Interactive policy processes

A challenge for street-level bureaucrats

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Interactive Policy Processes: A Challenge for Street-Level Bureaucrats

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Abstract
Street-level bureaucrats (SLB) play a crucial role in ensuring better policy implementation and generating trust between the system and citizens, according to the literature. In this article, we argue that Lipsky's distinction between public managers and SLB needs an update. Today, public managers are increasingly expected to work closely and directly with affected stakeholders in order to solve cross-cutting 'wicked problems'. Interactive and participative collaborative policy processes require public managers to move from back-office work to front-office work, in effect converting public managers into SLB. The key question raised is, thus: what kind of skills and capabilities do SLB need to engage in today's more interactive forms of public policy-making? And what are the implications for how universities educate these groups?' Drawing on a study of 32 urban professionals who work on the frontline in deprived neighbourhoods, we scrutinise the challenges and dilemmas that professionals face in their work with interactive processes. By distinguishing between 'academic specialists' and 'academic generalists', we are able to pinpoint and differentiate between skills needed for each of these groups in order to secure transparent processes that abide by the rule of law and support well-functioning local communities and, more broadly, the skills needed to secure democracy and economic efficiency.

Introduction

Interactive and collaborative policy processes in the public sector can support two key values in Western societies: democracy and economic efficiency (O'Toole, 1997; Sørensen and Torfing, 2005; Osborne, 2010a). Experiences show, however, that all too often they do not live up to their full potential. We argue in this article that street-level bureaucrats (SLB) play a key role in realising the potential of interactive policy processes, but that their success hinges on the skills and capacities they bring to the task. Moreover, we argue that the requisite skills and capacities are fundamentally different in interactive policy settings than in more traditional policy settings, which in turn has implications for the educational programmes that prepare SLB. In short, we pose the following research question:

What kind of skills and capabilities do SLB need to engage in more interactive forms of public policy-making? And what are the implications for how universities educate these groups?

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Bodil Damgaard is associate professor at Roskilde University, Denmark. Her research concerns the involvement of societal actors in addressing public policy issues and the conditions under which the collaboration between the state (at various levels) and the societal actors takes place. Governance, collaborative governance and multilevel governance are key words for much of her research. In recent years, university administrative positions have given rise to an interest into which competencies and transferrable skills new forms of governance require of future public and private sector administrators and subsequently, how to incorporate the training of such skills into university programmes within the social sciences.

While the core values of democracy and economic efficiency are surprisingly consistent over time, we observe significant fluctuation regarding their internal ranking and the ways in which the public sector is organised in order to fulfil its tasks. In broad brushstrokes, we may speak of a development in which classical Weberian public administrations have been partly substituted and supplemented by the New Public Management (NPM), as well as by more inclusive, participatory and collaborative forms of governing, which some scholars have termed the New Public Governance (NPG) (Osborne, 2010; Pestoff, Brandsen and Verschuere, 2012; Torfing et al., 2012). As criticism has mounted against NPM, attention has been drawn to NPG-type approaches known under headings such as *co-creation* (Bason, 2010; Voorberg, Bekkers and Tummers, 2015; Farr, 2016), *co-production* (Boyle, Slay & Stephens, 2010; Bovaird and Löffler, 2012; Alford, 2016); *participatory* (Grote and Gbikpi, 2002; Escobar, 2013) or *deliberative democracy* (McGrath, 2005; Mutz, 2006; Floridia, 2017); and in the planning field in connection with terms such as *collaborative* or *communicative planning* (Healey, 1997; Huxley, 2000; Innes and Booher, 2000).

The turn towards more collaborative and co-creating modes of governing was spurred by rising dissatisfaction both with the classical top-down policy-making style and the market-oriented and competition-driven NPM style of governing. In the top-down model, ordinary citizens are basically passive recipients of public policies who are activated only on election day. In the NPM model, ordinary citizens serve, moreover, as customers who may express their (dis)satisfaction with a service in a binary way (buy /don't buy); or to use Hirschman's (1970) terminology: citizens may exit but are not offered channels through which to express their voice, basically leaving producers of public goods and services without first-hand knowledge of what is required and why an initiative was perceived as good or bad. From a co-creation perspective, the public sector misses out if citizens are only active in their roles as electorate or as customers (Agger & Hedensted Lund, 2017). In part, this is because citizens and other stakeholders become frustrated if they are unable to put forward their ideas and wishes; and in part it is because politicians lack inspiration to think up new and innovative solutions to problems, which may even be more economically efficient than the standard solutions (*ibid.*).

In order to address these shortcomings, a wave of interactive and collaborative policy initiatives have seen the light of day, particularly at the local level, both internationally (OECD, 2009, 2011; Grisel and van de Waart, 2011) as well as in Denmark (Byrskov-Nielsen, Gemal and Ulrich, 2015; Mandagmorgen, 2015; Hjelmar and Mizrahi-Werner, 2017; Reiermann, 2017). Alongside the proliferation of these participatory initiatives, there is a growing critique that a number of them have not met expectations or have even failed altogether (Monno and Khakee, 2012; Tortzen, 2016; Roy, 2017). Failure comes in many guises. One particular type of participatory initiative has been unsuccessful because policy objectives were predefined in a top-down manner so that local participants-to-be failed to see their interests and their ideas about how to achieve policy objectives reflected in them, and hence chose not to get involved. Despite

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efforts to enhance citizen and stakeholder participation, such initiatives have not solved the classical implementation challenges of engaging end users in order to enhance goal fulfilment and compliance. Another kind of participatory initiative has been unsuccessful – not due to a lack of engaged end users, participatory arenas and entry points, but because these bottom-up efforts have stalled in seemingly endless workshops, hearing rounds, qualification and engagement processes, and unclear decision-making processes which have made it hard to reach much-needed compromises and make clear, substantial progress. Another well-known variant is when bottom-up processes do actually result in necessary compromises, but the suggested policy initiatives are ultimately not backed up at the political level due to other economic priorities. In sum, the success of interactive and collaborative policy-making must balance between too little and too much citizen involvement – i.e. between direct and representative democracy – and it must do so without losing sight of professional knowledge and economic efficiency objectives (Sirianni, 2009; Nabatchi and Leighninger, 2015).

In the light of these challenges and failures, we argue that SLB could play a crucial role in developing and refining collaborative policy-making. This argument is by no means new: SLB have been granted crucial and decisive roles before in generating and securing public policies that are co-produced or co-created among civil society and public actors (Tuurnas, 2015) or created through collaborative planning processes (Allegra and Rokem, 2015; Healey, 2015; Grange, 2017). They have also played a key role in convening and facilitating interactive and collaborative governance processes (Ansell and Gash, 2008; Sehested, 2009). Also, within the field of implementation studies, where the concept of street-level bureaucrats was coined by Michael Lipsky in 1980, recent empirical research has studied how deliberate interaction between frontline staff and citizens may increase the degree to which a policy is implemented (Nielsen & Parker 2009; Brodkin and Marston, 2013; Hupe, Hill & Buffat, 2016), and how collaborative arrangements influence implementation processes (May and Winter 2007). In line with Dzur (2008), we argue that public officials, in our case SLB, are custodians of public values e.g. inclusion, transparency and accountability. Moreover, public officials have the capacity to build bridges between specialists and the lay public, thereby favourably influencing the level of trust between governors and governed in such processes. Based on this, we argue that SLB have the potential to make a significant contribution to fulfilling collaborative policy-making aspirations. SLB may, for example, influence the extent to which citizens' resources are mobilised in public service delivery, stimulate the anchorage of a project in a locality, invigorate the implementation of projects, promote local or sectoral ownership, and promote the empowerment of the involved stakeholders (Alford, 1998; Bovaird, 2014).

We contribute to this literature in two ways: first, we disaggregate Lipsky's concept of SLB into 'academic specialists' and 'academic generalists' (see below). We work with the hypothesis that interactive policy-making schemes have different implications for different types of public employees (specialists and generalists, respectively), and that distinguishing between the two categories will

reveal different needs for new skills and competencies. Mapping out these differences is a first step towards pinpointing how educational institutions could change their curricula in ways that support the new mode of governance. Second, we build on work from a number of different academic fields such as planning, public administration, and political science, where scholars have endeavoured to describe tasks and roles that can enable public administrators to manoeuvre wisely in more interactive settings. We then take these perspectives a step further by focusing on the skills and capabilities that these new tasks and roles require of SLB.

The paper is structured in the following way: first, we unfold the SLB concept and clarify how we will use it, and we distinguish between academic specialists and academic generalists. Second, we sift through empirical material from case studies of area-based urban regeneration initiatives in order to identify used and needed skills and competencies for generalists and specialists, respectively. We focus on the new challenges and dilemmas brought about by interactive and collaborative policy-making schemes, as reported by the respondents. Third, we 'translate' the declared challenges and dilemmas into recommendations for educational programmes. Finally, we conclude on our research question, and call for further debate on the skills and capabilities that are needed in interactive settings in order to secure democratic, innovative and efficient public policy solutions.

Qualifying the concept of street-level bureaucrats

Within the scholarly debate in areas such as planning, public administration, and political science, there have been a number of attempts to capture how more interactive modes of governance change the tasks and roles of the involved professionals, who find themselves working in ever-more interactive settings and collaborative networks that are nonetheless still hierarchical. We see this, for instance, in descriptions of public administrators as *boundary spanners* (Williams, 2002), *deliberative practitioners* (Forester, 1999); *inside activists* (Olsson, 2009), *exemplary practitioners* (van Hulst, de Graaf and van den Brink, 2011) or *meta-governors* (Sørensen and Torfing, 2009); and in accounts of the new roles that are required of them (Peters 2010; Williams 2012). Contributors to this debate acknowledge how extensive reforms have reconfigured traditional decision-making structures within local government, as well as traditional schemes for service provision, and point to a number of dilemmas and tensions that emerge when public administrators are asked to carry out new tasks in new, interactive ways. Calls are made for frontline workers to be more entrepreneurial and innovative, to cooperate more closely with multiple civic and private stakeholders (Durose 2011), to master 'soft skills' or even 'people skills' (McCorkle & Witt, 2014), and to be able to develop, manage and facilitate processes aiming to ensure stakeholder identification, involvement and engagement (Sehested, 2009; Allegra and Rokem, 2015).

In our view, this debate about tasks and roles lacks a distinction between different types of public administrator. Here, Michael Lipsky's seminal work on street-level bureaucrats (1980) is inspirational, as Lipsky taught us to distinguish between different types of public administrator: de facto public managers and street-level bureaucrats. Much of the above-mentioned literature tends to lump public administrators together, leaving the reader with the impression that all public administrators are faced with the same kinds of challenges when operating in interactive policy-making and collaborative service provision. Lipsky, on the other hand, reminds us to distinguish more carefully between types of public administrators, yet his typology, developed in the late 1970s, which includes higher-level public managers vs. street-level bureaucrats, does not adequately capture what is going on for public administrators – particularly those Lipsky calls public managers – as we move towards more interactive and collaborative forms of governance.

Inspired by these two streams of literature – the NPG literature which highlights new tasks and roles, and Lipsky reminding us to differentiate between public administrators - we find it helpful to introduce a back-office – front-office distinction in order to get a grip on what is going on. Our claim is that many of those whom Lipsky denoted 'public managers' and whom, at the time of Lipsky's writing, were working in the back office, today work at the frontline in close collaboration and in face-to-face situations with citizens and private stakeholders. This tendency is reflected in a number of empirical studies on the skills and capacities of public servants (see e.g. Larsen et al., 2010; Heide and Larsen, 2011; Löfgren and Poulsen, 2013) and within planning (Albrechts, 2002), and it is the reason why we argue that the concept of SLB needs to be updated in order to include those professionals. Thus, we understand public administrators working 'front office' in the same way as Lipsky understands frontline street-level bureaucrats, but as the frontline/SLB concept is much more commonly used, we follow this tradition. However, our back office concept does not exactly fit Lipsky's concept of public managers because, since Lipsky taught us well, we find the need to distinguish between *academic generalists* and *academic specialists*. Both generalists and specialists have traditionally worked in back office positions with only scarce face-to-face contact with citizens, companies and organisations. Academic generalists (who are comparable to Lipsky's public managers) have traditionally dedicated themselves to carrying out policy mandates emanating from above in the hierarchical political system. Academic specialists (e.g. engineers, architects, biologists etc.) have dedicated themselves to turning political ambitions into concrete plans.

In reality, in times of interactive policy-making, our back office concept is also obsolete – which is exactly the point. When public policy is generated and carried out in the form of collaboration between citizens, companies, organisations, etc., administrative generalists and administrative specialists are forced to leave their desks in the back office and venture out to meet stakeholders. In effect, they become frontline workers because they meet the public face to face, often on location. Yet their role and sphere of operation is different from that of

Lipsky's SLB because they are still linked to the back office as well as to the (legal) rules and (professional) norms that reign there. The tasks awaiting academic generalists and academic specialists, respectively, at the frontline differ considerably. Below, we analyse an empirical case of collaborative governance in order to identify which skills and capabilities are used by academic generalists and academic specialists, and which they consider that they need when they leave their back office positions and engage at the frontline.

SLB as academic specialists and generalists – Skills used and dilemmas

Keeping in mind the distinction, developed above, between academic generalists and specialists, in this section we take an empirical look at the skills and capacities used by SLB working in interactive policy settings. Our findings draw on a study with the title '*Communities in transition – new approaches to understanding and facilitating community involvement*'[1] carried out in the period from January 2015 – June 2017, and financed by the Danish Ministry of 'Transport, Building & Housing'. Part of the study involved analysing how urban planners working on urban regeneration projects in Denmark staged and facilitated co-production processes together with local stakeholders (e.g. citizens, businesses, volunteer organisations, public institutions) in deprived neighbourhoods. In particular, the study looked at 'Area-based Initiatives' (ABI), that is, a type of urban regeneration project that emphasises active involvement by local stakeholders in the formulation, prioritisation, and implementation of projects (Københavns Kommune, 2012).

These initiatives run in deprived neighbourhoods for a 5-year period and are intended to function as catalysts for coordinating integrated physical and social solutions in close collaboration with local stakeholders (Københavns kommune, 2012). The ABIs run a local secretariat located in the neighbourhoods, and the employed staff are expected to make an active effort to mobilise local actors to take part in a number of working groups where local solutions are co-created. The ABIs are expected to act as intermediaries between the local neighbourhood and the municipality, as well as among different departments internally in the municipality. The Danish ABIs are known as front-runners when it comes to developing new and more interactive approaches to mobilising, and collaborating with, local stakeholders and may, as such, be seen as urban laboratories for co-creation between public and private actors (Larsen, 2013; Agger and Sørensen, 2018).

The empirical data for the study consists of 32 qualitative interviews with planners working in seven ABI projects in Copenhagen (*Haraldsgade, Vesterbro, Skt. Kjelds, Fuglekvarteret, Sundholm, Valby* and *Indre Nørrebro*). We consider the professionals working in the ABIs to be SLB because they work at the 'frontline', meeting local actors in face-to-face relations. We define a number of our informants as academic specialists given that they have backgrounds in engineering, (landscape) architecture, environmental planning and public health.

Other informants are identified as academic generalists, with backgrounds in public administration, political science, urban geography or other social science-based combinations. It was a new experience for all these professionals to work at the frontline and on the boundary between the locality and the municipality. As such, they had to navigate between back-office and front-line work. On the one hand, they were expected to represent the municipality vis-à-vis the citizens, and on the other they were expected to represent the locality in the municipal departments. As more interactive governance initiatives gain ground, many professionals who operated in the back office either as academic generalists or specialists tend to be expected to master frontline skills.

SLB as academic generalists

The SLB professionals whom we label 'academic generalists' in this article are, as noted above, public managers, to use Lipsky's terminology. However, unlike Lipsky's public managers, our academic generalists actually work at the frontline and encounter citizens face to face. Previously, academic generalists came from backgrounds in public administration or political science. The skills these professionals have traditionally applied in their jobs include knowledge about the political system, governance structures, economy and law. However, over the past decade, a notable development has taken place in Denmark regarding the employee composition of urban planning projects: while still rooted in the social sciences, new types of professional are being hired, with backgrounds in cultural studies, anthropology, social entrepreneurship, business studies, urban design and others. A common feature of these professionals is that they master skills in project management, participation techniques, communication and mediation. These gains come at the expense of qualifications in political science, and public administration skills, such as knowledge about democracy, law or administrative procedures, although our study shows that these skills still matter. The majority of the academic generalists in our study describe themselves as 'translators' or 'bridge-builders' among different types of knowledge and logics. As a consequence, in order to be able to act and spur progress, a central skill is the ability to 'read' and 'understand' the political system. As one planner expressed it metaphorically in this quote:

> A municipality consists of a number of small kingdoms. You have to know each of them and their corresponding main entrances. If you enter the front door the project dies. You have to find the back door and find the person that can help you to make progress. (Planner A in Copenhagen, 2017)

This quote illustrates how knowledge about how to manoeuvre in the silo structure can be decisive in order to effectuate projects. Furthermore, the ability to recognise and comprehend other professional approaches and skills is considered

an important skill by many of the informants we talked to. One academic generalist SLB explained it thus:

> I have the ability to read – and understand other professional fields – even though I am not educated within planning or architecture. My point is that it is important that the different professional fields get their space and that we respect that each has their own strengths. (Planner C in Copenhagen, 2017)

We heard several stories about how academic generalists are eager to integrate different types of knowledge when designing projects and activities. Some of the skills they reported that they used included the ability to link resources or networks, active listening, and outreach work inspired by anthropological methods. One described his role as being '*a civil servant – with a cowboy hat working at full gallop on the fringe of the municipality'*. With this expression, he touches upon a general characteristic that several of the academic generalists described as one of the expectations associated with their position. On the one hand, they are expected to perform as disrupters who test innovative solutions that cross municipal silos and can operate at the limits of the law (or previous interpretations of the law). On the other hand, they are expected to create trust and build relations and coherence in the neighbourhood. The latter can prove difficult if, for instance, locally initiated ideas are 'translated' into bureaucratic procedures and lingo that are foreign to the involved actors. Another example is when the involved actors are up against conflicting or contradicting intentions enshrined in different laws (Agger, 2015, p. 100).

Several of the academic generalists used social skills – or 'people skills' (McCorkle & Witt 2014). This involves the ability to communicate with high-level ministerial employees as well as with socially marginalised people. One described some of the competences he used as follows:

> I perceive myself as a bridge – a builder or a networker. It is this skill 'knowing what's going on everywhere'. I think that is why they hired me. I can both move in elevated circles as well as talk to the homeless on the corner. So it's my flair for establishing contact with all kinds of people, so they [these people] get the chance to voice their opinion; and then a talent for linking resources. (Planner I in Copenhagen, 2015)

Most of the academic generalists working as SLB claimed that they actually liked being at the frontline and working directly with local residents and other stakeholders in the neighbourhood. As one interviewee stated:

> I'm at my best when I'm working close to the practice field and away from the town hall. It's a challenge, when you're centrally located, to stick to the needs of the neighbourhood. The reason is that if you're working centrally, you quickly become part of the system which of course also aims to carry out good projects, but at the same time [the system] is at risk of becoming self-referential. Of course, we constantly have to be aware of new policies and political situations – but it makes sense when we 'translate' or interpret these [policies] so that they make sense locally. (Planner M in Copenhagen, 2015)

The above quote captures a point expressed by the majority of the academic generalists: that most of their work is about navigating between different spheres and logics. Crossing boundaries and creating participatory solutions across municipal silos clearly motivates some of the academic generalists. To pursue these endeavours, academic generalists must be persistent, suggest unconventional solutions, insist that all situations have some common ground which can be found if one is sufficiently creative and determined, and create realistic solutions that make a difference for local actors while at the same time being acceptable to society at large (in this case the municipality). Behind these capabilities lie academic skills such as analytical capacities, negotiation techniques, the ability to formulate constructive critique of someone's position or proposal, as well as more specific skills in writing tenders, memos, minutes, budgets and recommendations for decisions in the style and language used in the political and bureaucratic spheres; but also proposals, agreements and information pamphlets in a style and language suited for local target groups.

We further identified a distinguishing feature of our academic generalists which has to do with how they identify themselves. Academic generalists who primarily identify themselves with the back-stage office see themselves as *'the prolonged arm of the municipality in the neighbourhood'*; a position that corresponds well with core values of representative democracy. In contrast, others identify themselves with the frontline, and as '*the voice of the community in the municipal system'*; a position that corresponds more to direct democracy. Whichever democratic position they associate themselves with, the academic generalists find themselves caught in between the municipal departments and the local actors in a position that causes tensions due to its different logics and priorities - the clash between direct and representative democracy being but one.

SLB as academic specialists
The academic specialists, in particular, experienced a new role when they moved from back-office work to front-office work in the midst of local stakeholders with conflicting interests. They are employed in order to ensure that the ABI projects maintain a high professional standard, and are bound by the legal frames and democratic norms of public bureaucracies. We witnessed that many of the academic specialists used the classical skills of their profession to design ideas

for solutions e.g. for the design of public parks or climate-friendly activities. One difficulty facing several of these professionals is that they need to translate their technical knowledge, sector-specific jargon and often complex laws, rules and regulations into language intelligible to ordinary citizens, and many find that they lack communication skills in this regard. Some of these communicative difficulties have to do with striking a balance between what they, as specialists and experts, define as a minimum level of technical precision and explanation for a public text, without local laymen finding it incomprehensible and full of obscure technicalities that they are cannot relate to, let alone comment on.

Another challenge facing our academic specialists is that they find it difficult to navigate between opposing or conflicting views among the local stakeholders themselves, or the local stakeholders and the municipality. What characterises most of the academic specialists is that they are eager to make the citizens' voices be heard. However, when these voices conflict, either amongst themselves in the locality or with the strategies of the city council – and thereby the elected politicians - whom should they then serve? Should they serve the citizens whom they meet face to face in their daily work and who epitomise the superior voice according to the ideals of direct democracy? Or should they stick loyally to the strategies and policies of the elected politicians, as would be expected of them within the model of representative democracy? They often even face a third option: should they hold on to professional standards that define unpopular, but technically 'best practices' and which are also part of their professional identity?

We also identified a different approach to interactive policymaking between younger academic specialists and their older, more experienced colleagues. Thus, the experienced specialists were more aware of the political dimensions of their work, but also the need to hold onto their professional standards. In contrast, the younger generation seemed to prioritise the collaborative aspects, and were eager find ways to generate trust among the participants and to find common solutions. An example of the first was an experienced female architect:

> As an urban planner, you have to cherish your professional competence and not be afraid to speak your mind. If the politicians and decision makers won't listen, there's not much you can do. But the important thing is that you've voiced your opinion. One should not compromisejust to please somebody. (Planner B, Copenhagen 2017)

Being at the end of the policy implementation chain, and at the frontline involved in face-to-face relations with local citizens, is not always easy when there are certain rules, professional perspectives etc. that for technical reasons are simply not up for discussion. Our academic specialists – particularly the older ones – found it difficult to fulfil the part of the ABI strategy in which they were expected to build close relationships and trust in the locality. Our informants found themselves lacking training in facilitation, conflict management and (this

type of) project management. For several of them, having to deal with distrust towards the municipality and the project came as an unwelcome surprise. One of our informants reported how she had become frustrated and responded fiercely to some very critical citizens:

> There were some people that were constantly criticising the municipality and the public administration department. At last I responded that I found it frustrating to sit with them and that I was just doing my job – and the only thing they did was to scold us and that was not ok. Then they went completely silent. I aired some frustrations – and I get sad when somebody just criticises my work. I am actually sitting there because I want to contribute and because I think it's important. (Planner C, Copenhagen 2017)

Finding themselves in turbulent waters, obliged to deal with clashing interests from different groups of local citizens and, at the same time, having to represent a municipality that itself consists of a number of departments with colliding interests, posed a new challenge for the academic specialists. However, participatory policymaking is not about to go away any time soon, so the question is whether universities equip these groups of professionals with the skills and capabilities needed to engage in such settings? We will briefly discuss these perspectives in the next section.

Skills for SLB: Moving from back-office to front-office work

In the above analysis, we have shown how SLB working at the frontline, either as academic generalists or specialists, use different skills. In this section, we will briefly outline some of the capacities which we consider are needed by SLB in moving from back-office to frontline work. In an era of general mistrust towards authorities, experts and elites, we have witnessed a tendency in many of these more interactive policy-making activities to hold back professional knowledge contributions. This challenge is more acute for professionals such as our academic specialists who epitomise the role of 'expert', whereas 'process people' such as many of our academic generalists may more easily utilise the tide of general mistrust towards experts and elites in their own favour. Particularly those generalists who work to span the municipal silos and promote local co-production, collaboration and social inclusion may be able to tap into the general context of distrust towards authorities. Thus, the upshot is that SLB need different skills in order to produce democratic and efficient political decisions and governance. Below, we outline these skills.

For *academic generalist* SLB, the challenge is to allow space for the different types of knowledge that are relevant for a particular project. While our study demonstrates that academic generalists are proficient in including lay knowledge, we also saw that many generalists found it challenging to bring more technical or professional knowledge into debates with citizens and local stake-

holders. This is not just a question of preventing colleagues from technical departments (academic specialists) from becoming huffy or miffed. If technical knowledge and premises are excluded from discussions with citizens but – rightfully and necessarily – included later on as concrete projects are being operationalised and planned, there is a real risk that citizens will feel (even more) deceived if their ideas and wishes 'all of a sudden' are no longer included in the project. Such trajectories risk turning interactive arenas into mere talking shops which do not result in any action that can satisfy either the citizens or the academic specialists, nor contribute to the creation of democratically responsive or economically efficient solutions. For academic generalist SLB, a central skill is, thus, to be aware of the different types of knowledge (lay and specialist) and capacities needed to facilitate interaction between those who possess that knowledge, in order to create solutions that are rooted in citizens' needs and at the same time professionally sound. An example of how this has been done in the ABIs was an academic generalist who held a workshop for citizens and academic specialists (architects) in order to clarify citizens' needs and concerns and to develop ideas about how to integrate green and climate-friendly elements into their street. After the meeting, the academic specialist developed a package of three options that all met the requisite professional standards. The package was then used in the ensuing debates, and the three proposals served as a framework within which citizens were invited to offer ideas for improvements and ultimately asked to choose their preferred model. In this way, the citizens were heard, but the solutions were kept within a technically and economically feasible framework.

For *academic specialist* SLB, as mentioned in the previous section, the key skills required have to do with the ability to collaborate with citizens. These include skills in conflict resolution, communication, team-building, and project management. Such competences seldom form part of specialist professional curricula. To illustrate this, we will report on an incident figuring two academic specialists who were sitting in the local secretariat in a deprived neighbourhood one late winter afternoon. The office in question had large windows, allowing passers-by full view of the interior, especially when lit up as on a dark winter afternoon. One of the specialists told us that she felt exposed, like prey surrounded by circling sharks. One afternoon, a group of young immigrant boys entered the office and behaved in a menacing manner. The specialists both reported that they had found the situation very unpleasant and had realized that they completely lacked the skills to defuse potentially conflictive situations. After the incident, the specialists contacted a group of social workers that had close connections to the group of youngsters, and by using the social workers as their 'ambassadors', the specialists were able to initiate some joint activities involving the social workers and the youngsters, which over time generated trust and built productive social relations.

Being at the frontline, face to face with citizens also means that SLB are expected to be custodians of some public principles. Such principles have been formulated e.g. by the American Society for Public Administration (ASPA) in its

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'Code of Ethics', in which public servants may read that they (among others) are expected to advance the public interest, uphold the law, promote democratic participation, strengthen social equity, and promote professional excellence (*Public Administration Review*, 2017, p. 4). Similar standards were formulated in 2015 for Danish civil servants by a committee set up by the largest union in the field (DJØF's 'Bo Smith Committee). Adhering to these standards, as well as to calls from the research literature (Peredo & McLean, 2006; Cunliffe, 2016; Oonk, Gulikers & Mulder, 2017), and in our own research we wish to call attention to a number of skills we find particularly relevant for future SLB navigating in interactive policy-making settings.

First on our list is *knowledge about different modes of democracy and the democratic system.* This type of knowledge involves an understanding of relevant political and bureaucratic institutions, their mandate, the scope of their authority, and the way in which they operate (e.g. budget cycles, relative importance of committees, lingo etc.). SLB need this type of knowledge in order to decode how decisions are made in their systems and to differentiate between representative, direct, and deliberative forms of democratic governance. They also need *participatory skills* enabling them to navigate in and between these different modes of democracy. At the municipal level, this includes a grasp of the municipality not only as an administrative entity but also as a local community, where public services benefit from being created in close collaboration with affected stakeholders, measured in terms of societal cohesion and economic efficiency. This means that SLB need *skills for outreach* and for *mobilising local actors* during all stages of a policy process. Although academic specialists may have a more urgent need to enhance their outreach and mobility skills, academic generalists would also benefit from updated skills on how to mobilise (or tap into already mobilised) citizens and local stakeholders. Schooled within the notion of a Weberian bureaucracy that supposes clear and stable boundaries between public administrative entities and levels, as well as clear and stable boundaries between the public, the private and the civilian sectors, academic generalists are often short on the skills required for an era marked by ever-more fluid boundaries between sectors and administrative entities.

We end our long list of necessary skills by calling attention to capabilities that could promote design thinking in public policy-making (Bason, 2010; Ansell & Torfing, 2014; Ekelin and Eriksén, 2015; Lim, 2016). Skills *in designing* and *prototyping* projects and services – i.e. skills in *generating ideas, testing, failing, and facilitating creative and interactive meeting arenas* – would propel public solutions based on what citizens and stakeholders find pertinent. Design thinking clashes both with the mind-set of academic specialists, who are used to seeing their professional knowledge trump lay knowledge; and with the mind-set of academic generalists, who are trained to perform within a culture unaccustomed to testing and (particularly) to celebrating errors and failures as important learning moments.

Discussion: Consequences for practice

This article aims to answer the following questions: *What kind of skills and capabilities do SLB (academic specialists and academic generalists) need to engage in more interactive forms of public policy-making? And what are the consequences for how universities educate these groups?*

As faculty members teaching on a public administration study programme, we are concerned about how to equip the next generation of SLB – particularly the academic generalists we educate on our programme – with adequate skills to manoeuvre in settings characterised by different types of knowledge and interests. As stated in the introduction, we welcome the attention given to processual and facilitative skills in a number of master's programmes, as knowledge and skills pertaining to communication, conflict resolution and the mobilisation of volunteers enter the curriculum Yet although we applaud this development, we are concerned about the consequences if the many interactive encounters between public and private stakeholders merely result in much talk and little action or, even worse, in frustration for all concerned. Frustrated citizens and stakeholders will eventually lose faith in the authorities and the state as institutions; academic specialists will find themselves and their professional knowledge marginalised; and academic generalists may feel discouraged and exasperated at their inability to provide apt public solutions. Fortunately, this bleak scenario is but a scenario, yet it baldly depicts what is potentially at stake. So let us conclude by outlining what we consider to be the most important capacities for the next generation of SLB, based on our study:

- First, the ability to know and read the system you are part of. This means that the next generation of students should gain insight not only into the public sector per se, but also into the power games and logics at play. This competence is crucial for all types of SLB; however, it the least prominent in current academic curricula for academic specialists.
- Second, *awareness of your own role as a public employee who has to balance between representative and direct democracy.* It is important to provide the next generation of public administrators with an awareness of what it means to work within the public sector, and of the public values they become custodians of, e.g. transparency, equal access, etc. The SLB are seen as representing the 'political establishment' and 'the public sector' and their behavior therefore affects citizens' trust in the political system, the public sector and ultimately the state. This is relevant for all types of SLB; however, we may expect academic generalists to take the lead on this issue.
- Third, the *capacity to stand up to pressure (political or civil) and maintain your professional integrity.* This calls for insight into conflict resolution, mediation and negotiation techniques. Particularly

academic specialists seem to be challenged on this account, although maintaining professional integrity is essential for all SLB.

The above recommendations are derived from our reading of the literature (including existing codes of conducts), but also first and foremost from information we have gathered from practitioners. We recognise that higher-level educational programmes must develop according to theoretical and technological breakthroughs stemming from desktop and laboratory research, but at the same time they must also adapt to the challenges and tensions experienced by practitioners. By definition, interactive policy-making involves multiple stakeholders from various sectors – public, private, civil – and as our study clearly shows, it is not easy to find solutions to public policy issues that satisfy all concerned and at the same time adhere to the values of democratic and economic efficiency. We need to look into more cases of interactive policy-making, focusing not just on conflicts but in particular on how conflictive incidents are dealt with and how progress is assured even in situations that are stuck in stalemate. Universities have much to learn from the practice field (see e.g. the work of Forester, 2009), not only for researchers driving their research forward, but also for study coordinators and others responsible for developing higher educational programmes. Both at the level of designing the general structures and requirements of educational programmes, as well as at the level of individual courses, close collaboration with the practice field is important. It is in the encounter with the field that theoretical arguments are tested and methodological competencies must show their worth. It is also in this encounter that an awareness and vocabulary for different types of dilemmas and challenges is created, and may translate into skills and capacities that can help the next generation of SLB to navigate wisely in turbulent waters.

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Notes

[1] In Danish, the title is: 'Fælleskaber i forandring – nye metoder til at forstå og facilitere fællesskaber'