NETWORK GOVERNANCE AND POLICY CHANGE

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1. Introduction

The concept governance has been introduced in political science, helping to explain the complex linkages between public, private and civil actors affecting today’s policy making. Still, the term governance has several meanings in literature. For some, governance is simply the idea of making processes the main unit for research, replacing the older units of organizations (see Pierre 1998:5). For others like Rhodes, governance expresses the “change in the meaning of government, referring to a new process of governing; or a changed condition of ordered rule; or the new method by which society is governed” (1996: 652-3). Governance in this sense means more than decisions, it also implies that public policy develops and changes by structures where public authorities interact with partners rooted in private sector and/or civil society. In this literature, governance to a large extent has become synonymous with networks.

A number of societal changes have led to this growing complexity. Governments are no longer sole hosts for expert knowledge, but often need to trust in other institutions expert knowledge. Further, a wide range of stakeholders wish to participate in the problem solving process. And citizens and clients have become more self-aware, making demands, not tending to take no for a final answer. And mass media have developed a critical view on public authority and activity, constantly in search for news stories. These processes are considered to be part of the background for the conceptual change from government to governance. To many observers, public policy increasingly takes place within a multi-layered polity, involving both public, market and civil society, although to a certain extent formally organized by government. Some parts of this literature have argued even further, claiming that to some extent, politics and society have become intertwined in forms of interactive networks, which are neither public, private or civil, but is a hybrid organizational form (Mayntz 1993; Kickert, Klijn et al. 1997; O’Toole, Hanf et al. 1997; Sørensen and Torfing 2005).

Since (at least many of) these networks are grounded beside hierarchy, driven by each and ones individual and institutional interests, most likely, they are manifestations of equilibriums and balanced interests. It is well worth to ask how such structures can change. More likely, networks may tend to spend more energy on the continuation of policy, rather than to change it. Therefore, as a starting point, one may argue that network governance and policy change are concepts not closely connected.

The idea of this paper is to discuss how policy change can be understood in network analysis. The discussion will center on to what extent and under what circumstances policy change can be expected in network governance, and how one can, in theoretical terms, develop the idea of network governance to better cope with policy change?

Regarding the second question, the concept of meta-governance will be introduced. Although the tradition for such a concept is weak, a growing number of European political scientists are using the concept in order to explain how governments are able to influence on networks in different ways. This discussion will be illustrated by three Norwegian examples, pointing to agricultural policy, cultural/health policy and higher education.

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1 The paper was written while I was a visiting scholar at University of Pittsburgh. Since I had to leave most of my personal library back home, there are some references missing in the text. I apologize for this.
2. What is policy change?

Before we can make this discussion, we should deal with some core concepts. “Policy” means to display or make known (Webster), and is often referred to as a plan of actions. In this sense, policy is a category filled with decisions and intentions (Hill 1993). But, although for the most associated with political decisions, policy also needs to be related to actions (Kjellberg and Reitan 1995). Usually, the notion of policy rests on several assumed characteristics of organized action, e.g. coherence in the sense that single bits of action fit together, and become part of an organizational whole, and instrumentality in the sense that most likely there are some objectives or aims underlying actions (Colebatch 1998:3). From this, one can draw the conclusion that policy is an ambiguous concept, and when dealing with policy changes we need to include both intentions and actions. The figure below indicates how a policy can change in different ways, regarding whether intentions or actions are changed.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Change in intentions/decisions</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>Yes</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>No PC</td>
<td>PC 1: Implementation problem</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>PC 2: Democratic problem</td>
<td>PC 3: Ideal model</td>
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Table 1. Types of policy change. PC = policy change

Type three represents the ideal model, grounded in the idea of a parliamentary chain underlying political systems, where political intentions spontaneously is followed by implemented actions. But as more than a decade of implementation research have shown, policy changes of type one is common, meaning intentions that are not implemented, or not implemented in line with its original intentions. And type two, including changes in action, but not rooted in formal decisions, can be attributed to e.g. studies of community power, urban regimes, etc. The two types differing from the ideal model can be ascribed to different problems, type one pointing to implementation problems, and type two toward democratic problems.

Regarding the concept of change, obviously this is something else than variation. However, one will find that most social sciences seem to be dealing with variations more than change. The bulk of social science study is about variation across states, sectors, local government units, etc. Although one can, by quasi experimental methods, try to say something about change even when only cross sectioned data are available, still it is more a study of variation then change. To study change, one needs to add a dimension reflecting time to the study. The time span, within which changes can be studied, can be short periods of time, as when you study specific decisions like studies of incremental behavior in budgetary processes. But some of the theories available in literature indicate a much longer time span, often at least one generation. This reminds us that, when dealing with policy change, political science often comes as close as possible to the discipline of history.
For the man in the street, so-called, policy change is probably easy to understand. Policies change if and when elections point to a new political direction and new political actors enter office following another program than those leaving office. However, as has been demonstrated by a large number of studies, political decisions are not necessarily reflections of politicians will or political parties intentions or programs, and decisions are not necessarily brought into practice. Therefore, for a political scientist, it is not obvious under what circumstances, when and how policy changes come about.

Looking into the theories relevant to policy change, one is however astounded by the large number of possible contributions to policy change. In order to give any presentation of this literature, one will need some kind of typology. One of these typologies, developed by Peter John (2003) distinguish between three main type of theories. First, there is a group of general political science theories which can be brought into policy studies by direct import. This group include institutional theories (both “old” and “neo”), the idea of socio economic changes influencing on the political system, and rational choice theory. Johns second group include theories from mainstream political science that can be adapted to policy change. The network theory is one of these theories, along with ideas. To some extent, both of these theories, networks and ideas respectively, are combined in one of the theories making up the third group of theories, namely “synthetic” or alternatively, “tailored” models of the policy process. The one I have in mind is the Actor Coalition Framework, proposed by Jenkin-Smith and Sabatier (1994). However, this third group also include the “garbage can-like” idea of policy stream and policy windows (Kingdon 1984), and punctuated equilibrium models, the latter having much in common with Kuhn’s theory of scientific knowledge, since the idea is that policy changes in a paradigmatic way, followed by longer periods of “normal politics”/equilibriums.

Having such a typology in mind, however, it is not obvious where to place the idea of network. It belong to the second groups mentioned above, but it also represents a core element in the AC-Framework (Dowding 1995:147) and it has been related to institutional theories (Bogason 2000; Klijn and Koppenjan 2006) and policy windows (Howlett 2002:249). Possibly one could argue that the idea of network itself should not be conceived as a theory in a strict sense, but rather as a basic element of several theories, including some of the above mentioned. In the discussion below, I will follow such a view, not referring to network as a theory, but rather discuss network as a phenomenon that can be conceptualized in different ways.

3. What is network governance?

The network concept of political science roots back to early 1970s, but the notion of networks has some different history in USA and Europe, respectively. In the American tradition, there is a link back to the community power-studies in 50s and 60s, where the core questions centered on types of regular contact between individuals within interest groups, bureaucracy and political decision makers. Heclo’s contribution was the argument that, although iron triangles exist, more open issue networks should replace the “the closed circles of control” (1978). Marsh and Rhodes argue that a characteristic of the American way of looking at networks is it’s attention towards individual relationships between key actors, cutting across organizational boundaries (1992:8). In contrast, the European tradition has paid more...
attention to structural relationships, aiming to use the network concept to describe policy sectors. In the words of Marsh, the European approach “sees the growth of networks as having much broader significance, as marking a new form of governance, distinguished from the forms of market and hierarchy” (1998:3).

In Europe, one can identify at least two different sources to the network perspective. First, what later became known as the bottom up approach in implementation studies, and especially the idea of implementation structures, was a forerunner of the governance concept and the network idea. The theory developed by Benny Hjern and colleges (Hjern and Porter 1981), implied that implementation research should depart from as few as possible theoretical assumptions, turning the study into what they assumed to be what “really goes on” (Hjern and Hull 1982). A second source is the literature on intergovernmental relations, both between states and local government (Rhodes 1981) and between EU and its member states (ref), where the network concept has been used for a long time, trying to map relation patterns between organizations and to assess the influence of these patterns on policy processes (Klijn and Koppenjahn 2000:138).

There is probably no commonly agreed list of network studies. For most authors, network studies are probably studies that connect to the network metaphor. But some authors argue that we may also include a large number of studies that apparently, at first glance, not seem to belong to the group. As an example of this latter group of contributions, Sørensen and Torfing (2005) argue that as different theorists as Rhodes, Kooiman, Foucault, March/Olsen (1989) and Powell/DiMaggio (1991) all have dealt with networks in one way or another, though not necessarily have referred to the concept. Although huge differences in these contributions, Torfing and Sørensen argue that the governance by networks, i.e. network governance, can be condensed into five basic elements:

a) There is a relatively stable horizontal structure of interdependent actors that do have some operational autonomy. In other words, the horizontal relations are more obvious than the vertical ones, and actors are allowed to leave the network if the costs of their participation rise above their benefits.

b) There are interactions and negotiations going on between actors, as they are trying to influence each other. These processes can take different forms, like e.g. forcing each or search for deliberative solutions.

c) Networks have some institutional characteristics, in the sense that they, in the word of Scott (ref), have regulative, normative, cognitive and imaginary aspects. As such, networks can be studied as institutions (Bogason 2000; Klijn and Koppenjan 2006).

d) Networks are self-regulating within a certain framework. This means that decisions as well as procedural questions are dealt with and negotiated by the network itself. There is no hierarchal command system; neither market forces influence the network in a decisive way.

e) Networks contribute to public governing in one way or another. Per definition, however, this is not a necessary element to talk about networks, but network become governance networks to the extent they deal with public policy. More precisely, Parker (2007) argues that this should include elements like density and breath, this first meaning that there are links between all nodes in the networks, and the last implying that networks should include the most important institutions in a given field of public policy.
4. Network governance and policy change

To what extent are networks structures that promote or lead to policy changes? Such a question should be split into two parts, since the formation of networks may be regarded different from the continuation of networks. Probably, there are more studies of establish networks and their consequences, than studies of the processes that actually lead to network formation.

It seems likely that change is a major motivation among actors forming a network. This could be either to make changes in a certain policy, or to avoid changes in a situation of changing circumstances. Once in place, however, networks will probably be as inert as any other institution (like e.g. bureaucracies). One reason is the way they are constructed, given the definition above. Since network participants will have a choice of leaving the network, they will be able to strengthen their voice by threaten with exit. And since they are interdependent, an exit of one actor will not gain the remaining actors. They are more likely to search for solutions that gain all members. In a real world, this search for pareto optimums often will mean as few changes as possible.

In the literature, existing networks inabilities to change have been described by e.g. Scharpf, applying a network perspective on decision making in EU, arguing that the network-like structure of decision procedure of EU results in decisions that to a large extent represents the lowest common denominator among the participants (2006). In a more theoretical sense, Peters (2006:1) argues that networks are based on self interests, and are probably more self serving than serving the public. Peter John argues that networks are static structures. When power relations are at stake, the existence of a network among organizations does not seem to be a particularly strong influence or constraint of human action. “In the brutal world of politics, loyalty is a luxury that few can afford” (2003:486). Likewise, Rhodes argues that among other things, networks are difficult to steer, often they are inefficient because co-operation causes delay, and they may become immobilized by conflicts of interests (2000:81).

Beside conflicting interests and power relations, one can also imagine other mechanisms troubling common action and policy change in networks. In a study of three Dutch networks dealing with urban development, Klijn and Teisman (2003) points to three obstacles that kept networks from reaching a proper solution to the problems. The complexity it self meant there was a multitude of motivations, and participants were member of several others, partly competing networks. Then there were institutional aspects among network actors, for example different public agencies (e.g. regional and local government) had different rules affecting “their” participants in the network. And finally, there was a gap in the values motivating members to join networks, especially between public and private actors.

However, the possible lack of changes following from network governance, or the inertia of networks, does not necessarily means we are standing in front of a problem. To what extent this is a problem, to a large extent depends on how one look at democracy and politics. We are facing a normative, more than an analytical question.

This normative question appears not to be among the most discussed topics in the literature dealing with policy change. Most contributions seem to discuss how policy change comes about, more than explaining the relationship between policy change and democracy. The most obvious interpretation, most likely is to think of policy change in terms of the expression of a
common political will, just like standard democratic theory presupposes. But one could also imagine the extent of policy change determined by something above politics; reflecting e.g. socioeconomic or socio cultural changes. Or policy changes could simply be a reflection of the continuously implicit feeling among politicians and media that, regardless of circumstances, something needs to be done. In principle, both lack of policy change and heavy policy changes could be both good and bad, depending on the evaluation criteria.

In order to bring this discussion any further, we need a criterion for democracy and policy change. What is the democratic standard that policy changes should meet? I will argue that the expectations from politicians, requesting policy changes, are rooted into something deeper than the daily struggle over attention and visibility. At least two arguments can support this view. First, changes in economic situations and technological changes like ICT and their consequences for globalization mean that the conditions for policy and steering are constantly changing, raising the need for changes in policy. This is parallel to the effect of socio-economic changes, discussed by e.g. John (2003:484). Second, there is a learning process affecting policy making. As politicians, bureaucrats and other influential actors learn more about accumulative effects of e.g. discharging CO$_2$ or quicksilver, or the decrease in biodiversity, this call for political initiatives, political decisions and policy change.

This to some extent rationalistic reasoning makes it clear that we should expect, in the name of democracy, changes in policy. One could even argue that this is a core value in democracy in the sense that democracy can be seen as a system enabling policies to change when there is a common will behind. Therefore, any steering mechanisms or governance techniques should allow for changes in a policy. And if we can make probable that a certain way of govern does not allow for policy change, we are facing a democratic problem.

In this sense, the lack of policy change in network governance, or at least their conservative nature, may mean that network governance do not fit well into a democratic standard. However, to accept that network exists and influence on policy, does not necessarily mean that governments are unable to influence on them.

5. Policy change by meta-governance?

Public policy making has become more complex and interwoven with civil society and markets in modern societies, making it harder to measure democratic performance in line with simplified models of democratic processes, like the parliamentary chain (March and Olsen 1989). Confronted with this complexity, the theoretical and political response basically has fallen into three different kinds of theories and operational strategies (Røiseland 2003). Perhaps most significant is the idea that order can be reestablished by new steering techniques inspired by neo-liberal philosophy. These ideas, often labeled under the heading “New Public Management” (Hood 1983; Stoker 1990:249), indicate that the solutions to the challenges expressed by governance, is to identify the right technique of steering. In line with its ideological roots, these techniques have often come to mean e.g. to focus public actors on core business aims, separate politics from administration, deregulate and to make public providers compete with market actors (Koppenjan and Klijn 2004:101).

Quite another response, aiming to maintain democracy in a more complex society, points to the need of a strengthened democratic ethics among public servants. According to e.g.
Lundquist, we need a renewal of bureaucratic and democratic norms, so that public servants, involved in all kinds of networks and public policy making, are able to play their role as the "guardians of democracy" (Lundquist 1998), catalyzing and guarding policy processes in order to bring them in accordance with certain democratic standards.

A third response comes from the network literature itself. As has been argued by e.g. Pierre (2000), the agenda in network governance research has changed over time, and we are now fronting what has been labeled a second generation of network research, constituting a new way of thinking about strategies facing network governance. This new generation of network research has extended the agenda with three core questions (Sørensen and Torfing 2005). First, inspired by studies of network governance showing how networks can fail (e.g. Jessop 2002), the question of under what circumstances networks do gain success or fail, has been raised. The agenda has also been extended by discussing both democratic problems and potentials inherent in governance networks. But most important for my discussion is the introduction of a level of governance above networks, allowing governments, to a certain extent, to influence on both the structure and content of networks. Koppenjan and Klijn (2004:11-12) argues that a split in European network literature recent years has led the literature into two different schools: One focusing on the mapping of interests, the process that creates networks, and the analysis of interdependencies, but at a certain distance from concrete problems and policy making, and the second, dealing more with the process of strategic interaction, paying less attention to the institutional characteristics. To some degree, one could possible argue that this latter school represents a revival of implementation research, a field of research that lost much of its attractions during the 90s (Sætren 2005). In the literature, this latter school has been conceptualized as e.g. “steering governance” (Stoker 2000), ”network management” (Kickert, Klijn et al. 1997), “governance of governance” (Jayasuriya 2005; Peters 2006) or ”meta-governance” (Jessop 2002). In the following, I refer to the latter concept.

According to Jessop, *meta-governance* is the process whereby governments can “modify the relative weight and targets of exchange, hierarchy, and networking in the overall coordination of relations of complex interdependence” (2004:62). Or, as put by Peters (2006:14) to establish parameters for action, rather than determining those actions. In this sense, there is a link between meta-governance and the growing literature on policy instruments (Peters 1998:26). A similar link may be drawn to some parts of the literature dealing with policy design (ref).

Considering meta-governance, we need to have in mind that, despite arguments about growing complexity of public policy making and implementation, governments still has a monopolistic position over some policy instruments. No one has so far questioned the government’s role in lawmaking, although legislation may have changed from specific rules to more framing regulations. And governments still have large public budgets at disposal. Although both law-making and budget allocations are influenced and limited by international law and e.g. EUs common market rules, governments still have much room for maneuverings. Third, one can argue that the state still is the main actor on the international scene. One conclusion to be drawn from this is, despite arguments that states are loosing ground, we should not understate the capacity of states to govern (Pierre 2000:5; Pierre and Peters 2000).

\[\text{Not to be mixed up with a new generation of researchers, this is certainly not the case.}\]
Even in typical networked contexts, having power spread among a number of different kinds of actors, some argue that governments can have strong influence on both contents in policy processes, the processes itself, and the relationships between interacting actors. This is the mode of governance I will discuss below, following the contribution from Koppenjan and Klijn (2004), where they thoroughly discuss if and how networks can be managed by public authorities.

According to Koppenjan and Klijn, governments and their representatives have a number of management techniques at hand in order to influence on networks. These techniques can be sorted into three main strategies, aiming to influence on contents, processes and networks, respectively.

Managing content
The intention or objective behind efforts to manage content, is not by definition the creation of consensus, but rather to improve joint image building, cross frame reflection and develop interesting and appealing solutions that generate support among actors (Koppenjan and Klijn 2004:245). These are all efforts to establish a common ground from where further negations and actions can take place, including efforts to introduce a common language in the network. And since governments are considered to be centers of information in modern societies (Sbragia 2000), they have an opportunity to introduce input of experts, research and science to networks, in such a way that learning processes between stakeholders are supported (Koppenjan and Klijn 2004).

Managing process
The management of process intents to improve interaction between network participants. Basically, this is a question of steering strategies that aim to integrate the various perspective and perceptions among actors (Klijn and Koppenjahn 2000:140). The management of process includes for example the selection and activation of actors, which governments to some extent are able to empower and equip with resources. Governments can also make temporary organizational arrangements in order to support network activity, and they may introduce certain procedures and arrangements in order to improve information flow, coordination and mutual learning (Koppenjan and Klijn 2004:248).

Managing networks
By managing networks, one intend to change the network itself. According to Klijn and Koppenjan (2000:141), network management can be implemented by at least two different strategies. The positions of actors can be changed, and new actors can be introduced in the network. Second, rules of the network can be changed, by those who are in a position to regulate process to a process. Often, governments do have substantial influence here, since these regulations typically are regulated by law and formal rules.

Practicing meta-governance - mixed approaches
Policy problems are characterized by the fact that a number of actors are involved in them. They all maintain their own perception about the nature of the problem, and often, there is no mechanism that allows us to see one as authoritative. This means that the effectiveness of management strategies is not determined by the content of the problems. Therefore, there are no standard recipes for selecting management strategies. However, this does not mean that nothing sensible can be said about the selection of strategies. According to Koppenjan and
Klijn (2004:251), a strategic-contingent approach should be applied in the selection of strategies. This approach means that strategies must fit the characteristics of the processes of problem solving, and the effectiveness of these strategies is limited and influenced by the institutional context in which the network managers operate.

6. Exemplifying

The following section represents no empirical analysis of the above reasoning. It provides examples, illustrations or stories for some of the above mentioned arguments. Probably a large number of stories could have served this mission, so there is an element of chance in the selection of illustrative cases.

What they have in common is that they all illustrate, to some extent, how public authorities in Norway, in a networking context, have been able to gain some control through meta-governance, and by softer instruments than command (Peters 2006:8). But beside different policy problems and networks, they also differ in the sense that the management technique applied by public authorities is different, pointing towards content, process and network, respectively. The extent of intentionality, or how conscious these strategies were introduced, is an open ended question, however.

1. Managing content: Norwegian agricultural policy from food supply to cultural landscape conservation

Norwegian agricultural policy is formed in a networked context, made by e.g. private farmers and their two national organizations, several refining cooperatives owned by farmers and their organization, private companies and public agencies like the Ministry of agricultural affairs and food, and public funded research institute dedicated to agricultural research. This network is complex, and mutual dependencies are extensive. Not very likely, one should expect such a network to initiate extensive changes in Norwegian agricultural policy.

However, globalization and regionalization in Europe has set Norwegian agricultural policy under pressure. Although the network intent to maintain an agricultural production, climate and topography in most of Norway is not well suited for such a production. If borders became completely opened, allowing extensive import, Norwegian agricultural production most likely would have suffered a sudden death. As a result, Norwegian food prices are substantial higher than in Sweden and Denmark, the economic transfers from government to farmers are extensive, but still, consumers choice is limited, and many farms are in bad economic condition (Veggeland 1992). For the government, it is a serious challenge to legitimize such a policy (Rommetvedt 2002).

However, late 1990s, the challenge were answered, as the government revised the core goals for agricultural production (St.meld. 1999-2000). As before, food supply and rural development were recognized, but new was the aim of agricultural production to produce common goods as sustainable settlements and cultural landscapes. Gradually, such goals apparently have replaced the need for food supply as the core value of Norwegian agricultural production. Possibly, one could even argue that food supply has become a by-product of the production of cultural common goods. This reformulation in content also has brought about some important changes in the network. Since tourism is a big industry, mainly selling the
image of Norway being naturalistic and clean, and therefore to some extent dependent on the
cultural common goods associated with agricultural production, tourist industries have
become involved in the agricultural network. Recently, even health authorities argued in favor
of keeping up cultural landscapes by agricultural production.

From the perspective of Norwegian agricultural authorities, aiming to keep Norwegian
agricultural production going, the reframing process from food supply to cultural landscapes,
most likely has been a success. From a theoretical point of view, however, one may argue that
this example more points to continuation than change in policy. But in the light of the
separation between intentions and actions, discussed above (section 2), one may say that the
story illustrate how intentions were reframed and changed in an almost paradigmatic way, in
order to continue certain actions.

2. Managing process: The integration of sport and health by imposing planning processes

There are close links between physical activity and health, and some have argued that health
authorities should spend more energy to persuade people to exercise more. From the
viewpoint of sport, this may become a new way to legitimize their activities, and their great
financial support from government. However, if there are networks in this area, they will be
complex. Not only are health services and sport activities spread across three levels of
government. Sport also divides into public authorities (e.g. a Ministry of Culture or the state
lottery funding sport activities), civil organizations (sport clubs and their strong national
association) and private enterprises (like fitness centers, etc). And the institutional
characteristics of the two activities are very different, health grounded in science and
rationality, and sport as a leisure activity with a high level of voluntarism. Anyone aiming to
combine these two things is facing a challenge, and extensive policy changes coming from a
network made of health and sport actors seem unlikely.

Nevertheless, a policy program developed in one Norwegian regional government aimed to
cross the gap between sport and health at the local level (Røiseland 2006). The idea was two-
sided. One part of the program aimed to develop sport activities tailored to the need of
patients in rehabilitation. The other part aimed to help local sport clubs to develop more
activities for groups that, from the health perspective, strongly needed more physical activities
(e.g. age 40-50).

As there were no strong hierarchical links between regional and local government, soft tools
were used to change the behavior at the local level. More precisely, those municipalities that
became participants in the program were granted some resources to develop activities. But
they also had to make a plan for how sport and health should be integrated, and there were
certain guidelines for how this plan should be developed, regarding e.g. who were the main
actors in the planning process, the council had to decide on the plan, etc. etc.
Some places, the process behind the plan turned out to be more important than the plan itself.
In some cases (though not all), the planning process brought about some deep changes in local
networks dealing in some way or another with health and sport.

The important element in this story is the way a certain administrative activity, planning,
became a tool able to influence on the process in a rather decisive way, some places making
new networks able to partly close the gap between health and sport. From the perspective of
the regional government that initiated the program, some of the participating municipalities underwent great changes to an almost symbolic price for the regional government.

3. Managing networks: Norwegian higher education and new ways of coupling network actors

Higher education in Norway has over time developed into a system with networking characteristics, although most institutions are still owned and funded by the national government, and under the command of Parliament and the Ministry of Education. Still, Norwegian higher education institutions have always had much autonomy. As research and education over time has been recognized as a crucial factor for regional and urban development, institutions have become involved in many networks for regional, urban and business development. And private companies and public organizations have, to a much larger extent than they used to, favored institutions with donations, project funding and professorships. These relations are triggered by the system itself, since the grant from government is more or less fixed and earmarked for specific activities, but few limits are put on other kinds of income. And since the now 18 university colleges are allowed to become universities as soon as they develop at least four PhD-programs each, they have a strong motivation for extraordinary funding and scientific development. Many fear this system will displace goals in educational policy, allowing scarce resources to become all to spread.

Managing such a system is not easy, as it would trigger lobbying in Parliament, and opportunistic behavior among members of Parliament and Government, fulfilling their need to send greetings to their election district. But in this case, the political system has taken a step back, and partly left the managing of the system to the system itself. This is done by a system of peer review based accreditation of education programs as well as research and institutional status. This type of self-regulation has been working for almost 5 years, and so far, nothing seems to indicate that this softer form of steering put less restriction on the institutions involved, rather on the opposite.

From the government’s point of view, the linking of actors across institutions means that, although partly self regulated, the institutions are under strong regulation in a very inexpensive way. This management idea is part of the “Bologna process”, and has become common in various ways in most European countries during the last years (Koppenjan and Klijn 2004:219).

7. Endnote

The introduction of meta-governance is one among several ways to conceptualize the level above governance, and the use of softer steering mechanisms to influence network governance. Such a perspective has consequences not only for the way we think about policy making, it also affects the role politicians can have in a networking society, and it affects democracy in several ways. Although this is not a main topic here, some of these questions should nevertheless be mentioned. Regarding democracy, there is much discussion about under what circumstances network governance can be considered as democratic. Sørensen and Torfing (2005) argue that we need to look at in what way networks are anchored in political constituencies and in a given set of democratic rules an norms. So far, however, one can well argue that there is a lack of empirical studies dealing with networks and democracy.
The same can be said about meta-governance and political roles. Obviously, to manage networks, or be a meta-governor, call for other skills than to be a commander (Sørensen 2002). But exactly what and how has so far been less studied.

8. References


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