of the two viewpoints exposed by the Q analysis. These managers see new opportunities to express democratic practices, but also to realise the managerialist agenda of flexibility and devolved authority. Qualitative evidence from the case studies indicates that these do not easily sit together.

For example, the Birmingham regeneration case shows that managerial preferences trump democratic principles, whereas in Copenhagen there is a greater appreciation of what it means to be democratic. Although these conclusions are limited by the problem of undertaking comparative research on a small number of cases, we think that they offer valuable insights.

We conclude that public managers in these two cities have different levels of understanding of the fundamental democratic principles set out in conclusion 2. The discourse of democracy in Denmark is more unified and has clearer modes of

enactment (i.e. managers are clearer what actions and structures constitute 'being democratic') than in England.

We think that in England, comparatively, norms of democracy have been dismantled in the somewhat chaotic process of searching for new forms of managerial autonomy and governance of the past two decades. Thus, managers working outside the traditional public administration model may align with ideas about new democratic possibilities, but have little sense of what this entails at the level of institutional design and individual behaviour. We conclude that there is an urgent need for public managers to be able to understand the principles of democracy and the ways in which it may have practical expression.

CONCLUSION

There is a considerable volume of research emerging on the field of collaborative/participative governance. In relation to questions of democracy, we think there is considerable scope for adopting a more critical perspective. There are a number of taken for granted assumptions in the field, for example that participative governance is increasing and that it is marginalising elected politicians, that either lack sufficient data (e.g. a longitudinal analysis of trends in governance designs) or a sufficiently comparative approach to test out the position in different nations/policy sectors. There is also a potential for greater use of research designs that go beyond grounded theory-type interview and documentary analysis. We recommend the use of more systematic and quantitative methods, such as criteria based assessment and Q methodology, as a way of gaining greater insight into the phenomenon under study. In particular, we have argued elsewhere that there is scope for analysis to deploy the tools of the three schools of discourse analysis in ways that offers new insights into democratic performance of participatory and collaborative governance (Farrelly, Jeffares and Skelcher forthcoming).

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