Strengthening political leadership and policy innovation through the expansion of collaborative forms of governance

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Abstract

This article explores how political leadership and policy innovation can be enhanced through collaborative governance. The main findings are that while wicked and unruly problems create an urgent need for policy innovation, politicians are badly positioned to initiate, drive, and lead this innovation. They are either locked into a dependency on policy advice from senior civil servants or locked out of more inclusive policy networks. In either case, they are insulated from fresh ideas and ultimately reduced to policytakers with limited engagement in policy innovation. Collaborative policy innovation offers a solution to these limitations.

1. Introduction

This article explores how elected politicians can strengthen both their political leadership and capacity for policy innovation by engaging in processes of multi-actor collaboration that can help them to better understand societal problems and challenges, craft new and creative policy solutions, and generate widespread support for their implementation. Our claim is that by forming and participating in collaborative arenas, politicians can become vehicles for policy innovation, transforming themselves from 'policytakers' to 'policymakers'. As such, innovation in policy can be spurred by innovations in politics and the polity (see Sørensen in this issue).

Our point of departure is the urgent need for policy innovation in our increasingly complex and globalized societies in which a growing number of deep-seated and emerging problems appear to be 'wicked and unruly' (Hofstad and Torfing, 2015; Ansell and Bartenberger, 2016). Problems like climate change, congested cities, integration of refugees, protection of natural resources and social inequalities in health and education are hard to define and even harder to solve due to a complex mixture of cognitive and political constraints. They can neither be solved by standard solutions nor by increasing public spending, but call for innovative out-of-the-box solutions that can break the trade-offs between conflicting goals and externalities that seem to prevent their solution.

Finding innovative policy solutions to wicked and unruly problems presupposes strong political leadership that can help to set the political agenda, frame the problems in new ways, give direction to processes of creative problem-solving, secure widespread support,

and commit sufficient resources to the realization of new and bold solutions. Unfortunately, the exercise of political leadership is currently hindered by a number of factors such as globalization, mass mediatization, informatization, anti-authoritarian sentiments and the institutionally-embedded idea that politicians should merely focus on overall strategic steering and leave operations to the administration. Politicians generally feel disempowered by global economic pressures, a scandal-focused mass media, information-overload and shortage of knowledge, active citizens who want a direct influence on their living conditions, and the current attempt to reduce their political role to defining overall goals, standards and budget frames and endorsing policy solutions crafted by administrators, expert, and advocacy groups. Thus, as wicked and unruly problems proliferate, our political leaders increasingly lack the confidence, opportunity and inputs to initiate and develop innovative solutions.

Both the urgent need for policy innovation and the lack of political leadership can be solved by promoting a more frequent and systematic engagement of politicians in processes of collaborative interaction with public and private actors holding different ideas, competences and resources and by giving politicians a prominent role as sponsors, conveners, facilitators and catalysts of creative problem solving. The point is not that politicians lack formal political power for policymaking, but rather that they are poorly positioned institutionally to contribute to innovative policy solutions. By constructing and participating in collaborative arenas, politicians can place themselves at the center of policy innovation.

Political leadership is essentially about defining societal problems and challenges, developing new solutions that potentially outperform the existing ones, and mustering political and popular support for their realization (Tucker, 1995). Hence, there is an intrinsic relation between political leadership and policy innovation. Policy innovation depends on the exercise of political leadership, and political leadership is undermined if it fails to develop innovative policy solutions to urgent problems and challenges confronting the political community. Now, since political leaders seldom benefit from divine intervention, their ability to lead by means of defining problems and challenges and designing innovative policy solutions depends on qualified inputs from their surroundings. Politicians cannot create policy innovation in splendid isolation from public and private actors who might hold the keys to understanding a particular problem, fostering a creative and yet feasible solution to it, or facilitating its implementation.

In Western democracies, however, there is a tendency to limit the range of actors who provide input to politicians to a closed circle of executive administrators, policy experts and lobbyists. This tendency is a pity since politicians can benefit tremendously from tapping into the ideas of wider range of relevant and affected actors. More open and systematic collaboration with and between a plethora of public and private actors can enrich politicians' understanding of policy problems, help them to challenge reigning policy

paradigms, stimulate creative problem-solving, facilitate a comprehensive assessment of risks and gains of new and bold solutions, provide complementary resources, and help build common ownership that ensures implementation (Hartley, Sørensen and Torfing, 2013). Moreover, politicians who engage in collaborative policy innovation can strengthen their political leadership because their ability to mobilize support from potential followers is enhanced by involving them in the co-creation of new solutions in response to problems that they want to see solved. While the positive impact of multi-actor collaboration on policy innovation and political leadership has always been a possibility, there are two factors currently driving politicians and societal actors toward greater collaborative interaction. First, politicians seem to have an increasing appreciation of the contribution of external actors to policymaking (Christiansen and Nørgaard, 2003). Second, the educational and anti-authoritarian revolution from the late 1960s onwards has generated a growing demand among citizens and civil society actors for a more active involvement in policy making than traditionally offered by representative democracy (Warren, 2002). It is unlikely that these two factors alone will be enough to forge a collaborative interface between politicians and relevant policy actors, but they seem to warrant a closer investigation of how collaborative policy making can enhance policy innovation and strengthen the political leadership of elected politicians.

The present investigation of the collaborative conditions for spurring political leadership and policy innovation is structured in the following way. The constraints on a policy-innovating political leadership are analyzed in section two. Section three defines political leadership, explains the intrinsic link between political leadership and policy innovation and scrutinizes the literature on policy innovation in order to show how politicians seem to be cut off from valuable inputs from external actors. Section four explains what politicians might gain from a systematic engagement in collaborative policy innovation and provides examples of what it might look like in practice. Section five takes a further look at the drivers and barriers of politicians' engagement in collaborative policy innovation. The conclusion summarizes the findings, discusses when collaborative policy innovation is appropriate and suggests avenues for further research.

2. Policy innovation and political leadership in Western societies

While the United Nations can report optimistically about major advances in the global war against poverty, disease and illiteracy (UN, 2015), it is much harder to find examples of successful problem solving through public policymaking in the established Western democracies. Supranational, national, regional and local governments seem to be struggling with a growing number of wicked and unruly problems that are difficult to solve because they are complex, tangled and hard to define, and there is a lack of specialized knowledge about possible solutions, conflicting goals and demands, potential dangers that prevent experimentation, multiple stakeholders with different interests and a high risk of

political conflict (Rittel and Webber, 1973). Wicked and unruly problems call for innovative solutions, but instead of vigorous efforts to design and implement creative policy solutions we find an endless parade of political stalemates and logjams. Cases in point include: the failure of the European Union to solve the refugee crisis; national governments to reduce CO_2 emissions; regional authorities to stimulate growth and employment in the rural periphery; and local governments to secure social and political inclusion of disadvantaged segments of the population.

Cognitive and political constraints prevent governments from designing innovative policy solutions, but weak political leadership makes things worse and creates a growing popular distrust of elected politicians. The evidence of weak political leadership and bad governance is abundant (Helms, 2012). In the USA, Workman et al. (2009) conclude that Congress not only delegates policy-making authority, but also information-processing to the public bureaucracy and Meier (2009) claims that the majority of decisions driving public policy in the USA are taken by bureaucrats in the course of policy implementation. Interestingly, two back-benchers from different sides of the aisle in the Danish parliament recently published a critical analysis of how their political leadership role is reduced to voting for or against bills drafted by executive civil servants and expert committees with limited involvement of members of parliament (MPs) (Bruus and Lauritzen, 2014, 2015). Their analysis sparked lively discussions in the Danish parliament about the conditions for political leadership of elected politicians and proposals for reforms of the parliamentary system of standing committees (Folketinget, 2014). Equally interesting, a Danish municipality recently discovered that the local councilors in 2014 had followed the recommendations of the executive civil servants in 98.6 percent of all the political decisions taken by the local council (Sørensen and Torfing, 2015). This discovery adds flesh and blood to the results of a recent survey showing that 66 percent of local councilors in Denmark believed that the biggest problem they face is their lack of influence on the political development of the municipality (DJØF, 2013). These reports are by no means exceptional.

Several factors can help us to explain the elected politicians' perception of the constraints on their political leadership. First, globalization of economic transactions, physical and virtual communication and the strategic horizons of public governance mean that political jurisdictions at the local, regional and national level are subjected to pressures from processes that they can neither control nor affect because power is horizontally and vertically dispersed and the institutional mechanisms for integrative political leadership are weak. To make matters worse, many politicians seem to subscribe to the idea that the external pressures emanating from economic globalization dictate a particular type of neoliberal economic policies. Hence, the frequent use of the political catchphrase stating that: 'There is no alternative'. The global market economy is perceived as a self-governing mechanism that leaves elected politicians as mere bystanders.

Second, the ongoing mediatization of society and politics has created a drama democracy that places a high premium on personal point scoring, political conflict and rivalry, populist rhetoric and short-term solutions that hardly match the problems at hand. The result is the decline of informed political debate, trust-based political collaboration, shared focus on salient political issues and the production of long-term solutions addressing wicked and unruly problems (Klijn, 2014).

Third, technologically-enabled informatization means that there is unlimited access to multiple, redundant, parallel and competing streams of information that create a paralyzing information overload while, at the same time, a scarcity of validated and reliable knowledge that politicians can act upon (Workman et al., 2009). Time constraints force politicians to delegate information processing to public administrators who become much more knowledgeable and powerful than the politicians they are serving.

Fourth, anti-authoritarian sentiments nurtured by rising competences and political empowerment mean that citizens have less faith in expert knowledge and political elites and increasing confidence in their own ability to participate in and be able to influence public decision making (Warren, 2002). Hence, elected politicians are under pressure to engage with citizens who are no longer satisfied with their role as passive spectators, but demand to be actively involved in decisions affecting their lives (Bang and Sørensen, 1999).

Last but not least, the New Public Management suggests that elected politicians should perceive themselves as members of a corporate board. Hence, they should stand at the bridge of the ship and do the overall strategic steering once every year and otherwise be tied to the mast and keep their fingers off the daily operations of public service organizations. Although the emphasis on strategic steering aims to save politicians from drowning in administrative details, many politicians become utterly frustrated because they lack the strategic competences required to define overall goals, standards and budget frames and because the corporatization of their political role cuts them off from the real-life policy problems that motivated them to pursue a political carrier in the first place (Christensen and Lægreid, 2001).

3. Studies of political leadership and policy innovation

At the generic level, leadership can be defined as the attempt of one or more persons to influence the behavior of a group of actors in order to realize a particular set of goals (Parry and Bryman, 2006). When we speak of political leadership the goals pursued through the exercise of leadership are neither limited to the profit motives of a private firm nor to the organizational objectives of a voluntary organization, but are political goals for

society at large. In liberal democracies the political goals are defined by the people in and through regular elections and public deliberations.

Political leadership clearly involves the exercise of power in terms of the ability to make authoritative decisions that mobilize public resources in the pursuit of a public purpose. However, we should be careful not to reduce political power to domination and force. Although political leaders may have many forms of 'hard power' at their disposal, they frequently make use of 'soft power' that 'coopts people rather than coerces them' and 'rests on the ability to shape the preferences of others to want what you want' (Nye, 2010: 307; Helms, 2012: 6). Political leadership is exercised in and through a mutual relationship between political leaders and a more or less active and outspoken group of followers. The political leaders play a crucial role in constructing the political community that they are leading, but their followers critically evaluate the political leaders and may challenge them or shift their allegiance if they are dissatisfied.

According to Tucker (1995), political leadership undertakes three crucial functions: 1) providing a diagnosis of the societal problems and challenges that need to be addressed; 2) proposing a set of visionary, yet feasible, solutions to the problems and challenges at hand; and 3) generating support and mobilizing resources for the realization of the proposed solutions. As such, political leadership is essentially transformative as it involves higher order changes in needs, values, beliefs and practices (Burns, 2003). In stable societies with only a limited number of relatively small problems, it is sufficient for transformative political leaders to marginally adjust existing policies and strategies. In times of crisis and increasing turbulence, where demographic, socioeconomic and environmental changes threaten the welfare and security of the population and where wicked and unruly problems proliferate, political leaders must necessarily engage in policy innovation.

Policy innovation is a particular type of innovation that aims to respond to wicked and unruly public problems or to realize ambitious new political agendas by: 1) redefining policy problems and opportunities; 2) reformulating basic goals and priorities; 3) developing new problem-solving strategies; and 4) deploying new policy tools and perhaps even creating new governance structures. Although policy innovation does not necessarily advance all of these changes to the same degree, the combined effect of these changes should produce a rupture with established practice and common wisdom in a particular policy context. In short, policy innovation requires what Peter Hall calls second- or third-order policy change and thus a high degree of reflexivity. Since policy innovation is likely to disrupt distributional outcomes as well as the roles, identities and habitual practices of social and political actors, it is likely to generate considerable resistance that must be overcome through the exercise of skillful political leadership combining soft and hard power.

The scholarly focus on political leaders' contribution to policy innovation is by no means new. In his 1984 book *Political Innovation in America*, Polsby analyzes the role of politicians in fostering policy innovation. According to Polsby, politicians are driven by the competition for voters and will exploit ritualized occasions such as election campaigns, press briefings, party conferences, and presidential addresses to the nation to market new and innovative policy solutions that can win support from the electorate. However, while politicians might play a key role in identifying and legitimizing the problems and unfulfilled needs that call for policy innovation and in assessing the political distributional consequences of new policies, they seem to play a limited role in framing policy problems, developing the substance of new policy proposals and evaluating their likely effects and outcomes (Polsby, 1994: 55). The definition of problems and the development and evaluation of new policy solutions is more often than not left to executive civil servants and their aids with occasional assistance from scientific experts. Sometimes politicians are not even involved in identifying the pressing problems and needs, but are merely searching for something to offer the electorate. As Polsby concludes: 'one process invents an alternative, nurtures it, floats it into the subculture of decision-makers; another process searches for ideas, finds them, renovates them for immediate use, and exploits them politically' (Polsby, 1984). If this is so, it means that policymaking takes the form of a 'garbage can process' where solutions precede the problems (Cohen, March and Olsen, 1972). It also means that politicians play a limited role in policy innovation and rely heavily on their administrative staff. As such, political leadership is reduced to picking the right policy to offer the electorate at some mediatized event, and policy innovation suffers from the heavy reliance on bureaucratic views and ideas, spiced up with expert opinions and adjusted in accordance with the anticipation of what leading politicians will find politically appropriate.

Kingdon (1984) agrees with the basic line of argument set out by Polsby. He also conceives policy innovation as a process through which policy entrepreneurs contingently connect separate streams of problems, solutions and political opinions, and he believes that there are certain patterns in how this is done. However, on the basis of empirical studies of the US Congress, he seems to put more emphasis on the interaction between appointed political officials, executive civil servants and members of the elected assemblies, and to the actors inside government he adds the actors outside government including interest groups, academics, researchers, consultants and mass media. In the USA the president and the executive office play a key role in setting the agenda, but Congress is highly effective in offering alternatives from which to choose during the policy process. The presidential staff and the politically appointed officials in departments and bureaus both play a crucial role in agenda setting and the generation of policy alternatives, while career bureaucrats seem to play a less prominent role. Actors outside government also have considerable influence on policy innovation. The less visibility a policy issue has and the less ideological and partisan the debate about it is, the more influence interest groups will tend to have. Academics, researchers and consultants may also influence the

policy process and contribute to policy innovation, but their influence varies across policy areas. Mass media, however, seems to have less influence than is commonly assumed. Hence, according to Kingdon, elected politicians do not dominate the policy process in the way that they are expected to in liberal democracies, but the same goes for the other actors. Nobody is really in charge. Elected politicians and their executive civil servants are very important for fostering policy innovation, but only when they are supported by other actors. This observation seems to introduce a coalition perspective. Consensus-based policy coalitions that link problems, solutions and political opinions in contingent ways may be formed through bargaining processes that eventually lead to policy innovation. In sum, while Polsby imagined politicians cherry-picking new policy ideas from the public bureaucracy, Kingdon sees politicians as a part of a broader change coalition involving non-governmental actors.

The focus on policy coalitions is further expanded in the literature on policy networks that emphasizes the resource dependencies and/or shared belief systems that unify public and private actors engaged in sector-specific policy making (Kenis and Schneider, 1991; Marsh and Rhodes, 1992). The policy network literature has a keen eye for the broad range of actors engaged in the design and/or implementation of public policy, but it also reveals two important problems. First, elected politicians seem to play a marginal role in policy networks. They are seldom present in the councils, committees and meetings in which public managers and representatives of different interest groups negotiate and shape public policies, and when they try to play a role in policy networks they often end up relying heavily on the public managers who are managing the networks (Koppenjan, Kars and Voort, 2009). Second, the policy network literature tends to treat networks as instruments for pursuing particular organizational or sector-specific interests rather than acting as vehicles of policy innovation. At least, highly influential and tightly-knit policy communities seem to be less innovative than the not so influential and more loosely structured issue networks when it comes to policy making (Marsh and Rhodes, 1992). This insight is echoed by researchers from advocacy coalition theory who find that narrow coalitions based on normative core beliefs may not be broad-based enough to facilitate policy innovation (Ansell, Reckhow and Kelly, 2009). So the paradox is that while the policy network literature expands the range of actors engaged in policymaking and further distributes political power between them, it diminishes the role of politicians by displacing center of gravity of policymaking beyond the easy access of politicians and allows policy arenas to be captured by a logic of interest protection rather than a logic of policy innovation.

Nevertheless, a more innovation-friendly interpretation of policy networks is offered by Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith (1993), who emphasize the role of policy learning in fostering policy innovation. Policy learning, defined as changes in the distribution of beliefs in a network, is induced by individual attitude change, diffusion of new beliefs, turn-over of network participants, group conflicts and communicative responses to external events.

Policy learning changes the understanding of the relative status of particular goals and values and the causal assumptions about which policy tools and institutional frameworks can help to realize these goals and values in practice. Learning that problematizes core assumptions about goals, values and causal mechanisms while, simultaneously, aiming to respond to new external events and incorporating new insights generated elsewhere is a prerequisite for policy innovation. There are also good reasons to believe that learning is accelerated by multi-actor collaboration that allows different public and private actors to draw on different sources of knowledge when challenging and criticizing each other's beliefs and assumptions and subsequently trying to integrate these into more or less coherent policies. In short, collaboration tends to facilitate expansive and transformative learning, which in turn tends to spur policy innovation (Mezirow, 2000; Engeström, 2008; Torfing, 2016).

This insight has important consequences since it urges politicians to engage more frequently and systematically in a collaborative exchange of experience, knowledge, ideas etc. with other public and private actors. Politicians must get out of parliamentary committees and City Hall and interact with the relevant and affected actors who can help them to understand the complex character of the problem at hand, to develop and test new policy solutions, and adjust them so that they work in practice and produce the desired results. When successful, collaborative policy innovation can help elected politicians to strengthen their political leadership by creating broad ownership for a new set of political goals, problem definitions and policy tools.

4. Examples of politicians engaged in collaborative policy innovation

Despite the obvious advantages of a more collaborative leadership style, it is an open question whether it will be possible to engage busy, media-focused politicians in deliberative processes aiming to foster innovative policies. Many politicians will tend to consider themselves as sovereign decision makers who as elected representatives of the people have all the power and all the political responsibility, which they are not supposed to share with non-elected actors. While recognizing this and other impediments to collaborative policy innovation, we shall like to draw attention to some interesting new examples of what collaborative policy innovation might look like in practice. These illustrative examples may not describe the typical ways that politicians engage in the development of new policies. Indeed some of the examples are relatively ground-breaking. Still, the examples attest to the feasibility of collaborative policy innovation, and learning from them may help us to do more of it in the future.

To demonstrate the prevalence and empirical variability of collaborative policy innovation, we have selected an example from the local, regional and national levels. Our descriptive analysis focuses on: 1) how collaborative forums and arenas are created and sustained; 2)

how innovative policy solutions are initiated, crafted and agreed upon; and 3) how politicians can lead and manage collaborative policy innovation. While the first question concerns the institutional design of collaborative policy innovation, the second concerns the processes through which differences are constructively managed in the pursuit of innovation, and the third focusses on the political legitimacy and democratic anchorage of collaborative policy innovation.

1) Local Task Committees in Gentofte Municipality, Denmark

Gentofte Municipality had experimented with participatory and collaborative policy innovation for several years when it decided in 2015 to reorganize the way that the local councilors work as politicians (Sørensen and Torfing, 2015). The goal of the organizational reform is to enhance the opportunities for the local councilors to focus on policy development and do it together with citizens and local stakeholders. In order to facilitate this process, the City Council has created 8 so-called Task Committees that are temporary, advisory and thematic committees composed of a select group of local councilors, relevant and affected citizens, and local stakeholder organizations who will together engage in the development of innovative solutions to the most pressing local policy problems. The City Council defines the remit and appoints the members of the Task Committees (typically five politicians and 10 citizens/stakeholders), but the members can make their own plans for meetings and activities and also decide to involve additional citizens and stakeholders through sub-committees, task forces, social media, public hearings etc. Since in Denmark all the local councilors (except the mayor) are doing unpaid voluntary work for the City Council, often while holding a regular job, their time budget is restricted. Hence, in order to find time and space for the politicians to work in the new Task Committees, it has been decided that the activities of the standing political committees will be scaled down, so that instead of 11 meetings per year, they will only have four short two-hour meetings. Moreover, instead of closely monitoring the daily operations of the administration, the new standing committees should focus on overall policy performance. If the standing committees identify problems and challenges that call for political action, they can either craft a new set of guidelines for the administration or suggest the creation of a new Task Committee and begin to draft a remit for it. In the Task Committee the politicians combine overall strategic goals with concrete experiences and ideas from the other participants and input from the administrators who service the Task Committee and facilitate its meetings. The Task Committees meet on a regular basis over a flexible period from 3 to 18 months in order to gather information, define and frame the problem, search for innovative solutions, and discuss their practical and political feasibility. In the end a report is sent to the political committee responsible for the particular policy area, which makes policy recommendations to the City Council on the basis of the report. The elected politicians exercise political leadership by initiating and participating in the Task Committees, which in the Danish context provide ground-breaking forums for collaborative policy innovation. The politicians are also deciding whether to adopt the

collaborative policy recommendations. However, their political leadership is transformed since they are leading processes of collaborative innovation in which they have to convene, interact with and take account of the opinions, ideas and proposals of local citizens and stakeholders. Their political leadership is neither reduced to offering symbolic solutions to the electorate nor simply ratify administrative proposal, but now involves co-initiation, co-design and co-implementation of innovative policy solutions.

2) Regional innovation networks in Venlo, the Netherlands

The Venlo region in the southeast part of the Netherlands used to be a thriving agricultural area supported by agricultural research institutions and an excellent infrastructure connecting it to Germany. However, at the turn of the millennium it suffered from economic decline and environmental problems that led many young people to leave the region (Termeer and Nooteboom, 2014). In the Netherlands such problems used to be tackled by corporatist arrangements, but the failure of these arrangements to deal with the negative externalities of agricultural modernization undermined their power and paved the way for the construction of a new green growth alliance. Business leaders from the Venlo region met to discuss their common concerns for the future development of the region and the urgent need for action. After a while they managed to involve regional politicians in their ambitious plan to develop an innovative strategy for green growth. An informal regional network of business people, elected politicians and civil servants was formed and soon managed to get support from local municipalities and government officials. The informal network enabled and supported the formation of the Foundation for Regional Dialogue that was a broader and more formal network driving the development of the Venlo Greenport Project. The new formal network was led by a core group that comprised members appointed by all the participating organizations from the public, for-profit and non-profit sectors. The core group organized a series of meetings and workshops that led to the formulation of an innovative regional development strategy aiming to enhance sustainable farming and it also facilitated and sponsored the crafting and testing of innovative projects. As the number of project proposals increased and the need for evaluating and monitoring these projects grew, the core group was replaced with a more formal Network Board consisting of formal leaders from government, business, education and research. The collaborative innovation process created a continuous spin-off in terms of small informal change alliances that developed ideas and projects later adopted by the formal network. Elected politicians did not play a privileged role in the collaborative innovation process. Hence, the exercise of adaptive and enabling leadership was distributed among a plethora of public and private actors. Nevertheless, elected politicians and their civil servants played an important role in terms of providing funding and legitimacy to the Venlo Greenport project.

3) State-wide citizens' juries on energy policy in New South Wales, Australia

While politicians usually have few problems generating public interest in energy-related topics such as climate change and local infrastructure projects, it is more difficult to solicit input to policy innovation in the more mundane field concerning the production and distribution of energy. In the State of New South Wales (NSW) in Australia, politicians have sought to change that by supplementing the standard policy consultation procedures based on public hearings and written submission from key stakeholders with the formation of citizen juries (Hendriks, 2013). The collaborative policy process was orchestrated by MPs from the Public Accounts Committee (PAC) who recruited 54 randomly selected citizens from an urban centre (Sydney) and a rural area (Tamworth) to serve on two concurrent citizens' juries. These deliberative bodies were asked to consider the barriers to and to recommend a course of action with regard to alternative forms of energy generation. Both juries met 4-5 times over a period of ten weeks in the summer of 2012 before submitting a report to the PAC that fed into the preparation of its own report to parliament, which was published in late 2012 (PAC, 2012). The recommendations from the citizens' reports were summarized in a separate chapter in the official PAC report and the reports were included in the appendices. Studies show that the citizens' reports had a real impact on the MP's recommendations to the NSW parliament, although some of the more controversial proposals were either not addressed or addressed and rejected (Hendriks, 2013). The MPs in the PAC played an active role in setting up and briefing the two citizens' juries and also processed their recommendations. The MP's also met personally with the citizens when they attended meetings in the citizens' juries.

Table 1 provides a comparison of the three cases of collaborative policy innovation, revealing a number of differences and similarities in terms of the institutional arenas for policy interaction, the process of collaborative innovation and the leadership role of the politicians.

Table 1: Comparison of the cases of collaborative policy innovation

	Institutional arena of interaction	**Collaborative innovation process**	**Leadership role of politicians**
Local task committees	Permanent and formal arena formed by legislative body and integrated into the existing legislative structures	Joint deliberation between politicians, citizens, stakeholders and civil servants	Politicians orchestrate, participate in and assess outcomes of the collaborative innovation process
Regional innovation networks	Private actors form a temporary, informal network arena that spurs the formation of a broader and more formal network of public and	Joint deliberation between politicians, stakeholders and civil servants	Politicians play a limited role as champions and sponsors of collaborative innovation as political leadership is dispersed in relatively informal

	private actors		networks
State-wide citizens' juries	Temporary, but formal arena formed by legislative body supplementing existing legislative structures	No joint deliberation as recommendations based on citizens' deliberations are relayed to politicians	Politicians orchestrate and assess outcomes of the collaborative innovation process

As indicated in Table 1, the Task Committees and the citizens' juries differ from the regional innovation networks by being formal and politically initiated. At the same time, they differ from each other since the Task Committees are permanent institutions integrated into the legislative structures while the citizens' juries are temporary and supplementary. In contrast to the citizens' juries, where the politicians receive recommendations based on citizens' deliberations, both the Task Committees and the regional innovation networks facilitate joint deliberation between politicians and external actors. The main difference between the Task Committees and the regional innovation networks is that the latter fail to involve ordinary citizens. Political leadership of the process of collaborative policy innovation is stronger in the Task Committees and citizens' juries than in the regional innovation networks, but it is only in the Task Committees that the politicians gets to interact with citizen deliberators.

In sum, although our analysis does not allow us to draw any inference about the causal relationship between the institutional design, process and leadership of multi-actor collaboration and the resulting policy innovations, the Task Committees seem to have some comparative advantages in terms of being permanent and highly transparent institutional designs that facilitate joint deliberation between politicians and relevant external actors through a well-structured process where political leaders are allowed to play a decisive role.

5. Drivers and barriers of collaborative policy innovation

As partly illustrated by the empirical examples above, politicians' participation in and leadership of more or less institutionalized processes of collaborative policy innovation may help them to break policy deadlocks, connect and communicate with different groups of experts, stakeholders and citizens, and discursively construct the political community that they aim to lead. The potential gains raise the question of what drives and hinders a more frequent and systematic engagement of politicians in collaborative policy innovation.

One of the drivers that may urge politicians to go further down this road is the alarming decline in citizens' trust in politicians which is a thorn in the side of elected politicians because both their personal political legitimacy and the democratic legitimacy of the entire system of government depend on a high level of popular trust. In the final instance the lack

of trust reduces the ability of elected politicians to implement structural reforms and secure compliance with public regulation (OECD, 2013). As such, political officials increasingly recognize, especially within the European Union (European Commission, 2001a, 2001b, 2003, 2005), that the level of political trust needs to be improved and that this requires increased collaboration with citizens and private stakeholders in order to develop and implement innovative solutions that enhance public performance and satisfy unfulfilled social needs (Skelcher and Torfing, 2010).

Another driver is elected politicians' dissatisfaction with being sidelined and marginalized by technocratic policy making spearheaded by policy experts and executive civil servants. Politicians who are part of government or hold important positions in political committees surely have better chances to match the strong influence of experts and senior administrators than backbenchers, but even ministers can be sidelined by the administrative mandarins (Christensen, 1983; Hood and Lodge, 2006). Even well-positioned politicians will, therefore, be likely to welcome collaboration with actors outside government that can inspire them to pursue new and innovative ideas that administrators would deem 'inappropriate' from a strictly administrative point of view.

A third driver is the suppressed eagerness of elected politicians to solve societal problems and challenges, which is often what originally motivated them to go into politics. Many politicians are frustrated by the role prescription of New Public Management, which basically tells them to act as a board of directors that defines the overall goals and strategies and monitors performance. They may therefore be inclined to find new ways of legitimately engaging in problem-solving together with societal actors who like themselves are driven by values, indignation and other forms of political passion and who can help them to better understand the problems at hand and to design, test and realize innovative solutions (Sørensen, 2006).

A last driver is the frustration that many politicians feel when they are forced to defend new policy solutions against criticisms from citizens and relevant stakeholders in the mass media, or in public hearings and debates. When new policy proposals resting on carefully calibrated political compromises and followed up by elaborate administrative plans for their implementation, politicians are often prevented from making political concessions, even if they want to, and that is a persistent source of frustration. An obvious solution to this problem would be to involve citizens and stakeholders in collaborative processes that allows them to influence the initiation, design and perhaps even the implementation of policy innovations. Co-creation of new policy solutions will allow adaptation of new policy proposals to the needs and demands of citizens and relevant stakeholders and that will build a joint ownership for the new solutions.

Before getting carried away by the potential drivers of collaborative policy innovation, let us take a close and sobering look at the barriers that must be overcome in order to engage

politicians in collaborative processes. We have already mentioned one fundamental barrier in terms of the classical democratic self-perception of politicians as the 'elected representatives of the people' who are expected to use their skills and power to govern and provide solutions for the people rather than involving the electorate in complex decision-making processes that ordinary people can neither be expected to understand nor take responsibility for. The negative effect of this role perception on collaborative engagement is exacerbated by the New Public Management idea that politicians should focus on 'steering' the ship, and leave the 'rowing' to professional administrators (Osborne and Gaebler, 1993). The result of this reassertion of the politics-administration divide is that politicians become insulated from the forums and networks through which public governance is produced and delivered and problems are identified and solved.

Another barrier is that politicians who are driven by ideology, and perhaps even strive for ideological purity – as we have seen recently with the American Tea Party movement – will find it difficult to engage in an open-minded debate with citizens and stakeholders that aspires to find innovative, yet feasible, solutions to urgent problems and challenges. Dogmatic and uncompromising ideological sentiments and pragmatic problem-solving do not go well together (Ansell, 2011).

A third barrier is the competition within and between political parties. Representative democracy is built on this competition for votes, media attention, and political control, making it a challenge to openly share ideas and engage in cooperative enterprise. This barrier is somewhat less accentuated in consensual democracies as opposed to majoritarian winner-take-all democracies (Lijphart, 2012). However, even in more consensual democracies, adversarial interaction can dominate, reducing opportunities for collaborative policy innovation.

A fourth barrier is the unwillingness of politicians to accept the risks associated with policy innovation, particularly in the pre-election phase. In our mediatized drama democracy the penalty for policy failure is large and may wreck political careers, especially if politicians have invested personal prestige and integrity in the design of the new policy. Although collaborative policy innovation offers a way of sharing the responsibility for both success and failure with other actors, the danger of being left alone with the responsibility for policies that do not work as expected or create unforeseen negative externalities may discourage politicians from participating in collaborative policy innovation.

Last but not least, we should like to mention the scarcity of time and resources that politicians have at their disposal either due to their status as unpaid political volunteers holding a full time job while serving as local or regional councilors, or due to the large amount of time spent on fundraising for the next election campaign, which is a well-known problem at state or federal level government in the USA. Collaborative policy making takes lots of time and this time must be found by reforming the institutions of representative

democracy. Public financing of political parties and reform of the standing committee system may offer a way forward.

The barriers for politicians to engage in multi-actor collaboration and pursue policy innovation are considerable. Although it is also possible to identify strong drivers, researchers and practitioners will have to work hard to overcome the barriers by developing institutional designs and role perceptions that enable elected politicians to embrace the expansion of processes of collaborative policy innovation.

6. Concluding remarks

We have aimed to explore how political leadership and policy innovation can be enhanced through *polity innovations* that create new platforms for collaborative governance in which politicians play a central role and *innovations in politics* that foster processes of collaborative innovation in which differences are constructively managed in the pursuit of innovation. The main finding is that wicked and unruly problems create an urgent need for policy innovation, but that politicians are badly positioned to initiate, drive, and lead policy innovation. They are either locked into a dependency on policy advice from senior civil servants or locked out of more inclusive but sealed off policy networks. In either case, politicians are insulated from fresh ideas and are ultimately reduced to policytakers with a limited role in policy innovation. Collaborative policy innovation is a solution to these limitations insofar as the creation of institutional arenas facilitates the participation of a wide set of public and private actors who can perturb existing assumptions and paradigms and contribute to new change theories. The institutional design of collaborative arenas should also ensure that politicians have a clear presence and a leadership role that can prevent the arena from being coopted for the narrow protection of interests. Finally the design should facilitate deliberation and policy learning among the participating actors.

Our argument is premised on the observation that political leaders need to spur policy innovation in order to find new and better ways of dealing with wicked and unruly problems and that policy innovation can help them mobilize active support from their followers and widen their appeal. However, we should bear in mind that policy innovation in itself is neither good nor bad (Hartley, 2005). Although innovation processes tend to be driven by the intention to improve the public sector by enhancing its problem-solving capacity, increasing the quality of public services and reducing costs, the results of policy innovation might not be as expected and might not be liked by everybody. Moreover, there are some areas where policy innovation should be pursued with caution because the risks are considerable (e.g. innovative pension reforms may cause a future income loss for particular groups of citizens) and policy failure can be fatal (e.g. policies for safety regulation of nuclear power plants or air traffic). As such, it is an integral part of political

leadership to determine whether or not to initiate policy innovation in a particular policy field.

We have recommended a collaborative approach to policy innovation because collaboration seems to spur the development of innovative solutions. Collaborative policy innovation will in turn help to strengthen political leadership in the age of governance in which no public or private actor seems to possess all the knowledge and resources necessary to steer society and the economy (Kooiman, 1993). However, collaborative policy innovation may not be feasible to the same degree at all times, in all areas, at all levels of government and in all political systems. In acute crisis situations where new policies must be developed over night, there might not be time for lengthy collaborative processes. In policy areas dealing with highly technical or confidential issues pertaining to environmental regulation, public security or private business opportunities a collaborative approach may not be an obvious choice. At the federal and national level it will sometimes be difficult to find ways of involving citizens, whereas at regional and local levels of government there is a greater proximity to citizens who can engage in collaborative policy making. Finally, political systems with a tradition of corporatist involvement of stakeholders or with distributed powers nurturing bipartisan negotiation may on the whole be more conducive to collaborative policy innovation than political systems based on sovereign decision making by the political and administrative center of a unitary state or winner-take-all political contests.

In this article we have merely tried to set an agenda for further research, and we are perfectly aware that there is a long way to go before we fully understand how politicians can gain from collaborative policy innovation and under what circumstances. The next steps will have to include a more systematic mapping of examples of how politicians engage in collaborative policy innovation and comparative analysis of the political and institutional factors conditioning success and failure. As such, an initial expansion of exploratory in-depth case studies must be supplemented with more rigorous comparisons across cases, leading to the development and testing of hypotheses that aim to explain the dynamics of collaborative policy innovation and the results they produce, both in terms of new and better policy solutions and in terms of a stronger political leadership.

Empirical studies must be supported by theory development and a central point is here to re-conceptualize political leadership in order to discover what it can mean in the context of collaborative governance (Ansell and Gash, 2008). As pointed out by Helms (2012: 2-3), there is an unresolved tension between the concept of political leadership and the basic thrust of collaborative governance. Although political leadership is not necessarily linked to the exercise of hard power in formal, hierarchical organizations, it is clearly associated with the creation of followership, while governance tends to blur the distinction between leaders and followers. Moreover, whereas political leadership is often thought of in terms of individual action, the governance paradigm stresses relations of interdependency between

public and private actors. Finally, while political leadership is conceptually tied to the exercise of power, there seems to be little focus on power in the literature on governance (see Torfing *et al.*, 2012). These fundamental differences call for theoretical discussions and clarifications that can inform and guide empirical studies.

The potential impact of research and experiments with collaborative policy innovation is huge as it may affect the ability of politicians world-wide to strengthen their political leadership in and through pragmatic and creative problem-solving. However, in order to fully grasp the conditions for and mechanisms of collaborative policy innovation we need to bring together groups of researchers that do not normally work together. Hence, researchers in the field of public governance and public innovation research must join forces with researchers with scholarly expertise in political parties and executives. Institutional separations and cultural differences may prevent such a marriage, but as cross-disciplinary research becomes more and more fashionable there is a hope that these different groups of academics can develop a fruitful and mutually beneficial cooperation.

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