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GOVERNANCE NETWORKS AS A TOOL FOR DEMOCRATIZING INTER-GOVERNMENTAL POLICY MAKING

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Abstract

Both governance theory and social network analysis have much to offer in pointing out the important role that governance networks can potentially play in democratizing inter-governmental policy making. By establishing weak democratic ties between operationally autonomous but interdependent democratically appointed governments governance networks can promote an effective diffusion of information and influence and some degree of social cohesion between them. This specific capacity of governance networks give them an important role to play in a much needed democratization of inter-demos policy making as well as in reducing the risk of political closure that characterizes intra-demos policy making. However, if this democratic potential of governance networks is to be realized, they must be metagoverned in ways that construct them as democratic arenas that are called upon to legitimize themselves in accordance with a hegemonic democratic myth.

1. Introduction

Twentieth Century political science and public administration research has documented in detail that there is considerable distance between the ideal typical promises of the various normative models of representative democracy and their actual functioning in advanced liberal democracies (Schumpeter 1975 [1942]; Dahl 1956; Lindblom 1965; Rhodes 1997). Nevertheless, representative democracy has maintained its unchallenged and almost mythical position as the only acceptable way of institutionalizing liberal democracy. The strength of this myth can be explained partly by its simplicity and clarity that offers a consoling sense of order, and partly by the fact that we have not yet seen alternative myths that are able to offer the same kind of consoling image of what strong democratic institutions look like (Stoker 1998, p. 21). Any institutional set up that aims to become recognized as a positive contribution to democracy must lean on such a myth. The strength of the prevailing myth is evidenced by the fact that despite the documented distance from ideal type to reality the institutions of representative democracy prevail: there appears to be no better way of ensuring democracy within a political community than though the election of a representative political body, e.g. a government.

The myth has, however, proven to be considerably less powerful as a point of reference for considerations regarding how to democratically institutionalize the increasing amount of policy making that involves more than one democratically elected government (Bohman 2005; Ansell

2000; Jessop 2004). This weak point in the myth derives from the fact that most models of representative democracy view democracy as a way of organizing decision making within a polity and not between polities. Due to this intra-polity approach to democracy, few considerations are made regarding how to democratize inter-governmental policy making i.e. policy making that involves two or more transnational, national, sub-national or sub-local democratically elected representative bodies. Among them count the European Parliament, national parliaments, regional and municipal councils, and finally elected city and village councils and user boards. As such, a one sided reliance on the model of representative democracy produces an *institutional void in democracy*. Moreover, as pointed out in the expanding research on governance and globalization, this void is becoming more and more hard felt due to the current growth in inter-governmental policy making (Greven and Pauly 2000; Holden 2000; Bache and Flinders 2004; Heffen, Kickert and Thomassen 2000; Kersbergen and Waarden 2004; Hajer 2003). Therefore, the question of how to fill the democratic void is moving ever higher on the research agenda of political scientists and public administration researchers.

The aim of this article is to propose that although governance networks challenge representative democracy in many ways (Pierre and Peters 2005, p. 118; Klijn and Koppenjan 2004), they have the potential to become a cornerstone in democratizing inter-governmental policy. The democratic potentials of governance networks are directly related to their particular form and functioning: they offer an institutional framework that promotes the formulation of shared goals and coordinated action in contexts characterized by non-hierarchical relations between interdependent but operationally autonomous actors, e.g. governments. Thereby, they provide a means to enhance the willingness of governments to commit themselves to inter-governmental political decisions making on issues of shared importance. Although the ability to promote joint action between governments is not in itself a contribution to democracy, the willingness to engage in collective decision making that reaches beyond the individual demos is an important precondition for developing inter-governmental forms of democracy. The particular democratic contribution of governance networks is that they institutionalize inter-governmental policy making in ways that do not undermine but supplement and enrich the institutional set up and myth that have given representative democracy its hegemonic position in advanced liberal democracies. They *supplement* representative democracy by offering an

institutional set up and a powerful myth that encourages governments to pursue joint policy making without damaging the links to their respective constituencies. They *enrich* representative democracy by destabilizing the sharp lines that are drawn between the inside and outside of democracy and by disturbing well-established power positions and alliances and hegemonic policy discourses within the individual demos (Connolly 1995). As such, governance networks can be seen as a valuable ingredient in expanding the model of representative democracy in ways that, at one and the same time, help to fill the institutional void that characterizes the traditional model of representative democracy, and improves its ability to live up to its promises.

Efforts to clarify the particular value of governance networks in developing an expanded model of representative democracy can find valuable inspiration in Mark Granovetter's (1973) famous analysis of the strength of weak ties. This analysis points out how the presence of weak ties between groups constituted on strong ties is crucial for ensuring effective societal governance because weak ties stimulate an effective diffusion of information and influence and some level of social cohesion in contexts characterized by marked differentiation. Although Granovetter is more interested in effectiveness than in democracy, and focuses on dyadic structures and not on the role and functioning of weak ties between multiple actors, his basic argument is also relevant in this context. Hence, I shall claim that the presence of weak ties between governments with strong ties to their constituencies is highly important for two reasons. First, the existence of weak ties adds to the diffusion of political information that can promote democratic accountability, the diffusion of political influence to those governments who are most intensely affected by the decisions made, and the development of a sense of shared destiny between them needed to construct them as a momentary or situated 'we' or demos that can pursue a common good. Second, the existence of weak ties between governments paves the way for an inter-governmental political orientation that will reduce the permanent danger of intra-demos closure through a disturbance and a reshuffling of existing power positions, hegemonic discourses and storylines and political identities.

The fact that inter-governmental policy making between elected governments does already to a wide extent take place in various types of governance networks further supports the view that it is worth while considering the role that governance networks might play in enhancing the democratic quality of inter-governmental policy-processes (Fung and Wright 2003; Bogason

and Zølner 2007; Slaughter 2003; Marcussen and Torfing 2007; Ansell 2000; Kern and Bulkeley 2009; Benz and Papadopoulos 2006). However, as highlighted in the current debate among governance theorists, the surge of governance networks hold promises as well as dangers for democracy (Klijn and Skelcher 2004; Sørensen and Torfing 2007; Young 2000; Hansen 2007; Dryzek 2007; Pierre and Peters 2005). What we learn from this debate is that governance networks are neither intrinsically democratic nor intrinsically undemocratic. Moreover, we learn that whether they become the one or the other depends on the degree to which they are metagoverned in ways that construct them as democratic arenas (Sørensen and Torfing 2005). I define democratic arenas as institutionalized arrangements and myths that put pressure on the participating actors: 1) to diffuse influence between the involved parties in ways that can be legitimized with reference to the degree to which the participants are affected by the decisions that are being made; 2) to develop a sense of shared destiny that makes the formulation of shared policy goals possible; and 3) to diffuse information between them in ways that make it possible for the participants to hold each other to account.

After a short description of the institutional void that exists in models of representative democracy and the growing concerns that this void gives rise to, follows a brief outline of two case studies that illuminate the current need to find ways to enhance the democratic functioning and legitimacy of inter-governmental policy making. Then, I point out, in more detail, the potential role that governance networks can play in this endeavour and conclude with an outline of how a realization of this potential calls for skilful and targeted metagovernance.

2. The institutional void in representative democacy

Horizontal and vertical forms of inter-governmental policy making have become a frequent and integrated part of policy making in representative democracies. Horizontal forms of inter-governmental policy making bring together governments placed at the same level of governance. Nation states have always built alliances with each other, but other levels of governance are increasingly doing the same. Big cities in different countries form partnerships in a joint effort to reduce global warming (Kern and Bulkeley 2009), and municipalities work closely together in order to coordinate their efforts to solve difficult policy problems (Pedersen, Sehested and Sørensen 2010). Vertical forms of inter-governmental policy making bring together democratically elected representatives from different levels of governance in

interactive forms of governance. Decentralized unitary states and federations have always done so, but new levels emerge that intensify this activity. Trans-national representative governments such as the EU are a case in point, and so is the mushrooming of various democratically elected sub-national and sub-local governments such as regional and municipal councils, neighbourhood and village councils and schools boards and boards for the elderly. EU authorities engage in close dialogue with member states in order to integrate European employment policies (Bogason and Zølner 2007), and national, sub-national and sub-local governments involve themselves in fierce negotiations over the distribution of budgets and responsibilities (Blom-Hansen 2002).

The model of representative democracy can be said to suffer from an institutional void because it does not give advice regarding how to democratize this kind of inter-governmental policy making. This void is a direct consequence of the model's intra-demos orientation that restricts democratic issues to those having to do with how a given People can govern itself through the election of a government that makes decisions on behalf of that People. Due to this intra-demos perspective, the model has very little to say about how a People and its government can interact with other Peoples and governments in a democratic way.

The models of representative democracy have particularly little to say about horizontal forms of inter-governmental policy making that bring together governments placed at the same level of governance. This is equally true with regard to governance processes that bring together different international political institutions, different nation states and different sub-national and sub-local governments. The general tendency in representative democracies to treat foreign policy as a specific kind of policy making that need not live up to democratic norms and standards such as publicity is a case in point (Connolly 1995, p. 141). However, as we shall see later, this tendency to regard democratic norms and standards as irrelevant in relation to horizontal forms of inter-governmental policy making reaches far beyond foreign policy. It is just as common/clear in the case of inter-municipal policy making.

In relation to vertical forms of inter-governmental policy making, federal models of representative democracy and decentred unitary state models do offer important insights into how inter-governmental policy making between different levels in the political system can be democratized. However, these models tend to focus on the formal distribution of power between governmental levels and the relationships between each of these levels and the people

who elect them. Less attention has, therefore, been directed towards the complex and intense interaction between the levels that actually takes place in the governance processes that are necessitated by the outspoken interdependencies between them. Accordingly, multi-level models of representative democracy have not addressed the question of how to democratize vertical instances of inter-governmental policy-making to the degree it might be expected. Rather, they have aimed to uncover the impact that different ways of distributing political powers between levels have on democracy. The EU has not to the same extent as federal political systems and decentred unitary states been able to design and legitimise its political structure with reference to the institutional set up and mythical images offered by the model of representative democracy. The ongoing dispute about what the EU is and is not means that it can neither portray itself as a federation or a confederation. For this reason it might actually prove to be the most important source of inspiration for developing a democratic model for vertical inter-governmental policy making. Its reliance on inter-governmental policy making is clearly stressed in the much cited White Paper on governance (European Commission 2001), and the systematic institutionalization of the committee system is a highly interesting laboratory for the development of new forms of inter-governmental policy making. Although these experiments have not yet led to the development of a model of inter-governmental democracy, the intensive debate about democracy in the EU that currently gained momentum among researchers and practitioners addresses the question of how to fill the institutional void left by the model of representative democracy more directly and focussed than other research fields (Bohman 2005; Habermas 2001; Ansell 2000; Benz and Papadopoulos 2006; Jessop 2004). Intensified political globalization has pushed the question of how to democratize inter-governmental policy making further up on the research agenda (Zürn 2000; Holden 2000). The same can be said about the many governance reforms that challenge the idea that good governance can be obtained through a strict separations of powers and tasks between higher and lower levels of governance. Hence, these reforms have given birth to a system of governance in which the latter's autonomy is not given but depends on their ability to meet standards defined by the former (Larner and Walters 2004; Sørensen and Triantafillou 2009).

In this emerging reality, the institutional void in representative democracy becomes both more apparent and more serious. As envisaged by the two empirical case studies outlined

below, the need to develop a model of democracy that fills this void is getting more and more urgent.

3. Empirical manifestations of the institutional void

Let us take a brief look at the kinds of inter-governmental policy making that take place in advanced liberal democracies. A brief presentation of the results of two recent case studies of relatively institutionalized inter-governmental policy making illuminates how the void manifests itself empirically in actual governance processes. The first study focuses on a horizontal inter-governmental policy arena that brings together a number of Danish municipalities in joint policy making. The second study illuminates how vertical inter-governmental policy making is being institutionalized in an EU context. The two studies show that inter-governmental policy making integrated, influential and institutionalized aspect of public policy making. Moreover, the studies envisage that despite the integrated, influential and institutionalized role they play few considerations have been made regarding the implications of this form of policy making for democracy.

Inter-municipal policy making in Denmark

A reform of the Danish political system that took place in 2007 has triggered an increase in horizontal inter-governmental policy making between the municipalities in each of five new regions. Although one of the defined goals of the reform was to reduce this kind of inter-municipal collaboration by making larger municipalities that could manage things by themselves the opposite happened. A simultaneous decentralization of a large number of governance tasks and the institutionalization of a strict auditing regime triggered an intensive battle for power between the state and the municipalities. The new governance tasks as well as the intensive battle for power enhanced the feeling of interdependency between the municipalities and gave them an incentive to collaborate.

   Although Danish municipalities already worked together before 2007, the reform initiated a formalization and intensification of the inter-municipal collaboration though the formation of a Municipal Contact Council (MCC) in each region. These new MCCs are composed of the Mayors and a selected number of political leaders from the opposition parties. A study of the

activities in the MCC in Region Zealand over a three year period from early 2007 to the end of 2009 shows how the Council is gradually becoming an integrated and still more institutionalized, influential and well-functioning arena for inter-municipal policy making[1]. It is not least a result of skilful metagovernance performed by the National Association of Danish Municipalities, and a hard working and ambitious chair with the ability to moderate the many conflicts that occur between the municipalities along the way.

It is noteworthy that although the MCC in Region Zealand has become a fully accepted, highly institutionalized and politically powerful player on the regional political scene, it has not been constructed as a democratic arena that needs to live up to particular democratic norms and standards. Few questions have been raised about the democratic functioning and legitimacy of the Council by those who participate in it or by politicians or other actors who do not, and the issue has not been addressed by metagovernors. The involved actors have been more concerned about how to strengthen the ability of the MCC to make joint decisions that address pressing governance problems and enhance the willingness of the municipalities to stick together in order to develop and realize joint policy strategies.

Some members of the MCC do, however, find it difficult to operate in the interface between their respective municipal councils and the MCC and search for ways to link and balance the policy making that goes on in the two arenas. Moreover, many municipal politicians point out that although they fully accept the need for an MCC, they do not feel sure about what role it is playing and should play in the policy process and how it affects the policy making that takes place in the individual municipal councils.

Multi-level policy making in EU

The EU has developed several interesting institutional mechanisms that bring EU authorities and representatives from the member states together in processes of joint policy making. The 'Open Method of Coordination' (OMC) is one of them. The OMC is a method for joint policy

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[1] The case study was carried out by a group of researchers within the Centre of Democratic Network Governance at Roskilde University, and was financed by the Moms-Foundation. Over a period of three years around 50 interviews were made with politicians, administrators and other actors involved in regional policy making in Region Zealand, and more than 30 observations of meetings and events were made. The full presentation of the results of the study is available in Pedersen, A., K. Sehested, and E. Sørensen (eds). 2010. *Offentlig styring som pluricentrisk koordination*. Copenhagen: DJØF Publishers.

making in the EU in policy areas where the EU does not have decision making powers. It is particularly interesting in this context because it lays out a procedure for the formulation and implementation of joint policy programmes between autonomous but interdependent governments that are placed at different levels in a multi-level governance structure such as the EU (Ansell 2000; Bohman 2005; Jessop 2004; Peters and Pierre 2004). A series of case studies of the functioning of the OMC process within the field of European employment policy from 2003-2009 show how employment policy in Europe is being formulated and implemented in complex inter-governmental policy processes that involves EU authorities, and national (and sub-national) governments[2].

A cornerstone in the OMC process consists in the formulation of a set of policy guidelines that national governments should follow in their formulation and implementation of national employment policies. These guidelines are formulated by EMCO that is composed of representatives from the European Commission, the member states and different stakeholders (Torfing 2007, p. 43). National governments are regularly asked to report how they are responding to these guidelines, and meetings are held between the commission and the national governments in order to evaluate the national policy outcomes and discuss national policy strategies for the future.

The case studies indicate that the ongoing dialogue between the European Commission and the national governments plays an important role in developing and implementing a European employment policy. This is among other things a result of skilful metagovernance. The commission make use of a variety of soft forms of governance such as 'naming and shaming' events and bench marking schemes in order to put pressure on the member states to take the guidelines into account. Moreover, the studies show that the involved actors mainly view the OMC process as a managerial and none-political process that can safely be left in the hands of public administrators from the commission and the member states. Considerations about the democratic functioning and legitimacy of the OMC process seem of limited interest to them,

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[2] The case studies were carried out by researchers at the Centre for Democratic Network Governance at Roskilde University. It was financed by the Danish Social Science Research Council. Over a period of six years and involved the collection of more than 50 interviews with politicians, public administrators and other actors involved in the OMC process at different levels. Furthermore, a social network analysis and intensive document studies were made. The analysis of the case studies can be viewed in full length in P. Bogason and M. Zølner (eds). 2007. *Methods in Democratic Network Governance*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

and no attempts have been made to meta-govern the OMC process in a way that address democratic issues.

This is noteworthy in light of the fact that the EU faces serious legitimacy problems. These problems manifest themselves, among other things, when EU citizens turn their backs to new treaties, and when the European Parliament and others claim that EU suffers from a democratic deficit. Although the European Commission as early as the 'White Paper on Governance' (2001) introduced the thought that inter-governmental policy making like the one that takes place in the OMC process could add to the enhancement of EUs legitimacy, no considerations have been made about the degree to which a democratization of inter-governmental processes such as the OMC could help to reduce EUs democratic deficit.

The two case studies show that the presence of horizontal and vertical forms of inter-governmental policy making is fully accepted as an integrated element in governance processes. They are viewed as necessary for the successful governance of complex policy problems that affect citizens in more than one demos. Strikingly, the studies also show that few questions are being asked regarding the democratic implications of these instances of inter-governmental policy making. As suggested earlier, one reason for this might be that these bodies have not been constructed as democratic arenas. Due to the hegemonic position of the model of representative democracy, considerations regarding the democratic functioning and legitimacy of particular policy processes only seem relevant in situations that fit into the institutional and mythical set up outlined by this model. In municipalities as well as in the EU, considerations about the democratic character of decision making processes only seem relevant if these processes are recognizable as democratic arenas i.e. municipal councils and the European Parliament.

Efforts to pave the way for a debate about the democratic functioning and legitimacy of concrete processes of inter-governmental policy making must, therefore, start out by constructing inter-governmental policy arenas such as the MCCs and OMC as democratic arenas that must function and be legitimized according to a hegemonic democratic myth. The next step consists in outlining the features and contributions of these particular kinds of democratic arenas and the role they are to play in an extended model of representative democracy.

4. Theorical responses to globalization and new forms of governance

Within the social sciences there is a growing recognition of the inability of the traditional model of representative democracy to give answers to the question of how to ensure democracy in light of an increasing globalization and a growth in new forms of governance.   The   current challenges to democracy highlighted by globalization have been directly addressed by the proponents of a cosmopolitan democracy that argue for the establishment of transnational political and legal institutions authorized to govern the world community (Held 1995). This solution is problematic for two reasons. First, it seems unrealistic to make it happen in a foreseeable future. The hardships that the UN, EU and other transnational political institutions face in their efforts to play the role of regional or world government are cases in point. Democratically authorized transnational political institutions do indeed have an important role to play but the willingness to leave political power in the hands of these institutions have proven to be limited. Second, a cosmopolitan democracy does not fully address the fact that even if transnational political institutions could be authorized, we could not do without inter-governmental policy making. The complexity, dynamism, and diversity of the policy problems that governments must be able to address a call for flexible and situated forms of inter-governmental policy making that bring together the most intensely affected governments and those who have the resources that are relevant for solving the particular kinds of problems in question in ad hoc processes of inter-governmental policy making (Kooiman 1993; Elsig 2007). While cosmopolitan democracy highlights the need to establish trans-national democratically appointed governments, it leaves the question of how to democratize inter-governmental policy making unanswered.

Critics of cosmopolitan democracy such as James Bohman argue that an authorization of transnational political institutions to exercise rule by law is problematic because inter-governmental policy making - or what he calls 'inter-demoi' collaboration – should be based on non-domination in order not to undermine the fundamental democratic right of a demos to govern itself (Bohman 2005, p. 305). Hence, Bohman seems to view political domination within a demos more democratically acceptable with in a demos than beyond it. Although Held and Bohman hold different views regarding the degree to which transnational political bodies should be able to impose particular policies on national demoi, they both cling to the intra-demos perspective on democracy. Legitimate democratic rule is exercised by an elected

government over the people who elected it. Seen from this perspective, efforts to cope with globalization leave us with a choice between transnational legal rule and voluntarism.

Other contributions to the debate on the relationship between new forms of governance and democracy are more helpful in answering the question about how to democratize inter-governmental policy making. Paul Hirst (2000) and Archon Fung and Eric Olin Wright (2003) have pointed out how interactive governance arenas that bring together governments at different levels in the political system can promote democracy by improving the exchange of information between them, and Manfried Elsig (2007) shows how interactive governance arenas that bring together national governments, such as the WTO, are able to position themselves as legitimate arenas for inter-demoi policy making.

By bringing together this line of thinking with some of the main arguments in Mark Granovetter's social network analysis, I shall argue that governance networks have the potential to become an important arena for inter-governmental policy making because they provide an institutional set up and a mythical framework that supports the establishment of weak ties between governments: governance networks bring autonomous actors together in a way that promotes their ability and willingness to pursue shared goals. Hence, governance networks can be defined as a relatively stable regulative, normative, cognitive and imaginary institutional arena in which interdependent but operationally autonomous actors define and pursue shared goals on the basis of self-regulated negotiations.

As pointed out in the governance literature, governance networks have proven to be an effective institutional platform for promoting inter-governmental policy making. Among other things this effectiveness pertains to the fact that governance networks neither rely on the exercise of authoritative power nor on voluntarism. Their effectiveness is a result of the presence of a strong feeling of interdependency between the involved stakeholders that can be said to force them to pursue joint goals on a voluntary basis (Elsig 2007; Slaughter 2003).

However, although governance networks are increasingly viewed as an effective means to promote joint policy making among autonomous actors such as democratically elected governments, they have not gained reputation for being democratic. As noted earlier, there is an ongoing debate among governance theorists concerning the democratic implications of the widespread use of governance networks as a means to promote public governance. The debate points out pros and cons. On the positive side counts that governance networks make it possible

to involve those who are most intensely affected by a particular decision directly in the policy making (Dryzek 2007; Young 2000; Rhodes, 2000) and train the participants in constructing a sense of communality or shared destiny that encourages the formulation of shared goals while respecting the presence of difference (Sørensen and Torfing 2003). On the negative side counts that there is a propensity to include strong actors who possess resources that others need (Hansen 2007) and difficulties in holding decision makers to account due to the informal character of many governance networks (Pierre and Peters 2005).

Governance researchers have, however, primarily discussed the democratic implications of governance networks that bring together public authorities and private stakeholders. Therefore, democratic concerns have been particularly salient: How is it possible to democratize governance networks in which some of the participants are not democratically elected? In the case of inter-governmental governance networks, the network participants are all democratically elected governments. This does not diminish the democratic challenges that need to be considered, but it means that the focus of attention can be concentrated on how governance networks consisting of operationally autonomous but mutually interdependent governments can add to the democratization of the considerable and still growing amount of inter-governmental policy making. Translated into this context, the pros and cons highlighted in the governance debate point out that whether or not governance networks can be said to add to the democratization of inter-governmental policy making depends on whether they de facto: 1) diffuse influence to the intensely affected governments and not only to those with most resources; 2) develop a sense of shared destiny within the networks that perceive difference to be a constitutive condition for defining shared goals; and 3) diffuse information in ways that enhance the ability of the participants to hold each other to account. I shall return to how this can be done in the section on meta-governance. First, however, we must consider in more depth why governance networks are particularly relevant as a tool for democratization of inter-governmental policy making.

5. The potential role of governance networks in democratizing inter-governmental decision making

As suggested above governance networks are promising as a tool for democratizing inter-governmental policy making because they offer an institutional set up and a myth that does not undermine but supplement and refine the model of representative democracy. Networks provide an institutional arena and a myth that construct inter-governmental policy making as a process in which operationally autonomous, but interdependent democratically appointed governments collaborate without undermining the close democratic ties that they have to their respective constituencies. Therefore, governance networks appear as a relatively unproblematic way of filling the institutional void in representative democracy.

It should be stressed, however, that although governance networks can supplement representative democracy, the kind of democratic arena they provide is radically different form that characterizing representative democracy. Accordingly, they should not be measured by the same standards. While the democratic quality of governments rely on the degree to which they have close ties to their constituencies, the democratic quality of governance networks has to do with their ability to form weak ties between governments. In line with Granovetter's arguments, one could say that the particular democratic contribution of governance networks has to do with their ability to establish weak ties between strong ties. The model of representative democracy views democracy as an intra-demos arena that provides strong institutional and mental ties between the government and the People. Institutionally, the model points to the need for strong control and accountability mechanisms capable of guaranteeing a high degree of interaction and congruence between the views of the people and decisions made by the government. Mentally, it draws an image of the demos as an undivided collective political identity. In contrast, governance networks are constituted on weak institutional and mental ties that take their departure in the fact that the participating actors are committed elsewhere and should be allowed to maintain this commitment.

Then, what is the particular democratic value of the kind of weak ties between governments provided by governance networks? First of all, governance networks make it possible to *diffuse political influence* more directly with reference to levels of affectedness. Hence, the democratic legitimacy of governance networks depends on the degree to which their members are recognized as representatives for demoi who are intensely affected by the policy problems that

is being addressed by the network. To put it differently, governance networks pave the way for a flexible, situated and problem driven composition of inter-governmental democratic arenas that bring political influence into the hands of those governments who are most intensely affected. A further positive effect of introducing flexible and problem-driven inter-governmental governance arenas is a politicization of the question of who should be excluded and who should not. If pressure is put on inter-governmental governance networks to legitimize their position as influential policy makers on the grounds that they can be said to include the intensely affected governments, it is likely that the same kind of pressure to actively consider existing patterns of political inclusion and exclusion will increase within the individual demos. The following destabilization and re-politicization of well-consolidated patterns of exclusion and inclusion within the individual demoi can be seen as positive for democracy because it widens the range of issues that can be made subject to political contestation within representative democracies (Dryzek 2000).

Second, governance networks pave the way for the *construction of a particular pluricentric kind of democratic communality* between actors who subscribe to different collective political identities (Kersbergen and Waarden 2004). The significance of governance networks is that their ability to function well does not depend on the existence of a collective political identity. Rather, they rely on a specific kind of story telling that stipulates the existence of a strong interdependency and shared destiny between different collective political identities, and how this situation calls for shared action (Sørensen and Torfing 2003). In other words, governance networks are held together by policy related story lines (Hajer 1995) that produce a situated and dynamic 'we' that functions as a shared point of political identification between actors that subscribe to a fragmented plurality of democratic communalities. These points of political identification are particularly valuable for democracy because they train the participants in what Michael Sandel describes as the distinctive civic virtue of our time which is 'the capacity to negotiate our way among sometimes overlapping, sometimes conflicting obligations that claim us, and to live with the tension to which multiple loyalties give rise. This capacity is difficult to sustain for it is easier to live with the plurality between persons than within them' (Sandel 1996, p. 350). Governance networks provide arenas that place governments in situations where they must deal with these tensions between loyalties just as they offer a way to do so in a legitimate way. The necessity and legitimacy are founded on story lines that stipulate the existence of a

high degree of interdependency between the involved governments, and draws a mythical image of networking as a negotiated process that makes it possible to pursue shared goals without undermining the autonomy of the involved demoi. By serving as a platform for coping with multiple and overlapping points of identification and the tensions that these complex obligations produce, governance networks have a central role to play in paving the way for the formation of a pluricentric communality that allows for the construction of situated and temporal collective political identities. This kind of communality is not only important for democracy because it allows for the establishment of an inter-demoi 'we' that can set the agenda for the identification of shared political goals. It can pave the way for a destabilization and reshuffling of sedimented 'we' and 'they' relations within the individual demoi. Although such stabilizations are necessary for democracy they are also dangerous because they tend to block a permanent vibrant political contestation about what characterizes this 'we' and who and what it includes. By bringing different and partly overlapping notions of political communality into dialogue with each other, and by training governments to shift between different points of identification, governance networks encourage self-reflection and political debate about the character the political communality that forms the basis of a demos, and softens the boundaries between the included and the excluded. Thereby, governance networks help to reduce the totalizing tendencies that are inherent to the construction of strong collective identities (Connolly 1995).

Finally, the weak inter-governmental ties provided by governance networks can be of great value to democracy because of their *capacity to ensure an effective diffusion of political information*. Hence, governance networks establish an environment in which governments can exchange information about facts, views and ideas and diffuse this knowledge to their respective constituencies. It can be argued that the involved governments might chose to keep this information to themselves but the fact that the ties between the participants are weak makes it notoriously difficult for the participants to keep the aggregated information within the network. This incontrollable and extensive and far reaching diffusion of influence does not only increase the ability of the involved constituencies to hold inter-governmental governance networks to account for their actions. It also improves chances that the control and accountability mechanisms provided by the institutions of representative will be able to hold their promises. Representative democracy provides a series of mechanisms for diffusing

political information to the citizens. Different laws grant citizens the right to obtain information about the actions taken by politicians and the public administration and the media have extended access to key policy arenas. Although these mechanisms for diffusing political information are crucial for democracy, inter-governmental governance networks expand the level of political information available to decision makers because governance networks function as sites for information exchange and information aggregation. Furthermore, inter-governmental governance networks can help to destabilize well-established alliances between powerful elites and hegemonic policy discourses that lay the ground for asymmetrical distributions of political power in representative democracies (Connolly 1995, p. 24). This ability to diffuse political information in ways that reduce the chances of closure makes inter-governmental governance networks a valuable means to supplement and refine the control and accountability mechanisms provided by the institutions of representative democracy.

Having now outlined the potential role that inter-governmental governance networks can play in supplementing and refining representative democracy, it should immediately be stressed that this potential is not released automatically. If governance networks are to serve this function they must be actively constructed as democratic arenas through deliberate and strategic acts of metagovernance.

6. Promoting the democratic capacity of governance networks through metagovernance

If inter-governmental governance networks are to serve as democratic arenas, they must be put under pressure to justify and legitimize their actions with reference to democratic norms and standards. More precisely, they must be able to show that they distribute influence with reference to levels of affectedness, provide a sense of shared destiny or communality constituted on the presence of plural collective points of identification, and diffuse political information in ways that promote the ability of the participating governments and the affected constituencies to hold the governance network to account.

Due to the self-governing character of governance networks, the pressure on them to live up to these standards must necessarily be brought about by means of different forms of metagovernance. There is no over-aching point from where governance networks can be controlled and directed. Does this mean that it is impossible to govern governance networks?

No, but it means that governance networks must be governed in ways that grant them a considerable space for self-governance. Using the vocabulary provided by governance theory, governance networks must be metagoverned, which is defined as the governance of self-governance (Jessop 1998, 2003; Kooiman 2003; Meuleman, 2008; Sørensen and Torfing 2009). It must be said that there is an intensive debate about the forms of metagovernance that can be exercised through an institutional framing of governance networks. But what institutional framing means depends heavily on what is meant by an institution. Governance theorists tend to leave a traditional institutionalism behind and downgrade the importance of formal institutional rules and procedures. Instead they take their point of departure form different neo-institutional approaches (Sørensen and Torfing 2007, p. 30). Governance theorists who take their departure from a logic of consequentiality view institutions as incentives structures that motivate self-governing actors to act in particular ways (Scharpf 1994; Kickert, Klijn and Koppenjan 1997) while those who subscribe to institutional approaches that take their departure from a logic of appropriateness view institutions as universes of meaning that form the identities and subjectivities of the involved actors (March and Olsen 1995; Foucault 1991). As such, the institutional framing of governance networks points to the construction of incentives and meaning structures that motivate and guide self-governing actors to follow a designated direction defined by a meta-governor. In the metagovernors tool kit we find grant based funding schemes, performance based resource allocation, naming and shaming events and story telling.

The debate on the problems and potentials of metagovernance as a means of governing networks has been closely connected to considerations about the role of the state. Accordingly, the role of meta-governor has more or less explicitly been viewed as a task to be performed by a step higher authority with the resources that this position entails. However, as pointed out by some (Kooiman 1993; Jessop 1998) metagovernance can be exercised by a wide range of actors. This view is supported by Christopher Hood (1986) who argues the capacity to govern society can be performed by any political actor who has the nodality, authority, treasure and organizational capacity to do so. In the case of meta-governance, it could be added that actors who are able to activate one or more of these capacities in ways that add to the formation of a desired institutional framing of inter-governmental governance networks can increase the pressure on these networks to legitimize themselves with reference to particular democratic norms and standards. Strong political movements can do so, the media can do so, strong

governments can do so and organized interests can do, and the research community can do so. Whether these actors chose to use their resources as metagovernors to enhance the democratic quality of inter-governmental governance networks is another matter. They can but it is not certain that they will.

7. Conclusion

The aim of the article has been to show how governance theory and social network analysis provide important insights which can help to point out the particular role that governance networks have to play in democratizing the surging amount of horizontal and vertical forms of inter-governmental policy making. Governance theory categorizes governance networks as a particular institutional arena that enhances the capacity of interdependent but operationally autonomous governments to pursue shared goals, and point out how the democratic potential of governance networks can be promoted through metagovernance. Social network analysis highlights that the particular democratic potential of inter-governmental governance networks has to do with the fact that they establish weak democratic ties between governments constituted on strong democratic ties to their constituencies. Thereby, social network analysis helps to clarify that the democratic value of governance networks has to do with the fact that it provides a particular kind of democratic institutionalization that can both supplement and refine representative democracy: they can democratize inter-demoi policy making and enhance the level of political contestation within the individual demos through a destabilization of sedimented power structures.

There are definitely other important routes to take in our current efforts to deal with the serious challenges that face democracy in the light of political globalization and new forms of governance. We need to follow them all. The formation of strong trans-national political institutions is an important path to follow, and the many institutional experiments that take place in the context of the EU are valuable. However, if these paths should prove to be successful we still need to find ways to institutionalize the kind of flexible, situated and temporal forms of inter-governmental policy making that are necessary in order to provide focussed, problem driven policy making. Although it is not an easy task, we need to develop a model of democracy that suggests ways to democratize this kind of policy making.

It might be argued that it is problematic to expect governance networks to serve as a means to improve democracy in light of the many criticisms that have been raised against them for being a threat to democracy. I do not deny these criticisms, but I claim that they are not intrinsic to governance networks. Social network analysis indicates that governance networks do in fact enhance inclusion, social cohesion and accountability due to their reliance on weak ties. In my view, the democratic problems pertaining to governance networks have to do with the fact that they have until now not been perceived as democratic arenas. As the two empirical cases illustrate that even though governance networks have become an integrated and institutionalized governance practise, they are not expected to live up to democratic norms and standards. I can think of two reasons why they are not viewed as democratic arenas. First, governance theory has approached governance networks from a managerial perspective focussing on the extent to which they contribute to the provision of effective public governance. Second, the hegemonic position of the traditional intra-demos myth has placed inter-governmental policy making outside the realm of democratic decision making. If, however, governance networks were viewed as democratic arenas their full democratic potentials could be released. They will be able to provide a high level of input legitimacy obtained through the diffusion of influence to affected stakeholders, a high degree of with-input legitimacy through the construction of a pluricentric communality that makes it possible for the involved governments to define and pursue joint objectives, and a considerable amount of output legitimacy brought about by the diffusion of information about the actions of the governance network that makes it possible for the public to hold it to account.

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