

## **How Democratic are Networks Based on Citizen Involvement?**

A Framework for Assessing the Democratic Effects of Networks

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*Publication date:*  
2006

*Document Version*  
Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

*Citation for published version (APA):*  
Agger, A., & Löfgren, K. (2006). *How Democratic are Networks Based on Citizen Involvement? A Framework for Assessing the Democratic Effects of Networks*. Roskilde Universitet.  
[http://www.ruc.dk/demnetgov\\_en/working\\_papers/](http://www.ruc.dk/demnetgov_en/working_papers/)

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# CENTER FOR DEMOKRATISK NETVÆRKSSTYRING

## WORKING PAPER SERIES

### HOW DEMOCRATIC ARE NETWORKS BASED ON CITIZEN INVOLVEMENT?

- A Framework for Assessing the Democratic Effects of Networks

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WORKING PAPER 2006:1

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SEPTEMBER 2006

ISBN 87-92063-19-5

ISSN 1902-0058

## Abstract

There has, since the end of the 1980s, been a growing interest in western democracies for formally involving citizens in various local planning activities through network governance. The overarching goal has been to increase efficiency in local planning. Equally, it has also been accompanied by an underlying idea of enhancing public participation and mobilising the citizens, thereby strengthening local democracy. Even though much is written about these initiatives, the actual democratic effects of these activities have been notably overlooked in the literature. Both among scholars, as well as officials (i.e. civil servants and politicians), there seem to be a considerable uncertainty on how to appraise these initiatives, and there is a demand for criteria and tools for democratically appraising both the input and the output of network governance. The central question raised in this article is: How can we assess the democratic effects of formal network mobilisation? The article will present a tentative framework deriving criteria from both traditional democratic theory, as well as new theories on democratic governance and collaborative planning, which can be deployed for empirical studies. The criteria are based on norms concerning: public access, public deliberation, adaptivness, accountability, and the development of political identities and capabilities.

## 1.0 Introduction

Public participation in local planning, including urban design and regeneration, through the use of deliberative processes is currently widely promoted as the means of enhancing institutional legitimacy, citizen influence and social responsibility and learning (Hajer and Wagenaar, 2003). Moreover, these initiatives have been widely promoted by a number of governments, as well as international organisations. These 'networks', composed of representatives of local governments, business and associations from civil society, as well as 'ordinary' citizens, even though usually initiated by local authorities, are fairly autonomous *vis-à-vis* public authorities and traditional representative institutions (Booher, 2004). In terms of research, these network arrangements have since the beginning of the 1990s, received a fair amount of attention from scholars in planning and political science. These have in turn developed new theoretical frameworks around these new modes of governance, based on self-governing networks, which take a centre position in both the agenda-setting, as well as the implementation, of public policy (cf. Rhodes, 1997, 2000; Kooiman, 1993; Torfing, 2005; Healey, 1997; Innes and Booher, 2001). However, this so-called 'governance literature', has mainly been concerned with those aspects that concern how networks can enhance the efficiency and quality of public policy making, and/or make the policy processes less 'complicated', rather than if the networks actually enhance the democratic qualities of policy making (Sørensen, 2005:348f).

In terms of democratic values the governance literature can be divided into optimistic or pessimistic interpretations of the democratic outcomes of network governance. The pessimistic ideas, point out that network governance undermine democratic procedures and institutions (i.e. representative institutions) in terms of unequal access to the network processes (cf. Newman, 2001:134), lack of responsibility and accountability and low transparency (cf. Hall, *et al.*, 2005). Conversely, there is a growing literature which points to the idea that networks based on citizen involvement, unlike elitist policy networks, actually can become a solution to the democratic deficit of Western industrialised societies. In particular, there has been a growing focus on whether network governance entails an opportunity of creating new avenues of influence, where the networks can create new linkages between the elites and the public in

terms of e.g. legitimacy (of policy decisions) (Scharpf, 1999). They can enhance the flexibility of democratic institutions (Kooiman, 2000:143), and improve the ability to act collectively by creating new arenas for deliberation (Healey *et al.*, 1999).

Whilst this academic debate is still active, we can conclude that there is still a gap in systematic and consistent studies on how to democratically appraise these network arrangements (Margerum, 2002). The ambition of this article is to bridge the gap between collaborative planning theory and democratic theory with the aid of some of the methodological considerations embedded in the democratic audit framework (Beetham, 1993, 1994, 1999; Weir & Beetham, 1998). The research question in this article is thus: how can we study the democratic effects of citizen involvement through the means of democratic network governance?

There seems to be a variety of concepts that describe these new, and more interactive, arrangements for policy-making such as: *participatory-*, *interactive-*, *deliberative-*, *collaborative*, *governance*, *network participation-* or *policy processes*. In the following article we will use the term 'democratic networks' to describe governance processes based on interactive, participatory and deliberative methods. The focus in this article is thus those autonomous networks that are *formally initiated by a public agent (including a local government), which include both citizens and stakeholders as active members, and where there is a clear objective not only to solve planning issues, but also to enhance citizen involvement*. Our understanding of 'citizens' is here rather broad as we also include representatives of local non-governmental organisations (e.g. sports associations, environmental associations and other organised interests). In terms of stakeholders, we also include public street-level organisations (e.g. professionals/managers from primary schools, day-care institutions and public housing associations, as well as public administrators and planners from local governments and social welfare departments). Consequently, our framework is not applicable for networks initiated to solve public policy problems between (local) governments and businesses, the so-called 'Public-Private-Partnerships' (even though local business may be included in the democratic networks). Equally, this framework is not created for pure 'democratisation schemes', with the objective of supporting existing representative institutions by for example, increasing political participation, or promoting higher turn outs in local elections. Hence, our framework is developed for investigating those networks which are dealing with local planning, and where the participants are dealing with concrete policy issues.

The article commences with a critical review of how the planning literature assesses and evaluates the democratic consequences of networks based on citizens' involvement and their focus on the institutional settings and arenas for the design and practices of deliberation in formal networks. Based on some of the current theoretical discussions on planning, that is, communicative and collaborative planning approaches, we discuss their understandings of the evaluation criteria for assessing democratic implications of networks. We find that although these theories are helpful in defining some aspects of evaluating democratic networks, they neither relate to the democratic aspects on the input side of policy processes, nor take into account issues of adaptiveness *vis-à-vis* existing political institutions and procedures. In the third section, we present our own framework for assessing the democratic effects of the citizen's involvement in networks based on a synthesis of Dahl's criteria for democratic procedures and March and Olsen's thoughts about democratic governance. This section is structured around our five criteria for democratic assessment: *public access to political influence*, *public deliberation*,

*development of adaptivness, accountability, and finally, the development of political identities and capabilities.* In the final section of this paper we present a tentative scheme of questions for further empirical research.

## **2.0 Democratic appraisals within planning theory**

The planning literature has, since the 1990s, increasingly paid attention to the value of public participation in networks for enhancing institutional legitimacy, citizen influence and social responsibility. Despite this growing interest in citizen involvement through networks in urban planning, few studies have actually addressed how planners evaluate the quality of work and the democratic effects from it (Margerum, 2002; Petts, 2001). The term ‘public participation’ is, just like the term ‘democracy’, contested in the planning literature and encompasses several different definitions in relation to the role of planning in society (Thomas, 1996) and, can in many respects, be conceived of as a buzz word that everyone likes (Held, 1987).

The pursuit of citizen participation in planning is frequently carried out with few, if any, references to democratic theory. Many planning agencies engage in practices of citizen participation as if they were simply additional planning techniques to be woven into the planning process. Little attention, if any, is given to the considerable complexities of democratic theory and practice, including the issues of representation. According to Fagance (1977) many of the traumas generated with participation practices can be traced back to rather naïve accounts of democracy. When planners speak of citizen involvement, or public participation, they often refer to quite different, and often incompatible, democratic norms. The concept of participation is a subjective matter, and there exist no widely held criteria for judging success and failure, and subsequently, there exist no general evaluation methods (Beierle & Cayford, 2002). In this context, Arnstein’s (1969) taxonomy (the ‘ladder of participation’) is one of the more quoted references for understanding citizen involvement in planning processes. This ladder was designed to reveal the crucial difference between the appearance and reality of democratic involvement. However, this taxonomy only concerns one aspect of democracy, the degree of participation, and does not take into account other aspects of democratic theory and practice.

Otherwise, monitoring, auditing and evaluation are all established aspects of planning practice, but with the attention focused on the technical and physical achievements, rather than the democratic consequences (Agger, 2005). More normative democratic foundations for ‘why’ and ‘to what extent’ local citizens should be involved in public policy’, and how much influence they really should be granted, have to a lesser extent been addressed.

## **2.1 Communicative and collaborative planning**

*Communicative-* and *collaborative planning* are the two most discussed theories within the contemporary theoretical debate on planning (Sandercock 1998). This literature represents an opposing strand to much of the mainstream planning models, i.e. ‘the rational comprehensive model of planning’<sup>1</sup>, which the two theoretical frameworks criticize for embracing a too narrow

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<sup>1</sup> This term describes one of the most prevalent planning ideal in the post-war western democracies (Fainstein, 2000). Rational planning represents an approach based on faith in scientific knowledge, and with little respect to political conflicts, or attention to local circumstances.

concept of citizens as either voters or consumers, and with too much faith in 'expert scientific knowledge'. Moreover, the criticism also points out that the majority of methods for participation within this rational model, e.g. public hearings, written public comments on projects etc., leave few opportunities for interchange, or reciprocal learning (Innes & Booher, 2000). Democratic decision-making is in the rational planning perspective, legitimised by majority decisions, or votes, and presupposes that people are unable to reach consensus after deliberations (Healey 1996:250).

The terminologies 'communicative' and 'collaborative planning' indicate that the character of planning has partly been changed as a consequence of shifting governance relations, where more, and often conflicting, interests are being involved in decision-making processes. This has led to an increasing focus on the need to mediate between disagreeing, and sometimes adversarial, interests. Consequently, planning has since the 1980s, changed character. At present it is more regarded as a communicative and collaborative process encompassing a variety of actors, rather than a rational process with few, if any, possibilities for citizens and stakeholders to have their say and to make a difference (Hillier, 1998).

These theoretical frameworks suggest that ordinary citizens, not only experts and professional politicians, are capable of discussing public issues and that people have the ability to cooperate. Consequently, they propose consensus as the main principle of decision-making (Larsson & Elander, 2001). They do not expect that deliberation by default produces consensus, but they do expect deliberation to yield reciprocal understanding and mutual respect, and thereby *modus vivendi* (Dryzek, 2000:17). The advocates for this method of planning argue that it produces better decisions by allowing decision-makers to reach new and better decisions in tandem with citizens. These deliberations, or collaborations, through more or less formalised networks, are supposed to have an impact on not only public policy issues and regulation, but also public behaviour and knowledge, as well as attitudes and cultural practices (Gastil and Keith, 2005).

Several of the authors within the 'communicative planning paradigm' are grounded in Habermas' communicative rationality (Innes, 1998, 1999, 2000; Forester, 1999; Healey, 1997, 1999). They also share a number of characteristics such as they all take a departure in a pluralist political system; they all seek to define a unified planning theory; and they all aim to redefine rationality in a novel and communicative way (Richardson, 1996). Moreover, their ideas are conceived as more appropriate planning theories adjusted to the network society, whereas the theories produce more efficient planning decisions, thereby reducing regulatory transaction costs in the long run. In addition to this the theories are viewed as more political legitimate, as they add value to the planning processes by building shared knowledge and understanding among those affected by planning decisions, and developing the local capacity among stakeholders to jointly solve common problems (Healey, 1998:18).

Communicative and collaborative planning thus contains a strong element of consensus-seeking among the involved actors in the policy process which also reflects a current trend in democratic theory, where deliberative and discursive ideals of democracy have become increasingly fashionable (cf. Dryzek, 2000). Unsurprisingly, these models of planning often derive their arguments from Habermasian theories of communicative action, with the

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Planning is within this perspective viewed as a progressive activity that safeguards the public interest and is part of the modernisation paradigm of the welfare state (Sandercock, 1998).

underlying argument that everyone affected (by a decision) has to be consulted prior to the decision, and where the ultimate aim is consensus based on a dialogue in which all relevant assertions have been presented (Habermas, 1990). Accordingly, they pay attention to the institutional settings for dialogues and to the quality of the planning process *per se*. A collaborative process can take place in all kinds of exchanges of ideas that are based on direct involvement, and where the involved stakeholders are striving for consensus. However, collaboration should not only include your ‘allies’, but also the opponents. Susskind, *et al.* (1999) argue in this respect that collaborative dialogues only are appropriate under certain circumstances, and that matters of interests and conflicts have to be sorted out before a collaborative dialogue can be initiated.

A central issue within the debates around the communicative planning, is that collaborative policy-making in practice often is assessed on the success, or failure, of reaching consensus. Consequently, several important outcomes of the policy dialogues are often invisible, or underrated, as they are seen through the lenses of the modernist paradigm of government and accountability (Connick & Innes 2001:177).

## **2.2 Criteria for evaluating collaborative processes**

Patsy Healey (1997) focuses on the institutional settings for deliberations, and has formulated a general ‘collaborative planning theory’. Her work is based on Giddens’ (1994) work on structuration theory and Habermas’ work relating to communicative action. Drawing on these perspectives, Healey argues that structuring forces shape the systems of rules, the flows of resources and the system of meaning through which we live. But these structures are ‘shaped’ by agency, just as they in turn, ‘shape’ the agency (Healey 1997:46-47). Healey discusses how conscious reflexivity on our assumptions, and our cultural references, carry *transformative* power. These micro-practices of everyday life are key sites for the mobilisation of transformative forces (Ibid: 49).

The writers within the school of collaborative planning, attempt to question how particular agendas are formed, how power relations are structured, what arenas for deliberation already exist and how these might influence, or direct policy decisions, and finally who participates in these networks or policy communities. Collaborative planning seeks to bring together major stakeholders to address controversial issues and build consensus rather than use majority rule. They put an effort into establishing fair and just processes, which implies having the ability for the individual to express his/her opinions and ‘narratives’ (voice). The theoretical framework also implicates reciprocal respect in terms of the dialogue, having access to adequate information, being able to question other participants’ assertions, and to have some sort of influence on the decision-making procedures and the subsequent outcomes (Hillier, 1998).

However, this literature is rather vague about the criteria for evaluating agreements, network and policy processes (Margerum, 2002). The primary problem is that these process criteria for collaborative dialogues, often are formulated in rather intangible ways, and are thus not easily transferable to benchmarks that can guide evaluations in practice. One example of process criteria for a collaborative dialogue can be seen in the box below.

1. Includes representatives of all relevant interests
2. Is driven by a practical purpose shared in the group
3. Is self-organising
4. Is engaging to the participant as s/he learns and interacts
5. Encourages and challenges assumptions and fosters creativity
6. Incorporates many kinds of high-quality information
7. Seeks consensus following discussions that have fully explored issues and interests

**Box 1:** Process criteria for collaborative dialogue (Innes & Connick 2001:180; Healey 1997: 294-310)

It appears that these criteria contain both some elements for the input to the process, but also for the ‘process’ as such. The criteria for the input side is, for example, that all relevant interests have to be part of the process. This criterion is often formulated as ‘the inclusion of all relevant and affected actors should have the ability to participate in the process’ (Sørensen, 2005:xx). Another criterion that is often mentioned in the collaborative planning literature, is that a rich variety of knowledge should be presented in public debates. This does not only comprise technical or expert knowledge, but also tacit knowledge, individual views, and more practical and moral types of knowledge (Healey, 1997). But these process criteria can be difficult to convert into research questions for auditing the democratic effects of networks based on citizen participation. Who should decide what the relevant interests are? How do we identify them? And what type of knowledge is considered to be valid? Collaborative planning theory provides us with some normative basic rules that should be fulfilled in order to have a fair and just rational process, but they are not very explicit with respect to how to convert these rules into explicit research questions.

### 2.3 Criteria for evaluating the *outcome* of collaborative dialogues

Whereas the collaborative planning tradition emphasises the criteria for the process of deliberation, as mentioned above, criteria for how to appraise outcomes rarely go beyond the ideal of forming consensus among involved parties. There have, however, been some attempts to grasp these outcomes of deliberation in the communicative and collaborative literature. Forester (1999) argues that collaborative dialogues improve *social learning*. Innes finds that participation in these types of dialogues leads to more *robust* and *innovative* solutions with a greater *ownership* (Innes, 2000). Healey claims that it can enhance the ability to act together. These different approaches conflate in many ways, but they seem to have an overlap in their view that participation in collaborative dialogues can contribute to new understandings and fewer prejudgments against the other participants, reciprocity and trust, promotion of decisions based on consensus, potential for new knowledge and practices and improvement of the institutional capacity. An important element to notice in this context is that participation adds an educational component for the participants. Moreover, active participation in deliberation processes gives the possibility to modify individual attitudes and behaviours, as well as the



ability to initiate collective action to institutional or public policy changes (Gastil and Levine, 2005).

Healey *et al.* (1999) have formulated an evaluation framework for analysing deliberative governance initiatives in which they advance the notion of policy outcomes. They define outcomes of interactive governance processes by presenting the concepts of *institutional capacity building* and *institutional capitals*. Healey introduces these concepts in the theoretical debate on planning, to illustrate and emphasize the political implications of human actions in local contexts. The concept of institutional capacity focuses on the quality of the web of relations involved in a governance process, which bind all the actors in collective actions in governance processes. Healey *et al.* depict an analytical distinction between the qualities of social relations (the nature of reciprocal bonds of trust and norms within the network) and the knowledge resources which 'float around', and are developed, through these relations (Healey *et al.*, 2003:63). Here they refer to Innes & Booher's (1999) distinctions between three forms of institutional capitals that may be deployed in an interactive governance context: *intellectual capital* (knowledge resources), *social capital* (trust and social understanding) which builds up through face-to-face encounters, and finally, *political capital* (the capacity to act collectively to develop local qualities and capture external attention and resources). The concepts of institutional capital and capacity refer to the collective capacities that actors hold through their relations, and the alliances and coalitions in the different realms where they encounter each other. Access to the networks has great influence on the individual's likelihood to gain influence over policy decisions (Hillier, 2002). These ideas build on the perception that individuals are not completely autonomous, rationalist, utility-seeking agents which only pursue material benefits. Instead, they are dependent on social relations with others and are constrained by relations of reciprocal trust (Healey, *et al.* 1999: 120). This approach introduces a dynamic dimension into the analysis of planning processes by not only focusing on the institutional capitals that exists, but also to demonstrate how new resources are created and sustained (Agger, 2005). This variety of capital is important in relation to assessing the democratic effects of citizen participation in networks as they relate to the ability for individuals to be able to act politically together and thereby improve collective decision making.

#### **2.4 How can we use the collaborative and communicative planning theory for assessing the democratic effects on networks?**

The communicative and collaborative planning perspectives present us with a *normative* standard for the processes of network governance in planning. They pay attention to the *communicative* aspects of planning processes, as well as presenting some notions on the possible *invisible outcomes* of the processes. An analysis from this perspective can focus on 'to what extent' the normative criteria have been met, and to what sorts of knowledge and types of actors that have been involved in network processes with citizens. Also, the collaborative planning theory presents us with some interesting notions on how various forms of capital, or institutional capacity, may evolve as a result of these processes.

But in practice, many of these normative standards come out as rather vague. They are far from easy to translate to tangible research questions in an assessment of a given network process. The concepts of institutional capital and capacity do not include a distinction of what kind of relational resources, e.g. networks, are created in a deliberative governance process. That is,

whether these networks are open and pluralistic, or more closed or elitist. Another point of criticism that can be raised, in relation to collaborative and communicative planning initiatives, is that by focusing on the governance process the collaborative approach tends to overlook the more societal dynamics that these processes are a part of. They underestimate the influence that discursive structures have for the ways we think and act (Richardson 1996). Equally, they seem to put network governance in an institutional void with few, if any, links to existing institutions. Moreover, the collaborative approach is mainly concerned about the relations that are developed in a local context and therefore misses the consequences on the *individual* level.

In addition, the approach fails to explain how normative standards will be applied in practice (Allmendinger 2001: 125). The search for consensus will, according to this line of criticism, always involve political choices, and the winning argument will always mask power and interests behind a *façade* of agreement. The distribution of individual power is recognised, but collaborative and communicative scholars argue that by building up trust and confidence new relations will occur and shift power structures. These statements can be seen as rather optimistic compared to many empirical studies (e.g. Flyvbjerg, 1998). There seems to be no evidence that fair procedures can secure just and fair outcomes. Often we see collaborative processes disintegrate, from being forums of collaboration and individual realisation to battlefields of competition, domination and control (Hillier 2002: 131).

Finally, and probably most important, the collaborative and communicative frameworks only to some extent relate their approaches to the overall theories of democracy, thereby putting too much focus on the deliberative processes and consensus building, and consequently, neglecting other aspects of democratic theory and practice. Classical democratic virtues on access and participation such as, for example, 'who' participates and who initiates the deliberations, are widely overlooked. Equally, the collaborative and communicative approaches are not giving us any answers to aspects such as the sustainability of the networks, and how to secure accountability. This is why we, in the following section, will take our point of departure in democratic theory in order to identify a number of democratic norms that can guide us in the analysis of the democratic effects of citizens participating in networks.

### **3.0 A Framework for evaluating the democratic effects of citizen participation in networks**

Assessing the democratic effects on networks based on citizen's involvement raises several questions. Firstly, 'who' do we define as a citizen? Secondly, what sort of networks are in focus, are they formal or self-organized? Thirdly, is it the 'input', the 'process', or the 'outcome' that is the object for evaluation? Whether citizen involvement in formal networks is 'good' or 'bad' news for democracy depends on the democratic values one uses to make this judgement (Sehested, 2004).

Sørensen (2005:349) distinguishes between *liberal* and *post-liberal* theories of democracy, and argues that evaluation of e.g. democratic effects of citizens' participation in networks can be interpreted as both strengthening, and weakening democracy, depending on the democratic values that are employed. She finds that from a liberal view on democracy, network governance is 'bad' news for democracy. The liberal approach is based on a notion of democracy as something that takes part in a political system in which the members of a territorially defined political community govern themselves through participation, or indirectly through

representation. With inspiration from March and Olson (1995) the liberal theories of democracy can be divided into two groups. Firstly, the aggregative theories that regard democracy as a means of aggregating a variety of interests in politics, and as a way of ensuring the citizenry to control the state apparatus by means of representative democracy (Sehested 2003). Secondly, we have the integrative theories that define democracy as a goal in itself, with a culture of participation and dialogue as a precondition for political decision-making. From these two liberal perspectives of democracy, governance networks represent a threat because they undermine the institutions of representative democracy and the autonomy of civil society. From the aggregative perspective networks tend to challenge some of the core values of political equality and individual liberty by granting some network actors more influence than others (Sørensen 2005:350). In this perspective, networks and governance processes undermine democracy by moving political decisions from representative institutions to non-elected actors, who claim to represent a common interest (Sehested 2003:92). From an integrative perspective, networks expand the arenas for citizen participation and engagement, but they also enrol them in particularised power games that might prevent them from developing a strong political culture and the promotion of the common good.

From a more post-liberal view on democracy (e.g. Etzioni-Halevey 1993; Esmark, 2003), governance networks are interpreted from a more optimistic point of view. In this perspective governance networks can serve as a supplement to representative democracy, by providing channels for a variety of interests that can be integrated directly into the general system of governing. Also, networks can serve as means for sub-elites that through new arenas can challenge the dominant elites, and thereby qualify the public debates on an issue.

Regardless of the post-liberal theories' positive view of network governance, they neither address the question on how governance networks can be democratised, nor develop criteria for assessing the democratic consequences of the activities in the networks. Sørensen poses a model of democratic anchorage of governance networks where democratic legitimacy rests upon that the networks are: (1) controlled by democratically elected politicians; (2) represent the members of the relevant and affected groups or organisations; (3) are exposed to public contestation by a territorially defined citizenry; and (4) follow democratic rules specified by a particular grammar of conduct (Sørensen, 2005:352). Sørensen states that a further development of the four anchorage points can lead to a series of precise standards and criteria for evaluating the democratic anchorage of concrete governance networks. We find that Sørensen's model is an interesting attempt to ensure that network governance does not merely become an efficient means of public governance, but also gives attention to the degree to the extent to which governance processes contribute to democracy (Ibid, 355). Sørensen's model is useful for pointing out some important issues for securing the democratic legitimacy of network governance. However, we want to go a step further, and with inspiration from the above mentioned planning theory, call attention to 'the network process', and how the practical settings favour participation for some people compared to others, and draw attention to whether the outcome of the process contributes to developing a political culture among the involved.

Hence, our aim is nothing less than actually setting up a framework for the evaluation of democratic networks encompassing both more traditional accounts of democracy emphasising accountability and adaptiveness, as well as deliberative ideas of dialogue, and the development of democratic identities.

### 3.1 Methodological departures

Before presenting our norms and criteria we would like to say something about the methodological points of departure for assessing democracy in general. We have here followed some of the ideas embedded in the UK Democratic Audit (cf. Beetham, 1994; 1999; Weir & Beetham, 1999; Catt, 1999; Lord, 2004). Even though this tradition mainly concerns evaluating the state of democracy in nation states, or the European Union, the virtues of this approach for evaluating democracy are highly relevant for our suggestions for a methodology for appraising the qualities of democratic networks. The following considerations are based on Beetham (1993) and Lord (2004).

Firstly, a democratic audit is different from normal policy process evaluations, which can be defined as: '*...attempts to trace all kinds of interventions consequences, including intended effects, null effects, perverse effects, and side effects whether advertent or inadvertent*'. (Vedung, 1997:210). This definition presupposes that a certain policy is measured against predefined goals or strategies, and moreover, that the reasons for either success or failure are analysed. In terms of this framework, there are reasons to distance it from these sorts of analytical strategies as we (at this stage) do not seek to analyse the reasons for democratic success or failure. Having said that, there is an element of policy evaluation embedded in our understanding of appraising democratic networks which we will pursue. Democratic network governance, which is the object of our methodology, can be conceived as a 'soft' policy instrument within a wider 'democracy policy', in which governments initiate schemes with the aim to (re-)establish democratic avenues for citizen influence to political decision-making. Accordingly, the establishment of democratic networks is in concordance with other similar initiatives to reinvigorate local democracy such as 'citizens' panels', 'deliberative polls', 'consultative bodies', and other forms of non-representative arrangements. These have occurred in various local contexts since the 1970s in both Europe and the US (cf. Gastil & Levine (eds.), 2005; Aars, 2003; Lowndes *et al.* 2001; Montin, 1998)

Secondly, as a concept, democracy can undoubtedly be placed in the category of 'essentially contested concepts' in politics, which means the concept inherits a normative angle of vision (Connolly, 1993:29). Therefore, one can not define democracy in a purely empirical sense since it, at the same time, entails an ideal – a normative statement – of how 'citizens should govern themselves'. The problem with accounts of democracy, which take a descriptive-exploratory standpoint, that is, conceiving received political institutions, traditions and norms of a (Western) political system as themselves providing a 'benchmark' against which current practice should be assessed, is that they miss out the underlying democratic ideals.

One lesson which can be drawn from this methodological advice is the importance of not comparing the object of study (in this case the networks) with existing institutions.

Thirdly, what is assessed is not simply a question of judging whether something is 'democratic' versus 'non-democratic'. Each criterion represents a continuum in which the questions for evaluation are phrased in comparative terms: *to what extent...? how far...?*, etc. (Beetham, 1993:3). Democracy is a matter of 'more or less', rather than a pareto-optimal state of governance that may be attained. Moreover, a democratic audit should not attempt to measure democracy, but rather make a judgement of the state of democracy. As stated by Lord, most

standards of democracy concern the *'felt* relationship between rulers and the ruled: whether *they feel* they have a right to public control which they exercise as equals'. (Lord, 2004:14, original italics). With reference to what has already been said about the normative angle of democracy, which by default is subjective, the methodology cannot identify objective and readily measurable indicators for appraising the state of democracy. Having said that, the suggested methodology for assessing democratic networks can at least, based on questions, make a judgement about whether the empirical findings approximate *one* ideal of democracy. Also, in relation to the subjective and felt judgement, we would like to stress that our framework as such does not *per se* exclude the use of quantitative research methods for making judgements of the state of democracy.

Finally, the choice of criteria exploited for the assessment should entail a dialectical relation to the object studied. Just as it is misplaced to use Western institutions as benchmarks for democracies in transition, it would equally be wrong to use standards for making judgements about democratic networks based on criteria developed for national (or even super-national) political contexts. Even though we subscribe to the same democratic norms, the criteria need to be refined so that it actually encapsulates the nature of the studied object (in this case a network). In this specific case we need to explore the nature of democratic networks in order to identify suitable criteria.

### **3.2 Criteria for assessing democratic network governance**

As already mentioned, defining democracy inevitably implies a normative point of reference. Moreover, over the passage of time, the concept has become redefined in terms of its actual implementation into the sphere of the political. Various conceptions and meanings of what 'rule by the people' actually implies have included a number of contested issues (rule? – rule by? – 'the people'?) which has remained over history, and probably always will remain, unsettled (Held, 1987: 2–3). However, in terms of identifying cornerstones which are considered to be legitimate among democratic theorists, Dahl's five criteria for evaluating (any) democratic processes have been widely accepted among (at least) students of democracy (Dahl, 1979; 1998; cf. Saward, 2001:3; Habermas, 1996:315). The five criteria are: *effective participation, voting equality, enlightened understanding, control of the agenda, and inclusion of all adults* (Dahl, 1998:37–8). They are 'criteria that a process for governing an association would have to meet in order to satisfy the requirement that all the members are equally entitled to participate in the association's decisions about its policies' (Dahl, 1998:37). Political equality is thus the underlying rationale for the choice of these five. The search then becomes to identify which institutions can embody them, and which necessary perquisites are needed to safeguard the existence of these institutions.

Even though we do sympathise with the underlying rationale, and find these criteria vital for our framework, we understand these to be mainly focused on the building of democratic nation states, rather than micro-level local arrangements for citizen involvement. Consequently, some of the criteria usually employed in both Dahl's frameworks (in particular those concerning free and fair elections) are not immediately applicable in this framework. The criteria we apply should, (as mentioned above) be based on a qualitative understanding of democracy in which there is a dialectal relation to the object of study. The chosen criteria should therefore not embrace a vision of democracy that derives its force from a static (contextual) authority, e.g. a

constitutional setting or other forms of legislation, or where democracy is coupled to the existence of certain (formal) political institutions.

In the search for democratic evaluation criteria, this article has been influenced by the seminal work of James March & Johan P. Olsen 'Democratic Governance' (1995) which can be conceived as an institutionalist response to much of conventional thought based on the premises of self-interest and individualism that characterise much of current democratic theory and practice. Without totally dismissing the rational exchange framework, they pose an institutional supplement to the former. Although their suggestions of a democratic framework for governance are not particularly novel, they embrace a vision of deliberation in combination with a belief that political change follows a slower, less determinate and endogenous course (Ibid, 245.). These norms are by no means exclusive to March & Olsen's work as they to some extent bring together others works on democracy and politics. Essentially, the norms can be identified in Dahl's framework with perhaps one exception: the importance of empowering the role of citizenship in terms of developing democratic identities. Most of democratic theory is based on the assumption that democracy is dependent on the building of institutions, in fact the building of 'government' as authority. This assumption can be identified in the norms of a constitutional understanding of procedural norms (as suggested in Dahl), as well as, in the 'Neo-Tocquevillian' understanding of democracy in which (effective democratic) political institutions originate in civic virtue and civil associations (Putnam, 1993, 1996). Both these assumptions are founded on a dichotomy between 'the political' and the 'the private'. Democratic identities and capabilities are not necessarily connected to this dichotomy. As shown in the studies about the Danish 'everyday maker' (Bang & Sørensen, 1998), a 'political identity' is not only something that originates in the citizen's extensive relationship to authority. It is also something which is connected to 'life politics' (Giddens, 1994) as new relationships of self- and co-governance in the political identity are developed in the everyday political life and co-exist with political authority. This aspect is also vital for encapsulating the outcome of the democratic network arrangements where the results might be sparse in terms of better governing, but where aspects such as democratic learning, community building and conflict resolution might be unexpected 'side effects' which should not be neglected in the appraisal of the network performance.

The criteria we are applying are based on a number of democratic norms which unify traditional democratic norms (as described e.g. in Dahl, 1998) with the more deliberative vision expressed by March and Olsen (1995). Hence the norms we intend to use as point of departure for developing criteria for evaluation are the following:

- **Access:** A norm about influence and about equality in the channels for influence.
- **Public Deliberation:** A norm about public debate in relation to political decision-making.
- **Adaptivness:** A norm about the development of an adaptive political system, that is capable to handle changing demands and environments.
- **Accountability:** A norm about developing political accounts.
- **Political identities and capabilities:** A norm about the development of democratic identities and capabilities among citizens and other political actors.

**Box 3.** Democratic norms with inspiration from Dahl (1998) and March and Olson (1995)

Below we will describe the different norms, and also specify the aspects we find desirable for the networks fulfilling democratic principles. We have also chosen to give examples of research questions which can be derived from these norms.

**3.3 Access: A norm about influence, and about equality in the channels for influence**

Within most contemporary democratic (Western) political systems the ideal of equal and inclusive right to get access to political processes (which in turn are formally safeguarded by a number of political institutions, such as, free, fair and frequent elections, associational autonomy, freedom of expression etc. (Dahl, 1998:85–86)) is widely embedded in most constitutions. The democratic ideal of access (and inclusion) is also one of the major motives for establishing networks for citizen involvement. That is, by establishing ‘extra-parliamentary realms’ a larger group of involved citizens, than the normal representatives elected for certain posts, should ideally be given access to political decision-making.

Despite the general consensus both in planning, as well as in democratic theory about granting access to political processes, the question of access to political participation is still contested as this ideal leaves us with a problem related to the problem of inclusion of the citizens. In terms of democratic networks the norm on access should manifest itself through endeavour for a high level of inclusion. This does not imply that the ideal inevitably is full enfranchisement of all concerned parties in a local network, only that the networks should be accessible for those concerned. Also, the works of the democratic networks should be transparent for those who do not actively participate themselves, but still would like to be informed. Two questions for studying this could be:

*Q 1 To what extent are the democratic networks open for participation for interested individuals among those concerned?*

*Q 2 To what extent is the work of the networks transparent to the wider public?*

Our second question primarily refers to the range of these new forms of politically participation, i.e. to observe how many of those who could participate and who actually did take part. While the classical policy network literature mainly refers to networks as elitist phenomena, the democratic networks are supposed to enhance citizen participation. Although access is important from a democratic perspective, the actual participation is equally important. A high (and equally distributed) degree of political participation within a political system is normally considered to be a hallmark. An enlightened, active 'citizenship' (in contrast to the passive 'client' or 'consumer') demands a significant proportion of popular involvement in politics. To define 'political participation' is however, not an easy task. This implies a judgement of the distribution of those accessing the networks in terms of different groups, and how representative these groups are for the population as a whole. Classical definitions, such as Verba & Nie's (1972), usually limit political participation to those actions distinctly aimed at directly (or indirectly) affecting public authorities or political representatives. Parry *et al.* (1992) have adopted a somewhat less comprehensive definition including, 'action by citizens which is aimed at influencing decisions which are, *in most cases* taken by public representatives and officials' (op.cit.16, our italics), but still a definition that excludes a number of citizen activities, and thus excluding elements of participation that pursue community shaping and or identity shaping (Andersen *et al.*, 1993:32). What is desirable here is whether citizen participation in the networks is high or not. Hence, the question here becomes:

*Q 3 To what extent are those concerned actively participating, or being represented, in the networks?*

Another aspect of participation is that there should be some form of equality in terms of those participating, which is, that the distribution of those politically active in the networks represent their communities or groups of people, i.e. the passive citizens. Studies on citizenship and democracy in most democracies show that there exists a social bias in terms of those politically active (cf. Putnam, 1976:33). Roughly, there is an over-all tendency that male, well-educated professionals, and middle class citizen more actively engage themselves in politics than women, the poorly educated, and those holding low skilled occupations and the unemployed. This issue also concerns the very essence of the classical representation debate on whether representation should be based on ideas (Pitkin, 1967), or should embody a more descriptive reflection of representation in which e.g. women should be represented by women, and immigrants by other immigrants, etc (Phillips, 1995). Not only should those participating act in the interest of others than themselves, they should also be seen as more than representing certain values. The question here becomes:

*Q 4 To what extent does the networks embrace a high level of both ideational and descriptive representation?*

Even though many formal networks in principle are open for participation by any citizen, the choice of the institutional design related to the deliberations in the citizens' networks can influence on 'who' actually participates. Some of the planning theorists point out that different methods for citizen participation attract different types of citizens. Decisions about who initiates formal networks and the institutional design, and involvement methods that are



applied, will affect the deliberations, and have an influence on inclusion and exclusion. As we have noted in the section above on communicative planning, an important component for a democratic network process is that it enhances the intellectual capital. Also because it should secure openness for different types of knowledge. The question we address here is:

*Q 5 To what extent are different involvement methods applied in the network process?*

### **3.4. Public Deliberation: A norm about public debate in relation to political decision-making**

This norm primarily concerns the opportunity for those affected by a political decision to put items on the political agenda and discuss them in an open and tolerant manner prior to the decisive stage of a decision-making process. As March & Olsen put it:

*Democracies make decisions by means of discussion and deliberation, and a key democratic objective is to form a community of reasoned debate for such collective democratic decision-making. Actions are to be based on judgments informed by civilised arguments among officials and citizens (March & Olsen, 1995: 84).*

It also involves the possibility to influence decisions, and the tolerance among those involved in the discourse. In relation to the object of this study the criteria involved here are concerned with the quality of the actual participation as it is manifested in the democratic networks. In line with the quotations above, the ideal of collective problem solving through deliberative discussions appears in different models of democracy including both communitarians (cf. Barber, 1984; Arendt, 1958), critical theorists (Habermas, 1989; 1996b), deliberative democrats (Fishkin, 1995) and liberalists (Rawls, 1997).

The criteria involved here are two; mainly appraising the qualitative aspects of the dialogue within democratic networks: a) the openness, tolerance and interactivity of the public debates, b) the efficiency of the debates.

#### *Openness and tolerance of the debates*

Within this context, it is hard to neglect the works of Jürgen Habermas with respect to the discussion on deliberation. Habermas has, through his now seminal work on the structural transformation of the public sphere (Habermas, 1996a [orig. 1962]), been one of the most well-known critics of the decline and loss of autonomy of the public sphere in the age of advanced capitalism and social welfare state. His work has been a great source of inspiration for some thoughts embodied in collaborative planning theory.

Although Habermas, already in his initial work of structural transformation in the public sphere, explicitly defines the assumptions and conditions under which deliberation plays a significant role for democracy, it stands more explicit in one of his later works in which he denotes some rules for the democratic dialogue (Habermas, 1983, 1996a).

- 1. Every subject with the competence to speak and act is allowed to take part in the discourse.
- 2.a Everyone is allowed to question any assertion whatever.
- 2.b Everyone is allowed to introduce any assertion whatever into the discourse.
- 2.c Everyone is allowed to express his attitudes, desires and needs.
- 3 No speaker must be prevented, by internal or external coercion, from exercising his rights as laid down in (1) and (2).

**Box 4:** Rules for democratic dialogues (Habermas, 1983:98, quoted from Ess, 1994:210 )

Notwithstanding being a rather rigid (and in many respects oxymoronic and aloof of the ‘the real world’<sup>2</sup>) conception of what a democratic dialogue should entail, we can at least draw one imperative lesson from Habermas in relation to the criteria on public debates; the value of ‘reciprocity’ and ‘tolerance’. In terms of democratic networks these two concepts have a significant importance for the concrete deliberation in several aspects. Firstly, the rules embody that the networks should not function as prejudiced realms for top-down dissemination of information where those participants holding authoritative posts, or roles (such as e.g. civil servants, politicians, experts), directly, or indirectly, prevent representatives of the public to take part in the actual deliberation prior to decision-making.

Secondly, they also encourage *all* participants in a network to be tolerant *vis-à-vis* the other participants. Certain viewpoints, attitudes, and assertions should not be excluded beforehand, and the dialogue should be based on mutual respect, albeit not necessarily acceptance, of opposing arguments. This is also in line with Frank Fischer’s work on the value of ‘citizen expertise’ in policy-making in which he suggests that deliberations of ordinary citizens can be of value in policy-making processes by contributing local contextual knowledge to the professionals’ expertise (Fischer, 2002). But this rule also implies, which is quite common in conflicts regarding new zoning and planning, that certain citizens’ voices should not be given special privilege based on e.g. the duration of their residency in the area or the value of their property.

Thirdly, the dialogue should at least initially be free of coercive arguments in which e.g. threats of legal action(s) underpin the deliberative arguments. We understand that coercive instruments might be necessary in certain deadlock situations, but the deliberative process should not initially be embraced by coercion. The question arising from this norm is:

*Q 6 To what extent do the debates within the networks approximate standards of reciprocity and tolerance.*

*Deliberative efficiency*

In light of what has just been mentioned about reciprocity and tolerance in public deliberation, there is reason also to include something about the outcome of public deliberation. By and large

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<sup>2</sup> As Nancy Fraser notes: ‘Declaring a deliberative arena to be a space where extant status hierarchies are bracketed and neutralised is not sufficient to make it so.’ (Fraser, 1997:74).

this is a question about whether the involved participants themselves believe that their voices actually are included in the decisions made by the network (or conveyed to other decision-making bodies). In one respect, our recognition of democratic deliberation diverges from Habermas (and also the main bulk of the collaborative planning tradition): we do not agree that the end goal of deliberation always should be consensus. Here we hold on to Mouffe (2000) who, by and large, criticises the Habermasian ideal of consensus for conceiving conflicts as ‘unwelcome’ antagonism, rather than (productive) agonism (see also, Pløger, 2004). Conflicts are inevitable, and the strive for consensus, might in fact undermine the quality of the deliberation process as it may too early in the process set up certain ‘frames’ for the dialogue thereby suppressing certain views and assertions.

Instead, we limit our criterion on deliberative efficiency to a demand that the deliberation process actually should produce something which leaves foot-prints in the further decision-making process, and not only becomes an idle talk realm with no other purposes than pure symbolic ones.

*Q 7 To what extent do the debates produce something which is perceived, by the participants, as essential for the decision-making process?*

### **3.5 Adaptiveness: A norm about the development of an adaptive political system**

By and large, this democratic criterion refers to a vision of matching constantly changing political institutions and their environments with a commitment to the (enduring) democratic values. If the other criteria are those that enlarge democracy, this criterion is the restraining one. March & Olsen write:

*Democratic governance of institutional changes seeks to further institutional survival while serving democratic ideals. Survival requires a reasonable match of between an institution and its changing political, social, cultural, and economic environments. Serving democratic ideals requires a commitment to popular consent, informed discourse, and individual rights (March & Olsen, 1995:184)*

As mentioned before, democratic institutions are products of democratic norms, and vice versa. There exists a co-evolutionary relationship between the environments, i.e. the democratic norms or the democratic culture, and those political institutions that are set up to defend and sustain the very same norms. As democratic norms by nature most often are imprecise and obscure, the question about which institutions are the most appropriate to fulfil the embedded democratic norms is one question which inevitably involves negotiations of the meanings of the norms, as well as whether the institutions are legitimate, and/or are adapting the democratic norms. According to March & Olsen, two features of political institutions are especially important to the development of adaptiveness (ibid. 192 – 193.).

First of all, stability, and with stability, rules to achieve that. On the one hand, rules serve to foster learning and reliability within a political system, thus making it less vulnerable to too-rapid external submission in terms of political, technological, or economic changes that threaten

human dignity and political community (Deutch, 1966). On the other hand, this inevitably inhibits the possibility to change the political system.

In terms of democratic networks this feature of political institutions can be coupled to the temporal aspects of citizen involvement. Just like many other aspects of contemporary political life, citizen involvement has been subject to the ‘unbearable lightness of project management’ in which the network building with citizens has been conceived as a temporary initiative, with a temporary budget, and with a more or less clear objective to obtain in reach of a short project period. In contrast to this view, we claim that a democratic success of democratic networks partly is embedded in the continuity and stability of the citizen involvement. With ‘partly’ we do not suggest that the networks should become stable and rigid institutions. What we advocate is that there should be mechanisms (and subsequently rules) for making the network more than just the erection of another tomb on the crowded ‘project cemetery’. Even though there might reasons to alter the composition of the participants in the network, change the rules, and even terminate democratic networks, there should be clear long-time strategies for how experiences from the networks are disseminated, how citizen involvement can be made permanent, and how the dialogue can be sustained. From the collaborative planning literature we saw that the building of institutional capacity was an important potential outcome of governance processes. But an interesting question is whether these competences erodes when a networks stops, or whether these capabilities can be sustained. The question we induce from this part of the criterion is:

#### *Q 8 To what extent are the networks guaranteed sustainability and continuity?*

Secondly, democratic institutions are, as we have already touched upon above, built on a presumption of conflict. That is, the political institutions should be adapted to handle conflicts that may occur within the frames of the political system. However, this does not mean that the institutions should solve conflicts, merely that they should facilitate the legitimacy and permanence to manage conflicts, and the likely negotiations and trades that may occur as a result of conflicts. As March & Olsen write:

*What democracy requires is not that conflict be eliminated but that it be civilised, that the encounters occurring among individual citizens exhibit empathy, generosity, and patience, and that political processes be based on reflection and discourse (March & Olsen, 1995:60).*

With respect to democratic networks, this question refers to one of the more common reasons for catering for citizen participation. That is, democratic networks are established with the clear ambition to avoid, or at least mitigate, conflicts between governors and those to be governed through means of public deliberation and inclusion. Even though that might be the official goal with the network, there is here reason to ask ourselves whether the networks actually are capable of handling conflicts. A benchmark here would be that the network holds the autonomy and capacity to actually handle conflicts itself. A network where conflicts either are transferred (back) to traditional political institutions, or where conflicts by default are passed on to the legal system, are of less importance for enhancing democratic inclusion and equality, and one

can sincerely ask whether network arrangements without the autonomy and capacity to handle conflicts really are meaningful. The question here is:

*Q 9 To what extent are the networks capable of handling conflicts?*

**3.6 Accountability: A norm about developing political accounts**

One basic premise of modern democracy is that citizens should have the capacity to hold policy-makers in general, accountable for their actions. With respect to politicians this principle is exercised through regular elections where citizens have the prerogative to sanction against those politicians who have acted against the citizens' will. Equally, civil servants are, at least following the Weberian role-model, held accountable for their performance by rules and regulation. Nevertheless, much of contemporary literature on democratic accountability demonstrate the problems of upholding this classical chain of accountability as an increasingly number of participants have been assigned, or taken, the role of becoming 'policymakers'. Mass media, organised interests, policy networks are just some examples of actors which albeit actively engaged in policy-making, are not accountable to the citizenry for their performance<sup>3</sup>. The main focus is still on the politicians and the public administration whereas much of the 'new managerialism' embedded in new public management is focusing on how to better measure performance, and to better hold decision-makers accountable.

Notwithstanding the importance of holding policy-makers accountable, there is reason to distance ourselves from that understanding of accountability. From March & Olsen we have adopted two important aspects of accountability: information and sanctions (March & Olsen, 1995:162ff). The question of information is already dealt with above in the paragraph on access (transparency), whereas we here only look into the possibility of democratic sanctions.

Sanctions can be both formal and official, and exercised through rules and democratic competition, or they can be derived from internalised personal obligations of the policy-maker. That is, an inappropriate act is punished by guilt and a loss of self-respect, and is based on the existence of a sense of strong community (which might be organisational, professional or political). Conversely, these two models of sanctions are not once and for all predetermined and rigid, but are always subjects to interpretation. Since the networks we are discussing here are set up, and usually 'meta-governed' by public authorities, there are in fact bodies with a reference to accountable actors, i.e. politicians and civil servants. As Torfing and Sørensen say, the networks participation should also include engage elected politicians in order to secure accountable decisions (Torfing & Sørensen, 2005).

Regardless of an active participation of elected politicians in the networks, there should ideally be possible to identify some chain of accountability meaning that sanctions can be imposed. A network for citizen involvement operating in an accountability void is not favourable for democracy. Another aspect which is vital for securing a high level of accountability is that the representation of the (local) government not only becomes limited to civil servants. As Torfing and Sørensen say, network governance should also include engage elected politicians in order to secure accountable decisions. The question that arises here is:

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<sup>3</sup> March & Olsen (1995:155) also stress that citizens themselves should take responsibility for their actions (or rather lack of action).

*Q 10 To what extent can the networks be held accountable for their actions?*

### **3.7 Political Identities and Capabilities: A Norm about developing democratic identities**

Through civic education, socialisation, and participation in democratic deliberation and decision-making citizens learn ‘what is good, who they are, who they want to be, and the kind of community in which they want to live’ (March & Olsen, 1995:76). The question here is to apply a criterion that is suitable to handle the theory and practice of identity formation that embrace the supporting of empowerment of the actors in networks. This norm is about how, and if, participation in a network develops capabilities and new political identities for the involved actors. From the planning literature we saw that the concept of developing institutional capital and capacity was a way of analysing the outputs of network initiatives. Institutional capital can be divided into three forms of capital: *intellectual (knowledge resources)*, *political (mobilisation capacity)* and *social capital (relational resources)*. Social capital refers to trust-building through social interactions among participants, and the personal and professional relationships that are built up through face-to-face encounters. Political capital refers to the actor’s abilities to engage in political decision making. Sørensen and Torfing formulate three factors that influence this ability: the level of access they have to the decision-making process (endowment); their capability to make a difference in the process (empowerment); and their perception of themselves as political actors (political identity)(Sørensen and Torfing, 2005:624). This can also be compared to March and Olsen who distinguish between four broad types of capabilities relevant to governance; *rights and authorities*, *political resources*, *political competencies*, and *organising capacities* (March & Olsen, 1995:92-95). In this perspective, the process of deliberation in a formal network contributes to reconstruct political identities, so the process is not simply the projection of group interests, but precedes this in the process of articulation through which identities, representations and rights claims are themselves contingently constructed (Hillier 1998:225). Our interest here is whether the actors in the networks themselves feel that their participation has contributed to the development of endowment, empowerment and democratic identity, and whether the networks enhance the institution capital.

*Q 11 How does the participation in networks contribute to the empowerment and endowment of the participants?*

*Q12 How do the works of the networks contribute to build, or improve, the institutional capital and capacity among the participants?*

### **4.0 Concluding remarks**

The aim of this article has been to present a framework for assessing the democratic effects of citizens participating in networks. We took a point of departure in the current planning literature because of its focus on institutional settings for deliberations and collaborations among actors. In this field we can identify a growing literature that advocates for more deliberative and participative approaches to public engagement within decision-making at all

levels of policy making. However, this literature does not explicitly address issues concerning how to assess the democratic effects of more interactive decision-making processes, e.g. formal networks, in local planning. We found that the collaborative literature contributed with attention to the communicative aspects of institutional settings for deliberations, and provided a normative standard of criteria that had to be fulfilled in order to secure a democratic and legitimate process. The literature is also developed on the different kinds of potential outcomes, such as institutional capitals and capacity, which might be the result of formal network processes. However, we also found that this literature had overlooked certain democratic aspects including both liberal and post-liberal accounts of democracy. Hence, we have in this article presented a rather all-encompassing framework with the aim to include most of the major democratic aspects of network governance in local planning.

There are still some questions we have not dealt with in this article. Firstly, how do you apply this framework in a practical evaluation study of actual networks? The box below is a tentative attempt to produce more detailed research questions.

<i>Norms</i>	<i>Input</i>	<i>Process</i>	<i>Outcome</i>
<b>Access</b>	Who are invited to participate? Which channels for participation exists?	Do the institutional settings for the processes favour some types of participants? Are the processes transparent?	Are the outcomes biased in terms of fulfilling the wishes of only certain groups of participants?
<b>Public deliberation</b>	Are different types of knowledge included in the deliberations?	Are the deliberation processes characterised by reciprocity and tolerance?	To what extent do the debates produce something which is perceived, by the participants, as essential for the decision-making process?
<b>Adaptivness</b>	Are there clear rules for the network process prior to the deliberative process?	Is the network capable of handling conflicts?	Is the network's work secured sustainability and continuity in terms of e.g. competencies?
<b>Accountability</b>	Is there a clear political mandate from politicians which can be hold accountable?	Are the processes transparent?	What are the possibilities for accountability when implementing the outcome of the networks?
<b>Political identities</b>	--	To what extent do the processes of the networks contribute to endowment and empowerment?	Have the processes contributed to the building of institutional capital and capacity?

Box 5: A tentative set of research questions.

A second important issue which needs to be addressed is the trade off between these norms and criteria. This problem is actually something which can be traced back to Dahl where e.g. Fishkin points out the same problem with Dahl's criteria as furthering some criteria may require sacrifice in others (Fishkin, 1999). We can, even from a pure theoretical outlook, see that a high 'score' on one of these norms automatically means a low score on another norm. Our view is that this is something the actual study needs to consider in terms of the aim of the investigated

network. If, for example, the objective with the network is to enhance competence building and empower the citizen, a democratic success would naturally be effects on these criteria. And equally, if the result is that the network only has contributed to another 'project' to be filed in the records of the town hall, and without any long-lasting effects on building on institutional capacity, this must be seen as a democratic failure.



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