Learning in the Context of Hybrid Governance
An exploration

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1. INTRODUCTION

The importance of learning in the public sector is widely accepted, as it seems necessary to constantly adapt and improve public performance to address complex challenges in a constantly changing environment. The OECD (2011), for instance, suggests to regard city-regions as ‘laboratories for policy’ that test new policies and mutually learn from them. City-regional governance often takes shape in hybrid and adaptive (or even experimental) forms of co-operation between existing and new actors, such as state actors, market players and civil society (Sørensen and Torfing 2007, Ansell and Gash 2008). Hence, with the growing role of city-regions, it is highly relevant to gain more insight in how city-regions can learn. The perspective of learning in this context of hybrid forms of governance is interesting because in such a network setting with a multitude of actors, learning is not taken into account by definition.

This paper is meant as a search for new insights in learning in hybrid contexts. Quite some knowledge already exists on different variations of learning: individual learning, organizational learning, network learning, and policy learning. However, much research focuses on classic public institutions and on learning across homogeneous governance structures. This does not take into account that current governance structures tend to be ‘hybrid’ governance and that they proliferate across different sectors. In a balancing act the (local) government on the one hand acts as a “regulatory state” taking responsibility for public interests, while on the other hand it depends on public-private-civil society arrangements to realize these interests. To what extent does such a government need to learn and to adapt as it is functioning in these arrangements? This means that the learning environment is the eco-system of a city or region. In practice we see a lot of different more or less innovative interactions with at least a learning intention. A critical assessment of existing methods on governance learning is the main goal of this paper. Are methods such as evaluation, gaming, scrum-sessions, peer-review meetings, and intervision suitable for learning in the context of hybrid governance? How successful are those and other methods, and due to what conditions and circumstances?

2. LEARNING IN THE PUBLIC DOMAIN: A BRIEF OVERVIEW OF EXISTING KNOWLEDGE

In this section, we present a short overview of approaches to learning in the public sector.

An example of first pioneering work on learning in general, is the work of Paulo Freire (1996) and his attention for the way people learned individually and in small groups. In the 1950’s and 1960’s he did not see ‘learning’ as a large, static, repository from which knowledge should be drawn, but also as something to be constructed by students from what they already knew and what they saw and experienced in the world around them. The interaction in small groups, discussing practical experiences, helped individuals to learn and develop. The individual learning process is directly linked to problems they experienced.
At about the same period Laswell explored public policy as a field of study (1949, 1951). He advocated a problem-oriented discipline that took into account the context of the situation, using multiple methods of analysis. His central concern was to develop policies that would be effective within the context in which these policies were to function. For Laswell it was evident that these policies could only be effective if the people felt such policies addressed their preferences and fitted in the laws and regulations of the context in which these policies had to function. Such policies required policy-makers to incorporate signals from the field into policy (re)formulation (see also Dror 1968). From then on, an extensive body of literature on learning processes of individual policymakers has emerged. Parallel to that, there is agreement that people continue to learn in interaction with others. This way of learning is often implicit (Bolhuis and Simons, 1999), and it is referred to as hands-on learning. It is also widely considered more important than formal learning by courses and formal training sessions. McCall et al. (1988) argue that approximately 70% of learning is learning-by-doing or learning in practice.

In the nineteen seventies and on, the attention shifted from individual learning to a focus on policy processes as learning cycles (Argyris and Schön, 1978, Bateson, 1972) and organizational learning (Stewart 1992). The learning organization got more attention, not least due to the seminal work by Argyris and Schon (1978). Also Senge’s “The fifth discipline” (1990) undoubtedly contributed to that attention. In these contributions, the focus is on organizational learning. This learning will indeed start with learning individuals in the organization. The new ideas or ways of working gained from learning on an individual basis can be embedded in the organization. This means that the organization changes the way it operates, or its rules or practices. The changes then have become independent from the individuals who originally initiated them.

A further development is that several authors suggest that inter-organizational interaction and networks can greatly contribute to learning (Coughlan 2011). As the idea of network governance emerged, attention for the way networks learn also developed. In the nineteen nineties, scholars increasingly recognized that the government is not able to steer society solely by itself. Government organizations were increasingly seen as part of their social system and as only one of the many social actors influential in public policy processes. Therefore, the debate criticized the picture in which ‘the government is seen as society’s central ruler, and citizens, private organizations and lower tiers of government are considered more or less passive objects of these steering efforts’ (Kickert et al., 1997, p.5). Governance network theory refers to public policy-making and implementation through a web of relationships between government, business and civil society actors. These actors need to interact, as they are depending on each other although their relationships are not necessarily equal. Networks in the public sector involve many actors, and their interactions often revolve around rather complex issues (Klijn et al., 2010). The actors involved are connected to each other because of their dependence on the resources or commitments of other actors to realize their aims and/or to solve societal problems. For that reason, the relationship between actors exists for a long period of time and is characterized by intensive, or at least regular, interactions. O’Toole and Meier (2004) see networks as “a pattern of interdependence among social actors in which at least a portion of the links are framed in terms of something other than superior-subordinate relations. Networks, therefore, may include multiple organizations or parts of organizations.” O’Toole and Meier note that networks can be fluent, that actors in the network can change, and persons from organizations
can contribute to a network while their function in the organization may differ from the function in the network. Given this complexity the need to learn within the network is recognized by various authors (Coughlan 2011).

Such networks that enable learning - learning networks - may get various shapes. Wenger and Snyder (2000) describe “communities of practice” as “groups of people informally bound together by shared expertise and passion for a joint enterprise” (Wenger and Snyder 2000: 139). He further notes that these communities of practice regularly meet, or connect by e-mail, sharing their knowledge and experience in free-flowing creative ways trying to find new approaches or solutions.

The overview so far might suggest that the trend in scholarly thinking about ‘learning’ is from individual learning to organizational and even network learning. That would be a partially adequate observation, as some scholars indeed investigate the latter kinds of learning. Others, however, still follow the path of individual learning (for instance, Laird 1999). In psychology, it is known that individuals learn through a gradual incremental process. Learning is a relatively permanent process through which people acquire new knowledge and skills. This is the first notion of learning. The second notion is that individuals grow and progress to further stages of development. By passing from one stage of life to another, a person is able to use increasingly sophisticated ways of organizing knowledge, reason about problems and thereby learn in other ways. These stages are very visible if one looks at learning in kindergarten, primary school, secondary school, and university. Laird interestingly (1999) draws a parallel with policy learning, commenting that we often disregard discontinuous change in learning in policy science. We may argue from that, that we need to look at policy learning as an ongoing and often irregular process.

More authors presuppose learning to be an individual process, but approach learning in a wider context, thus suggesting that that context may very well learn too. Rist (1994, pp. 193 ff.), for instance, signals two approaches to study learning: policy cycle resp. government decision-making. Back in 1971, Schon linked organizational learning to network learning, as he noted: “There is always a state of mismatch between the institutional map and the array of problems taken to be important” (Schon, 1971: 182, 183). He argued that a number of organizations in a functional (problem oriented) system should learn, rather than one organization: “(T)he design, development and management of networks become pivotal to learning systems” (ib.).

**Regions as learning in hybridity**

A specific kind of learning networks are ‘learning regions’, that is, regions that attempt to promote development through innovation by placing emphasis on cooperation, networking and increasing the interactive learning capacity of companies (Bellini and Landabaso 2007). These learning regions are seen as an important evolution. In these regions “what counts is rather the ability to structure informal networks, to regulate the dynamics of openness of local systems, to activate (and de-activate) actors according to their potential positive (or negative) contribution to an innovative (and not necessarily agreed) project, to shape shared visions and manage expectations, often through lengthy exercises of interaction among key regional players through strategic planning and foresight.” (Bellini and Landabaso, 2007: 243).
In hybrid governance networks, from a formal point of view actors are ‘public’ or ‘private’, but when looking at the actors’ actual performances, stands, roles, and responsibilities that distinction may be less valid. In other words, hybrid governance involves ‘new organizational forms (...), where organizations take on characteristics from both the public and the private sector’ (Lindqvist 2013). Through the combination of ‘multiple mentalities of rule’ (Lockwood and Davidson 2010), practices of hybrid governance bridge, and thereby replace, state–market–community divisions. Private actors may work on the basis of budgeting instead of markets, while civic organizations may perform as if they were market oriented, and public actors may happen to decide on market rationales instead of political and hierarchical choices. Hybrid governance, thus, presents a genuine alternative to more traditional modes of governance (Lemos and Agrawal 2006). Hybrid governance, thus, includes less clear boundaries between public and private on the one hand, and more horizontal ways of working and shifting rationales, on the other.

Asheim (2007) and Florida (1995) argue that arranging effective co-operation and operational partnerships is key to successful network learning. Etkowitz (2003) mentions operational interfaces, enabling people to learn together, to support these learning processes. This is what we now turn to in the next section.

3. METHODS FOR LEARNING IN THE PUBLIC DOMAIN

There seems to be a wide range of methods to stimulate learning in the public sector. What originated this richness in variation? How can we understand this variation? Is the variation still widening with still more and new methods or is a focus on fewer methods visible? There may be an effect of copying the approaches from elsewhere. A logical question related to this variation is, what works best? This may very likely have to do with the conditions and contexts under which a learning approach is used. Although we do know a few things about favorable and unfavorable conditions, questions about the results or impacts of learning processes are hard to answer.

Learning methods: a provisional overview

With the need to make networks in the public sector more effective, several learning methods emerged. In trying to solve a shared societal problem, organizations may learn together. Sometimes they learn across eco-systems, from similar organizations, for instance when a local council learns from another local council. Looking at the variety of methods, we distinguish some main categories of learning methods. These categories may not be complete, but for now we observe the following methods: evaluation, gaming, scrums, peer review teams, and intervision. Below these methods are briefly characterized.

Formal evaluation

A traditional – but not to be overlooked - learning method is the formal evaluation. Partners in the network might be the evaluators, but more often external – be it independent – have this role. The evaluator gets an assignment to assess the efficiency, effectiveness, legitimacy, and/or other elements to be included in the evaluation. Producing a report including conclusions and recommendations is the
A typical manifestation of an external evaluation. A whole range of evaluation techniques are available here (see e.g. Rist, 1999 and Bemelmans-Videc e.a., 1998). Traditionally external evaluations take long and meet criticism for having a ritual function and not always having an impact on practice (see e.g. Donaldson 2013).

**Gaming**

Another well-known method is gaming. We here refer to gaming as simulation games, whether or not supported by computer models. As partners in the network have their goals, ambitions, focus on specific tasks and constraints, this can be simulated in a game (Greenblatt 1981). The game is based on (presumed) causal relations and can have different scenarios; alternatively, scenarios are built during the game. The outcomes typically depend partly on the causal relations already built into the game, partly on the way the players make their decisions in different rounds. Games can have different objectives, including instructional and interactive objectives. Partners in a network can develop games to model the reality they face and - while playing - learn how this reality might change. Games can also be used to learn in what way cooperation can best be shaped. Variations in the simulation game, for instance regarding the role of the moderator and characteristics of the players involved, can have different effects on both the outcomes and effect on the players involved (see e.g. Vogel, 2006).

**Scrum** (Nettleton 2011, Rubin 2013)

Scrum is a term originating from rugby. It is a method of restarting play, whereby players pack closely together with one team opposite the other with their heads down and attempting to gain possession of the ball. The term also popped-up in the context of software development. Small multidisciplinary teams come together for one to four weeks to develop a new software product. Sometimes, the meetings are called ‘sprints’. ICT companies often use scrums when customers do not know exactly what they want.

After the development of a first proto-type, the customer gets more insight and comes up with additional requirements. Scrum has the ability to deal with such changing demands. Since its introduction in software development, the scrum method spreads in other both sectors, private and public. The main characteristics of the scrum method include:

- Use of multi-disciplinary teams
- A series of pre-defined time-slots to work together (sometimes called sprints)
- In-between the sprints the solutions/results are used in practice
- Each sprint starts with a very brief stand-up meeting discussing progress and interim-results (resembling a scrum).

The method seems to be helpful to improve processes with a relatively high frequency. This gives a chance to evaluate the effect of a measure or change resulting from the previous sprint. Its domain seems to be that of a single market organization dealing with customer demands.

**Peer review teams/visitation** (Lyons et al., 2012)

Peer review teams were a known practice in the technical sector and in academic accreditation. Technical peer review teams use well defined review processes to find and fix defects. The review team is used during the development of a complicated technical device to find defects in an early stage and prevent expensive rework and redesign in a later stage. In the academic world peers are used in well-defined
processes to accredit academic departments, including academic research and academic courses. Here peer review teams are normally referred to as visitation committees. However, peer review teams are used in many other fields including urban networks. Main characteristics are:

- A team of experts in a certain field is used
- The team members are peers working in a different environment or organization
- The review process is usually known and well described
- The visit of the peer review team usually requires preparation by the object/organization of review


**Intervision** (amongst others, Kohlmann et al. 2017).

Intervision is mostly done amongst professionals in the same profession to increase their skills and knowledge. The method has a tradition in the medical sector, psychology and psychiatry and with lawyers. All these professionals have in common that complicated cases have to be addressed. During the intervision meeting the way the case is handled is discussed including ways to improve. The method is now widely used in other sectors. Often with a specific order during the meeting, starting with an introduction to the case by the case-provider, followed by questions by the other participants, then discussion among the participants and finally advice by each participant.

We have used this method for some years to enhance learning among city-managers in the Netherlands. In this case the intervision is prepared by a brief self-assessment on the case and a number of interviews by ourselves to feed into the intervision.

### 4. **Dimensions of Learning in the Public Domain**

Looking at the learning methods mentioned so far, we see three main dimensions along which we can describe differences between the methods.

A first dimension is the disciplines that are involved in a learning process. In some methods, actors from different positions or organizations but from the same disciplines work together in a learning context. Such a design leads to somewhat similar views on issues of challenges at stake. Examples are peer review and intervision, where like-minded actors with a similar background and focus on a specific issue are learning from each other. At the other side of the spectrum, we see actors from different disciplines being involved in a learning process. This is the case where deliberately views from different positions are included in a learning process, to make sure all information and knowledge required is taken into account. Scrum as a learning method is a perfect example where a multidisciplinary approach leads to learning.

A second dimension regards the perspectives involved. On the one hand the perspective might be either purely public or private or civil society, on the other all three perspectives may be involved. Whether one or more perspectives are present, is not solely a matter of actors’ formal statuses - ‘public’ or ‘private’ -, but also of actors’ actual performances, stands, roles, and responsibilities. In a hybrid context, such as hybrid city-regions where both public and private interests are involved, such formal statuses will overlap
and they will even become blurred. When it comes to learning methods, we can see that most methods specifically focus on learning in the context of either the private or public sector.

Finally, the third dimension regards the clarity of the issue at stake in the learning process. Learning processes may focus on a well-defined issue or challenge or on diffuse challenges or even ‘wicked problems’. In the first case, the specific problem or challenge and the need of finding a clear solution, are obvious to all actors in the learning process and which needs a clear solution. Scrum are often used in such cases, where the team members, in small sprints, work together towards a solution. Also, in the case of intervision, a specific issue is part of the learning process, where other actors in the learning context reflect on. However, where in the case of scrum the solution is tested and assessed in the learning process, the intervision method does not necessarily reflect on the suitability of the solution. But in cases where the problem is diffuse and abstract, the learning process will require different methods, leaving more room for consideration and reflection. In such cases of learning, gaming seems to be the more appropriate method.

An attempt to visualizing:

However, whereas the methods mentioned earlier seem to cover these dimensions, the question remains whether these methods are sufficiently capable of providing means for learning in cases of hybrid governance learning. Most methods are especially suitable when one knows what issue is at stake, and which disciplines and perspectives are useful. Gaming stands a better chance as method for learning in hybrid governance settings, but it still requires a priori decision on the three dimensions, because without prior choices regarding the game actors (hence their disciplines and perspectives) and the definition of the issue at stake, it seems impossible to even build a game. So, we may still wonder, to what extent do these existing methods fall short in providing means for learning in the context of learning in situations of
governance? Another question that is interesting as a follow up of this overview, is whether more knowledge on the suitability and characteristics of these methods will enable actors in learning situations to make more suitable choices in the use of these methods.

**General factors influencing learning**

Argyris and Schön (1978) see three groups of factors hindering learning processes. The nature of these factors indicate they could hinder both organizational as well as network learning. First, they identity structural factors such as the structure of organizations and systems of communication. Secondly, they mention cognitive barriers to learning, such as defensive mechanisms or non-acceptance of organizations or groups. Finally, social barriers such as different ways of interaction may hinder learning processes.

The literature contains knowledge on several conditions that help and stimulate learning. An important condition for learning is safety. Actors need safety to share experiences, both successes as well as failures (Van der Knaap, 1997; Van den Dool, 2003). In practice this is not always an easy condition, people may feel they run risks, especially when sharing their failures or showing their incapability. The aspect of safety relates to trust. If trust exist amongst the participants in a learning process, it is possible to agree on a safe environment (Cross, Parker and Borgatti, 2002). Trust also relates to the knowledge and experience other actors in the process are believed to have. Professionals trust the professional opinion of someone else as long as that person is believed to be knowledgeable and experienced in a certain field (Ibarra and Andrews, 1993). Another condition potentially contributing to learning is diversity. Being able to look at a problem from different perspectives and with various backgrounds and experiences enhances learning (Van Gunsteren & van Ruyven, 1994; Wenger and Snyder 2000).

Willingness to share knowledge is also widely seen as an important condition. People cannot be forced to learn and it is therefore important that participants have a drive to bring and receive knowledge, or to develop knowledge together. Wenger and Snyder (2000) point out that in many cases participants voluntarily take part in learning processes and thus have a willingness to learn together. However, networks can also be composed of organizations that are willing to undertake a certain project together without the willingness to share their knowledge and experiences with others.

Finally, the actors need to have a shared practice (Soekijad and Andriessen, 2003). A shared practice means that participants recognize experiences and circumstances, although those need not be the same. It also means that there is a shared language.

Literature is not conclusive on the need and role of intermediate organizations, functioning both as a filter and as a broker of knowledge and learning. Lamping et al. (2012) convincingly argue that intermediate organizations play a crucial role in learning processes in the Netherlands health care system. Wenger and Snyder (2000) argue that communities of practice emerge spontaneously, and that those are self-perpetuating and reinforcing and renewing themselves. They can be identified and nurtured, but not actively installed or steered.
5. City-region labs for learning in and between hybrid regions.

Current societal challenges, such as climate change, an ageing population and social inequality, are often characterized by its unstructured nature, its connectedness to other problems and relentlessness and thus can be characterized as ‘wicked problems’ (Weber and Khademian 2008). Whereas networks are considered to be the best means to address these problems (Kickert, Klijn, and Koppenjan 1997; Peters 2001; Podolny and Page 1998; Powell, Kopet and Smith-Doerr 1996), their governance poses extra complexity to learning in the context of networks.

Taking the dimensions of learning into account, we see on the one hand that such complex – or even ‘wicked’ - problems often require a multidisciplinary approach. For instance when it comes to climate change, not only environmental issues need to be solved, but also acceptance of new technologies by customers is an important challenge that comes with it. Regarding the ageing population, developing technical opportunities (such as domotica) for the elderly to be able to stay at home as long as possible is not the only solution, but also attention is needed to, for instance, economic effects of prolonged payment of pension benefits. Both examples show that a multidisciplinary approach is essential in thinking about these problems.

Secondly, it is also evident that these wicked problems require more often a situation of hybrid governance, where both private and public actors are involved and the responsibilities and value orientations of those actors become blurred. Where traditionally governments have been responsible for the provision of solutions to societal problems, in current developments private actors more and more are involved in tackling those wicked problems, and not only as executors of policies, but also as partners in policy-making.

Third, what we typically see when discussing these wicked problems, is that these are diffuse issues, where ‘a solution’ is not easily found. As in the case of climate change, there is no single solution thinkable, and trying to solve it will prove to be an incremental process which consists of different measures that need to be taken, such as the introduction of electric cars and the increased use of green energy producers instead of fossil fuel, all contributing but not able to solve the problem completely.

Thus, taking the above into account and applying these characteristics of governance in complex situations to the three dimensions mentioned earlier, we can see that solving those problems or challenges is complicated with the current learning methods available. All of these methods mentioned earlier have their own constraints concerning these three dimensions: where scrum is an ideal method to involve multiple disciplines in the learning process, it lacks the possibilities to serve the hybrid perspective and enable thinking about a diffuse solution. Thus: in governance learning situations where ‘wicked problems’ arise, there is a need for new learning methods, to foster the learning between actors. Such methods need to respect the plural-multi character of present policy topics. Multi-actor networks, with
multiple interrelated issues on the agenda that quite often are not well-defined and that are understood in multiple ways and based on different values and to which no simple solutions are available. Learning methods therefore need to include multiple perspectives, need to be multi-disciplinary, and will have to accept that ‘the problem’ at hand, that is, the issue on which learning is deemed necessary, is not very clear.

Hybrid city-regions provide an ideal context for such learning. In many countries, such regions proliferate, addressing wicked problems mentioned above and governing across (sub-)national governments, across sectors, and across the public-private divide. While they share the common goal of addressing current societal and economic transformations, they differ in the way they organize and interact with other public, societal and/or market actors. Because they go beyond the traditional organization of government, these innovative governance models create new challenges: collaboration across sectors and different mentalities, effectiveness, robustness, modes of legitimacy, and the like.

**Governance learning in practice: city-regional labs**

An example of governance learning is to be seen in the context of a project on city-regional governance, called ‘Smart Transformations in City-regional Law and Governance’. The project’s aim is to study and foster cross-sectoral and cross-regional learning between four city-regions in North-West Europe, cooperating in the project. The four participating city-regions in the project, which are Berlin, Brainport-Eindhoven, Greater Copenhagen area and Zürich (all with a focus on different policy areas, respectively social cohesion and urban development, innovation policy, labor market policy and infrastructure and strategic planning), are contributing to city-regional labs of two days in all four regions in a time span of 2 years. During these labs, both practitioners from the different city-regions in the project and stakeholders from the region jointly reflect on their experiences in dealing with particular governance challenges and, as a group, identify opportunities for improvement. To enable this, the researchers in the project facilitate exchange of knowledge and views by using different techniques in sessions of 1-1,5 hours, such as a fish bowl conversation or ‘rich picture’. By using these techniques, the practitioners are challenged to step out of their comfort zone and reflect upon the governance challenges that the city-regions are confronted with. The ambition of the project is to stimulate a collective learning process, and discuss the possibilities of governance learning.

Thus, in the project a method is used that is more or less a mix of the different methods mentioned earlier: by organizing ‘labs’ in the specific city-regions participating, a lab setting is simulated, although the process is more about analyzing the current set up of the governance and its challenges, and not on learning-by-doing jointly during the lab. The latter is one of the characteristics of different kinds of ‘field labs’. This concept - initially used for on-site temporary or portable laboratory facility set-ups to conduct chemical or physical evaluations now also refers to ongoing social experimental activities. In our city-regional labs, no actual experimentation takes place.

Also, by having the participants from the different regions discussing the governance of the region that is being visited, an element of the method of peer review is added: having experts from other city-
regions discussing the issues at stake in that region. Finally, there is also attention for the hybrid element of the governance system in the visited city-region, in the way that one the one hand the participants joining all labs are a mix of public and private officials, and on the other the stakeholders invited to join the city-regional labs are both from the public and private domain.

Concerning learning between the city-regions in the project, three important lessons are to be learned. First of all, as is always the case in participatory research, there is the importance of having people involved in the learning process that are best suited to represent their organization and support the learning process. During the project it became clear that the difference between the participants and stakeholders concerning knowledge, experience, background and learning abilities has an important influence on the learning between the cases of city-regional governance, in the way that this can be hindered. For instance during one of the city-regional labs, there was some reluctance at the representatives of the hosting organization to be seen, to really engage in a learning process, and to be open to the comments and advice from the other city-regions. Also, since some participants and stakeholders are working on a more implementing level of policies, whilst others are working on the level of the development of policies, these differences between the participants and stakeholders also were to some extent hampering learning. Thus, in a learning process, the willingness to share is essential, as mentioned earlier, but at the same time, it is also important that there is willingness to accept feedback from others. Such a learning process must ensure that the conditions for learning, as mentioned earlier, are met as much as possible.

Secondly, during the city-regional labs, there was a tendency to focus on policy learning instead of on governance learning. Although the focus of the project is on governance challenges within the city-regions concerned, in practice it proved to be easier for the participants to focus on policies and rather well-cut issues. This relates to the third dimension of governance learning, regarding the clarity of the issue(s) at stake in the learning process. This example from the project shows that, especially when participants are working on a more operational level, they will be inclined to share knowledge and information on policy level, instead of on the governance system.

And third, where learning concerns the process of change of thoughts and behavioral intentions (Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith 1999), it is also interesting to look at what really happens with this knowledge, whether change will actually occur. However, in the case of governance learning and the project at hand, we cannot expect much change to happen. This is because the governance context has even a lot of evident differences that play a role in using knowledge and information from – in this case- other city-regions: such as systems in place, national contexts, division of responsibilities between actors and culture. Despite the selection of cases in North-Western Europe (Switzerland, Germany, Denmark-Sweden, and the Netherlands) to make differences in the fabric of government as little as possible, in the labs it turned-out to be difficult to think about the transfer of governance practices from one city-region to the other. Also, if governance changes will occur, they cannot occur during the labs, but only in practice, and then most probably after a while, as it will take some time for the participants to the labs to reflect on the lessons learned, to translate and insert such lessons in governance interaction in the city-region context.
Thus, the example of this project on city-regional governance, which is comparable to other cases of hybrid governance in the fact that the issues at stake all reflect extremes on the dimensions of learning, shows that different methods can also be mixed into a new set up. However, also the method used in this project has not been able to solve the limitations of the other methods.

6. Discussion

In this paper so far, we have discussed various concepts of learning in the public sector, and identified several methods applied in practice. We also analyzed in what kind of domains such methods are being applied, resulting in the insight, that most of them require a relatively well-defined issue to start with and use only a very limited number of perspectives and disciplinary approaches. Present societal issues however, are not that simple. Multi-actor networks need to address multiple interrelated issues, and quite often those issues are ‘wicked problems’, thus lacking a clear definition, lacking normative consensus amongst interested parties, and with no simple solutions at hand. If such networks are willing to learn, we need methods that encompass many perspectives and disciplines, and that treat defining and redefining ‘the problem’ as part of the learning process.

Our solution to this method problem was to organize city-region labs with participants who had different perspectives (public, private, or a mixture) as representatives of four different city-regions and of policy problems in four different sectors. The techniques we applied during the labs were a mixture of delving into the governance issue at hand, exchanging knowledge and experiences, and focusing on solutions.

Reflecting on the labs in the research project so far, we observe that, first of all, selecting participants needs more attention, in order to ensure that they are of a same kind of level (it seems to matter whether they originate from the strategic or rather operational level). Secondly, additional techniques are necessary to steer participants away from all-to-easy discussions of well-known issues (economic growth, citizen-participation, and the like). Thirdly, it is obvious that the kind of labs we organized, may (and: does!) lead to learning by the participants as a person, but not necessarily by their home organization and/or network. A longitudinal effort will be needed to assess the latter.

More in general, we observe that we need more knowledge on the pros and cons of various learning methods. In this paper we formulated dimensions to compare methods, but we acknowledge that additional dimensions might be relevant too. We also tried to analyze general factors influencing learning outcomes, but again, more knowledge is needed.

In other words, what we need to enhance learning in the practice of hybrid governance, is to learn about learning.
LITERATURE

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