Democratic consequences of urban governance
-What becomes of representative democracy?

To be presented at the ECPR Turin conference 2002.
Workshop: Institutional Innovation in Local Democracy

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February 2002
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Abstract

The article concerns democratic consequences of urban governance. Urban governance through policy networks indicates a problem for representative democracy but in theory there is no agreement about the consequences for a new network democracy. The article starts by presenting the theoretical discussion of governance and policy networks and the relevance for a Danish study. Then democratic theories are presented in order to locate ideas about the possible consequences. One group of theories conclude that policy networks undermine democracy and have to be restrained. Another group argues that policy networks illustrate a new network democracy and have to be sustained. These conclusions are used to discuss the conclusions from a Danish study of urban governance. The Danish case study is about the building of a city mall in the centre of an old city in Denmark. The case study illustrates how policy networks operate in Danish local politics and how hierarchy becomes integrated in the policy networks. The case study shows an elitist and centralised governance process characterised by conflicts but the effect was not a closure of the political matter and the article discusses explanations. Participation through policy networks was accepted as an extension of representative democracy into a network democracy but the case study illustrates two very different interpretations of a network democracy. These two different interpretations influence the understanding of the proper roles for politicians and citizens in a new network democracy and make it possible to reach opposite conclusions about the democratic consequence of a policy network process in urban politics.

Introduction

In 1997 there was a celebration in the Danish city of Helsingør, which is famous for the castle Kronborg – the resident for Shakespeare’s Hamlet. The celebration was about the opening of a new city mall on the edge of the old Middle Ages city. In the city mall there was shops, dwellings, offices and a multi-story carpark. The celebration with music and speeches was a special event for a lot of people in Helsingør and it was the end of a dramatic political period in the history of the city. For some it was a day of relief because they finally succeeded. For others it was a day of great disappointment for the same reason. For seven years there had been a struggle going in the city about the city mall. Entrepreneurs, architects, lawyers, politicians, administrators and planners, interest groups and many citizens had been involved in actions for or against the city mall and numerous democratic means were used to influence the process. This case is an excellent example on how urban politics and democracy is handled in a governance process where public and private actors form policy networks in order to act on a political problem.

In theory, governance through policy networks is a new governing form. The policy networks are relatively independent of a representative political centre and the result is a fragmented political system with no centre and no single actor in control of the urban development. The fragmented political system indicates a problem for traditional representative democracy
characterised by one elected political elite in control of all decisions in public matters. This article will concern this relationship between governance and democracy. The questions to be discussed are how such governance processes dominated by policy networks affect the democracy? How can these processes be characterised as democratic? Are they related to representative democracy at all? Or do new democratic forms arise from the processes?

These questions will be discussed in theory as well as in the empirical case study of the city mall. The theoretical discussions form the analytical framework for interpretations of the empirical study. The first part of the article is theoretical and concerns a discussion and presentation of theories about governance and democracy. The issues raised in the theoretical part are further discussed in the second part of the paper concentrating on the empirical study.

In the theoretical part I have looked into especially British theories of governance and policy networks. It is discussed what policy networks could look like in practice and how this British perspective could be of relevance for a Danish study. Then I will look into democratic theories concerned with the consequences of governance. However, within this theoretical field there is no agreement about the consequences and neither any agreement about whether governance is good or bad news for democracy. I present competing theories in order to make room for different interpretations in the case study. In the democratic theories I have stressed democratic issues that were found important in the case study. These issues were the role of representation and participation in a network democracy and how the common interest is represented in a governance situation based on numerous policy networks.

**Urban governance as policy networks in the shadow of hierarchy**

The governance discussions concern the way of organising and governing in political processes. The idea of governance seems to have developed as a dominant theoretical framework for understanding the new form of governing in postmodern society and cities. However, this idea of governance has to be understood in its opposition to government as the traditional governing form.

In the theories government is described as a cohesive and integrated public sector with a central political management centre – the Government – based on national parliamentary sovereignty and accountability through elections. The parliamentary chain of control is the centre of the governing process with elected politicians as the authoritarian decision-makers and a neutral administration based on bureaucratic means to implement policies. Bureaucratic means are hierarchic relations between superiors and lower-level staff and units, a clear division of work and responsibility between different actors and offices, specialised work functions, work based on expert knowledge and formalised work processes and information preparation. A precondition for government is a clear division of boundaries and responsibilities between politics and administration and between the public and the private sector. Rationalisation, objectivity, and universality are the leading principles of society and
are expressed through specialisation, scientification and formalisation in the modern organisations (see e.g. Bogason, 2000a, p.13-18 and Rhodes, 1997, p.181-84). In a Danish city this governing system place the city council and the elected local politicians in the central governing position. The highly professionalised and specialised administration is loyal to political decisions and implement policies using bureaucratic means. The citizens elect their politicians and follow the decisions made in the political centre or in administration. They do not actively participate in policy processes.

However, the argument is that this government system is about to be outdated due to the post-modern society defined by an increased fragmentation, differentiation and complexity in social and political life (see e.g. Kooiman, 1993b, p.254 and Rhodes, 1997, p. 181-84 for this kind of argument). The consequence is the emergence of a new logic of governing and new forms of organising. Governance is the new logic and policy networks the new organising form.

Governance indicates a new kind of socio-political logic characterised by a differentiated and multi-centred political system with a mixture of private and public actors who participate directly in the decision making process without any clear hierarchic relation between the many centres and actors. The actors recognise the interdependence between relatively autonomous parties based on the understanding that nobody possesses total knowledge, information and overview or resources to solve collective problems. Governance becomes the result of interactive social-political management and the concern is, first and foremost, to find and develop a common understanding of problems and solutions among participants in political processes. The focus shifts from structure and form (should public or private sector solve the problem?) to problems that must be solved and the possibilities to do so (how can this problem be solved?). The administration participates in policy making side by side with politicians, and the boundaries between politics and administration become unclear. So do the boundaries between public and private – they not only become unclear they also change character (Kooiman, 1993a, p.4-6).

This new logic is expressed in a new form of organising through policy networks. Rhodes (1997) sees governance as characterised by self-organised, inter-organisational networks (p.15). The theoretical concept of policy networks is developed as an alternative to the hierarchy of the public sector and the exchange and competition of the market. Rhodes (1997) defines a policy network as a cluster or a complex of organisations or persons (public and private) joined together through their interdependencies of resources (like money, information, know-how and experience) (p.37). Networks are based on dependency and interchange of resources. Rules are rooted in confidence and negotiated by the members and policy networks have a significant autonomy in relation to government.

In a Danish city this governance system would indicate the existence of numerous policy networks related to different policy areas and political issues as arena for urban policy-
making. The policy networks have a wide autonomy to solve policy problems in the city. City council is either part of the policy networks or work side by side with the networks. The actors in the policy networks could be politicians, administrators, interest groups, citizens and private business depending on the political problem and the resources needed to solve the problem. The networks are very different because they have to deal with different political tasks.

Network theories develop several typologies and categories for different types of policy networks (see e.g. Mayntz and Marin, 1991; Jordan and Schubert, 1992). In the following I will present only two types but they illustrate a continuum in types of policy networks from closed, exclusive and stable policy communities to open, inclusive and unstable issue networks (see Rhodes, 1997, p. 38-39 for this typology). In the closed, exclusive and stable policy community there is only a few public and private participants with very close contact for a longer period. They participate as equal partners, they trust each other, they share the same values and they develop a common understanding of the political matter that made them join the network in the first place (Rhodes, 1997, p.42-44). This is a very strong policy network and Rhodes argues that this type of networks often operate for a long period in relation to a policy area or policy sector. In the other end of the continuum we find the open, inclusive and unstable issue network. There are a variety of participants in this type of network and it is open for newcomers. The contact is unsteady and the participants do not agree in all matters. Conflicts are not unusual in the network and some actors are more powerful than others. This is a weak policy network and Rhodes argues that it will typically operate in relation to one political issue and for a short period (Rhodes, 1997, p.43-44).

It is evident from the presentation of the governance theory and the theoretical definitions of different policy networks that the democratic consequences will depend on how governance and policy networks find expression in practice. One can use the theory of governance and policy networks as a description of practice and look for either government or governance as the dominant governing form in a city. Or one can use the theoretical ideas of governance and government as ideal types and, as Sharpf (1994) argues, look for policy networks in the shadow of hierarchy as the most likely situation in practice. In that vain, Bogason (2001) writes that in a Danish cultural context it is possible that the autonomy of policy networks will be limited and that hierarchy can occur in different forms. In the empirical study of the city mall this latter approach is taken. The case study is chosen due to the functioning of several policy networks. It will be discussed how elements of governance and government are intertwined in the policy networks or in the relation between these networks and the traditional political decision centre: city council. The question is what policy networks look like in a Danish city and how the shadow of hierarchy is expressed in practice? Furthermore the two types of policy networks are both used as possible forms of organising in relation to a single political issue as the city mall.
Governance and policy networks will influence democracy but as mentioned the consequences will depend on the expression in practice. In the democratic theories there are different conclusions about the practice and the consequences and also disagreement in the valuation of this new governing form depending on different definitions of democracy. Some reject this development because it is bad news for representative democracy. Others support the development because it is good news for the development of a new network democracy. In the following these competing theories are presented.

**How governance and policy networks can influence democracy**

The disagreement within the theoretical field of democracy has a long history. March and Olsen have tried to provide some order for understanding the differences within traditional democratic theories. They place the theories within the framework of the opposing ideas of aggregation and integration (March and Olsen, 1989, p.118). I will start the discussion by shortly presenting these two opposing ideas but in the presentation I stress the democratic issues important in this article: the role of representation and participation and the question of who represents the common interest. Then I move on to new democratic theories specifically concerned with the consequences of governance and policy networks in post-modern cities. First I discuss theories that reject governance because policy networks undermine representative democracy. Second I discuss theories being supportive of governance because policy networks illustrate the development of a new form of democracy.

Even though the traditional theories of pluralism, elitism and liberalism differ, they all have a common foundation in aggregative democracy. Democracy is a means or procedure for the aggregation of different interests in politics in order to govern society. Democracy is also a means for the distribution of resources and power and for mediating conflicts in society (Sørensen, 1995, p.29). Politics is a competition between conflicting groups and citizens and citizens have pre-given interests that have to be canalised into the governing system through the voting system (March and Olsen, 1989, p. 120). Representation by delegation is a positive factor for democratic life and the contact with citizens has to be limited. The citizens participate through elections and their participation has to be restricted because they are driven by self-interest. Due to that they are not competent democratic decision-makers. The elected and enlightened elite presents the common interest and therefore they are the competent decision-makers. The elite secures stability and unity and protects the citizens (Sørensen, 1995, p.33).

As competing theories of democracy, we find republican and communitarian theories based on integration. They find that democracy is a goal in itself and a lifestyle. Participation and dialogue are the prior conditions for political decisions because it is through participation and dialogue that citizens become socialised by the norms and values of society (become democratic citizens) and because the dialogue and participation legitimise the political decisions made by elected politicians. Politics is a matter of equalising conflicts through
rational debate that generates consensus and common understanding (March and Olsen, 1989, p. 126-127). The image of the common interest (the common good) is central in these theories and every citizen has a duty to serve for the common interest. Representation is a practical necessity but only as a mandate with limited autonomy to the elected politicians and strong popular control. Politicians are likely to be corrupted by power and the competent citizens have to constrain and control them.

These two competing understandings of democracy are always present in the development of our democratic institutions. In different countries, and at different times, these ideas have been balanced in different ways. However, representative democracy and the parliamentary chain of control are often stated as having dominated Western democratic institutions and the theories, to a large extent, agree about a general trend of integration expressed by the participation of large interests groups in the policy processes. This is especially true for the Nordic countries. Eriksen (1995) talks about a Nordic development in the 1970s and 1980s with the states of the strong interests groups administered by politicians with a weak political foundation (s.12). In Denmark the result has been a highly professional and technocratic negotiated democratic system with strong elements of corporatism.

The question is what happens if the idea of governance and political fragmentation through various policy networks is accepted as the new condition for democracy? What are the theoretical conclusions about the democratic consequences? Some conclude that democracy is undermined, others that it developed in new forms. I will start with those who interpret governance as bad news for democracy.

**Neo-elitism or hyper-pluralism: networks undermine democracy**

In theories about urban democracy changes have been noted in democratic conditions and they are explained by post-modern or late modern tendencies such as fragmentation, differentiation and complexity in the social and political life. The argument is that competition and pluralism accelerate and power is increasingly dispersed and the result is ungovernability for the state (see e.g. Savitch and Thomas, 1991, p. 246 and Logan and Molotch, 1987, p.52-53). The urban theories describe the rise of several centres (policy networks) for political decision-making with a wide range of actors involved - most of them not elected. These new centres undermine representative democracy. So far these theories agree. But in the urban discussions about how these political centres outside parliament develop we find competing theories.

Urban researchers register two very different consequences of this development. They construct two different stories about practice. The hyper-pluralists tell about the upcoming of an extreme pluralism. The political decisions are made not in the elected political organs but in the city corridors of power where politicians, administrators, private business, citizens and local pressure groups are involved in periodic negotiations for a share of the power (Savitch
and Thomas, 1991, p. 246, Judge, 1996, p. 26). The relationship between the actors may very well take the form of either policy communities or issue networks and some researchers, like Deleon (1991), talk about urban regimes and anti-regimes fighting about control of the city (p. 210-11). This theoretical view stresses that it is no longer evident who represents the common interest of the city. A constant fight between numerous policy networks is going on about this right. The neo-elitists very much disagree with this storytelling about urban democratic practice. They do not see a dispersion of power into different policy networks or regimes and anti-regimes as the new condition for democracy. On the contrary, they see a concentration of power in e.g. growth machines, which can be interpreted as policy communities. Due to the ungovernability and loss of power in the representative political bodies other actors enter the scene. These actors are usually private rentiers in coalitions with developers and city officials. They establish closed coalitions in order to exploit the exchange value of the urban land. They all have a common interest in economic growth and are able to set the political agenda and take control of the power in the city using the argument that economic growth is beneficial for all urban citizens (Logan and Molotch, p. 52-53, Harding, 1995, p. 42-44). By doing so they claim to represent the common interest of the city.

So we are told two very different stories about what to expect in a contemporary urban political study as a democratic effect of governance and policy networks. Both emphasise that post-modern urban politics is exercised outside representative democracy and in policy networks with public and private actors. Politicians can participate in the policy networks but as only one actor among others. One stresses that the consequence of governance and policy is a new hyper-plural democracy with a lot of different policy networks fighting against each other to gain power and control in the city. The result is a dispersion of power and a constant fight about who can represent the common interest. And the other stresses that the consequence is a highly elitist democracy with strong closed coalitions between rentiers, builders and city officials and a concentration of power. These closed coalitions claim to represent the common interest. However, both agree in the conclusion that representative democracy is undermined by this development. These two stories tell us that we need to be open to both possibilities in a study of policy networks as a new condition for democracy.

Hyper-pluralists and neo-elitists argue for representative democracy as the final argument. They evaluate the development of governance and policy network from the perspective of representative democracy and the conclusion is to restrain the development of policy networks and keep them in line in the representative democracy to reinstall the hierarchy and parliamentary control as a centre for representation of the common interest. Policy networks have to be regulated from the central centre. In this perspective on democracy the theories concentrate on aggregative elements in democracy and have little to say about integration, participation and dialogues. They uphold the traditional dichotomy between aggregative and integrative thinking.
If we turn to other democratic theories about the consequences of governance and policy network we find a more positive attitude towards governance and policy networks in a democratic perspective.

New forms of democracy: networks sustain democracy

There are a variety of new democratic theories and I have only looked into theories that agree in pluralism as the basic foundation for a new democracy. Pluralism is regarded as the only instrument to prevent authoritarian tendencies in the definition of interests and to secure the right for everybody to formulate their different interests. The new definition of pluralism is developed in order to bridge opposing ideas about aggregation and integration and to bridge liberal and republican theories. In this article, deliberative democracy and radical plural democracy are chosen as two examples of these new democratic theories. Their conclusion is that governance and policy networks illustrate a new form of democracy – a network democracy. In this sense, the new theories are positive towards the development of a network democracy as a very complex and differentiated democratic system in a decentralised and fragmented society (Eriksen, 1995, s. 13). The theories agree about several elements in their understanding of a new democracy but they also disagree about other elements.

The agreement is found in the statement that the right to be different and the right to see these different interests fulfilled are essential in the new understanding of pluralism. The traditional perception of pluralism is based on the possibility in the end to reach a point of peaceful coexistence between interests. The new perception redefines pluralism as continuous conflicts and struggles between interests with the possibility only to obtain a temporary and contextual balance and consensus between opposite demands and interests. The aggregative aspect of democracy is stressed by holding on to pluralism but integration is also emphasised by pointing to the importance of not only one (the representative centre), but a diversity of channels for democratic influence like e.g. policy networks (Bogason, 2000b, Torfing, 1999, p.257-258). Furthermore, rational dialogue and reflection is an essential part of the new democracy. Public debate and active participation is seen as a precondition for the development of a sustainable and dynamic community and for securing the support for social, civil and political rights (Hansen, 1999, p.8 and 15-16, Eriksen, 1995, p.13). Participation is exercised through representation and direct participation, e.g. in different kinds of policy networks, but direct participation being of great importance. It has a value of its own – not only to achieve democratic control and socialisation but also to achieve a common understanding of the common interest and a democratic identity that does not exist as a substantial doctrine (as in the thoughts of Republicans). It has to be constructed over and over again.

Governance and policy networks do not constitute a problem for democracy in this way of thinking. On the contrary policy networks are new channels for influence and the foundation for the development of a new democracy. The development towards governance through
policy networks has to be sustained. But the democratic theories disagree about how to sustain the development of policy networks and what the characteristic of a good democratic process looks like in the new network democracy: How should people participate and how to regulate this participation? How to deal with representation in different forms? How to develop the common interest in a fragmented governing situation? The disagreements can be illustrated through the two examples of new competing democratic theories chosen in this article.

Theories about deliberative democracy are one example. These theories believe in the Habermasian ideal and the democratic idea is based on rational reasoning in open communicative processes in several public arenas (Eriksen og Weigård, 1999). The integrative elements of democracy are stressed more than the aggregative elements. The theories argue that communicative processes should be founded in certain communicative preconditions that allow the better argument to evolve in public discussions and in procedures – a discourse ethic - that secure a sensible and fair discussion (Habermas, 1995, s 33). The communicative preconditions and procedures keep the public dialogue free from power and strategic actions. The ideal is communicative action based on empathic and social rationality as an opposition to the instrumental, cynical and strategic rationality. It is possible to reach the consensus in this kind of communicative processes by using rational and sensible arguments (the better argument) (Eriksen, 1995, s.15, Eriksen og Weigård, 1999, s. 76). Democracy is exercised in these inter-subjective communicative processes both inside and outside the formal political bodies. The politicians do not get their legitimacy through the formal bodies or positions but by their ability to find the better argument (e.g. about the general interest) in the public dialogue. Public hearings and public debate are the only ways to create political opinions and in the end legitimise a political decision made by representative politicians. A good democratic process is characterised by integration, participation and communicative processes based on confidence, consensus and deliberation.

A competing idea is found in the theory of radical plural democracy inspired by Foucault (see Torfing, 1999, Laclau and Mouffe, 1985). The theorists believe in power and conflicts as inherent parts of politics and democracy and the issue of representation is an important democratic issue to consider when conflicts have to be solved. All political and democratic processes are discursive processes and the foundation for these discourses is exclusion and inclusion of meaning and actions based on different power mechanism (Torfing, 1999, p.124). In this perspective on democracy it is not possible to separate communication and power – not even in an ideal form – they will always be interdependent and intertwined. Politics and democracy are basically matters of exclusion and discursive power in the process of constructing meaning (Flyvbjerg, 1998). In democratic processes there will be numerous barriers for achieving consensus and consensus-making always involves exclusions and the exercise of power. Consensus merely illustrates that certain values and solutions have gained hegemony in the democratic process. A good democratic process is characterised by making room for conflicts and by finding procedures to reveal and regulate exclusions and power.
The theoretical conclusions in the first part of this article were that governance through policy networks are likely to be found in different forms in practice. The policy networks might vary from closed exclusive stable policy networks to open inclusive unstable networks and they might be functioning in the shadow of hierarchy (government). The conclusions about the democratic consequences differed. One conclusion was that the development of policy networks makes room for more non-elected actors to participate and the consequence is either a hyper-plural or a neo-elitist democratic situation but either way this constitutes a challenge and a possible undermining of representative democracy. Policy networks are bad news for democracy. Another conclusion was that governance through policy networks illustrates new channels for influence and new forms of representation and participation. This causes the development of a new form of democracy bridging and re-interpreting former competing democratic ideas. Policy networks are good news for democracy. However, the new democratic theories differ in their interpretation of a good democratic process. One perspective – like deliberative democracy – stresses consensus and procedures of dialogue. Another – like radical pluralism – stresses conflicts, power and procedures of representation as well as of participation.

The theoretical conclusions will be discussed further in the next part of the article concerning the empirical case study. I start with an introduction to the city of Helsingør and then turn to the analyses of policy networks in the shadow of hierarchy. This is followed by the discussion of the democratic consequences. First I look into the relationship between policy networks and the city council (the question of representation and the common interest). Second I investigate the relationship between policy networks and the citizens of Helsingør (the question of participation and the common interest).

This is not the place for long methodological explanations. In brief the empirical study has been conducted as a qualitative case study informed by qualitative interview and written public documents, newspaper articles, reports etc. The strategy for analysis was formed as a social constructivist bottom-up study of policy networks and policy processes in an institutional and discursive perspective (see Sehested, 2002). The theoretical perspectives of networks (inspired by Rhodes and other network-theorists), institutions (inspired by March and Olsen, 1989) and discourses (inspired by Laclau and Mouffe, 1985) were used as different optics to analyse events in Helsingør. Theories of e.g. governance and democracy were used to discuss the result of the case study in general terms.

**Helsingør: A city in need of activity and a new identity**

In 1989, the idea of a new city mall in the centre of the old city of Helsingør was presented. Helsingør is the city that provides the scene for Hamlet and Kronborg castle is a major tourist attraction. The city is situated at the north-eastern corner of Sealand and is a port on the narrow waters between Denmark and Sweden. It is the largest city in the municipality of
Helsingør, which had 57,421 inhabitants in 1996. Trade and a large shipyard had been the economic foundation for the city for almost a century, but in 1983 the shipyard closed as a result of economic problems. The city lost an essential part of its identity and unemployment and social problems became part of the city's major political problems during the 1980s. The city has a very well preserved city centre with Middle Ages half-timbered houses and narrow paved streets. It is a very lively city centre with people living in the old restored houses or having small shops, cafes, restaurants etc to serve the many Swedes and tourists that visit the city. For the citizens of Helsingør the old architecture is another essential part of the city’s identity.

The reason for the fine preservation of the old city has to be found in the city's planning policy, which was developed during the 1970s. This planning strategy was twofold. One was the preservation of the old city centre with very strict rules for any change in the old city centre. The other was a decentralised centre strategy. All large new building projects had to be placed outside the city centre. In Helsingør, everybody was very pleased with and proud of this far-sighted planning effort to preserve the old city at a time in the 1970s where everybody else destroyed the old city centres. The planners were seen as heroes who saved the old city. In 1989, when the idea of the city mall was presented, the double planning strategy was still the dominant planning policy and most of the heroic planners were still employed in the planning department.

The Social Democrats had had the majority in the city council for many decades and there was a long tradition of close co-operation with the leaders of interest organisations representing labour and industry (especially from the shipyard) but also trade. A very typical corporatist governing system during the 70s and 80s in Danish municipalities, as mentioned in the first part of the article, and in Helsingør it would not be unfair to talk about a very closed and stable policy network (a corporatist regime), which had governed the city for many years. This elitist governing situation had during the years caused a lot of conflicts with the citizens about urban politics. When the shipyard closed in 1983, the foundation for this corporatist regime fell apart and with the changing political climate during the 1980s a more open and instable political situation developed in the city council. In 1989, when the idea of the city mall was presented, the Social Democrats governed with the support from a small socialist party. However, the Conservatives were close to take over power for the first time in decades. Several of the people involved in the former conflicts about urban politics in the city were also involved in the case of the city mall.

This short historical view illustrates that in 1989 Helsingør was in trouble. The closing down of the shipyard in 1983 caused high unemployment and social problems in the city and the city lost an essential part of its identity. The politicians tried to find alternative projects to provide the city with a new future but they did not succeed. The mayor had troubles in keeping his majority and needed a success for the next election that was soon coming up. The city was in urgent need of a new economic development and a new identity and meaning. The
old order had disappeared and a new one had to be established. This is the background for the case study of the city mall in Helsingør.

Policy networks in the shadow of hierarchy

In this troubled urban situation two local people – an architect and a lawyer – fostered the idea of building a brand new city mall in Helsingør placed on a parking lot owned by local government right at the edge of the old city. The building project should include a large shopping mall, new dwellings and offices and a multi-storey carpark. The two men were local businessmen in need of new businesses. They had lived in the city for years and were engaged in the general development of the city. They were part of the local business life and they knew the political traditions in the city. They also knew important political actors. They were aware that the idea of a new city mall in the old city centre would be a controversial idea and very difficult to promote in a city protected by the double planning strategy supported by most politicians, administrators and citizens. It took seven years before their idea was implemented and there was a lot of resistance and problems during the process. But they succeeded in the end.

The argument in this article is that the making of an informal closed and stable city mall network was very important for this outcome of the process. There would not have been any city mall without this policy network. However, the strategy of policy making through networking would not have succeeded without another equally important political strategy. It was the construction of meaning about the city mall – the construction of a city mall discourse. A whole city had to be convinced that it was a good idea to build this brand new city mall as part of the old preserved city. This was not an easy task in a city where most people saw the old architecture as an essential part of the city’s identity and where the planning policy for years had been concentrated on preserving the old city. In the following I will investigate the strategy of networking and the strategy of construction meaning in the case of the city mall in order to understand the functioning of policy networks in a city. However, the city mall network and the city mall discourse were challenged and opposed strongly in the process during the seven years. Another informal policy network was created in the process to fight against the city mall. And other meanings were presented. This network was an open and unstable opponent network and I will also look into the functioning of this policy network and the meanings presented through the network.

The closed and stable city mall network and the construction of the city mall discourse

The two local businessmen with the idea started the process by making contact to local government. They decided that they had to go right to the top of local government from the start and they knew that if the urban manager and the mayor did not support the idea there would never be any city mall. This first contact between local private and public actors was soon developed to form the closed, exclusive and stable city mall network. The director of a
new planning department was integrated soon after and these five men developed a relationship characterised by most of the elements described as a policy community in the theoretical part. During the process, a national building company and investors got involved in the project but they never joined the local city mall network. They talked and acted through the local lawyer because they realised that the local aspect was essential for the legitimacy of this closed and stable policy network in the city. The city mall network illustrates how non-elected private businessmen are allowed to participate in an informal strong network relation with the highest representative of the representative democracy (the city council).

The five public and private actors worked together from the start and stayed in a very close, stable and closed relationship during the whole process. They were dependent on each other’s resources: the capital, the idea and the public decision-making authority and they soon developed a relationship based on trust and a sense of mutual obligation to work hard to implement the city mall. It was this policy network, which carried the idea through all the resistance and all the problems during the seven years. It was these actors who possessed engagement and the strong belief in the idea and they kept on fighting for the idea no matter what. They always discussed and negotiated what ever happened in the process to be able to react properly to the situation. In this perspective the closed and stable city mall-network became an instrument for effective decision-making and acting in the urban policy process. Due to its closeness and its stability it was able to resist numerous problems and strong opposition during the whole process. Actually there was never much attention about this cooperation between public and private actors in the city mall network.

The city mall network was also characterised by a common understanding of the city mall and the network was the central actor in the construction of a city mall discourse. The core element in this discourse was the argument of the city mall as beneficial for the whole city – for the common interest of the city. The city mall network claimed to be acting on behalf on the common interest. While the networking process was a quiet one, the process of constructing meaning was a very loud and dramatic one with rough disputes in newspapers and on numerous meetings about the future and the new identity for the city. In one meeting it almost came to a physical fight between the mayor and some of the citizens in the opponent network. It is described in more details below.

The city mall discourse had room to develop due to the readiness for change in the city and the need for a new meaning to replace the old one. In the discursive process the city mall was never presented as a goal for the urban development. It was only presented as a mean to solve several political and social problems (as mentioned above) in the city that occupied the political agenda and different important political actors at that time. The solutions to these problems would be beneficial for the whole town (and not just for a few entrepreneurs or politicians). The city mall-discourse therefore became a discourse about problem solving and a new identity. Helsingør could again be the leading city of trade in the northern Zealand, which provided the support from the trade organisations and most of the politicians. New
The city mall discourse grew stronger and more and more coherent as more arguments were presented for or against the city mall and it soon created a certain limitation and framework for the discussions about the city mall that was very difficult to break out of for the opponents. It became very difficult for others to enter the arena for debate without offering an alternative problem solving and alternative ideas about how to develop the city in the common interest of all citizens to replace the ones presented in this discourse.

The establishment of a closed, stable policy community and the development of a coherent problem solving discourse stressing the common interest were two important elements in the functioning of policy networks in Helsingør and important for the outcome of the process. The question is now if the expression of policy networks in the shadow of hierarchy makes any sense in this urban policy process? It certainly did. It made sense through the actors involved in the network and through the governing principles developed in the network.

Looking at the actors in the city mall-network it was the top of the formal hierarchy in local government who joined the policy network. Hierarchy in the form of the actors was therefore present in the policy network from the start. The political issue had a high priority in local government and the top managers and the mayor himself chose to be part of, and in control of, this network. This representation turned out to be essential for the wider accept of the functioning of the closed network. But the hierarchy was also expressed through the meaning of the proper governing principles in the policy network. One principle was the political will in city council and another was bureaucratic rule-following.

The mayor represented the political will and in the policy network the political will meant the majority in the city council. During the whole process the political will was used to legitimise the work of the policy network. All the actors in Helsingør saw the political will in the city council as the driving force for the whole process and the policy network saw itself as implementers of this political will. They claimed to represent not only the common interests of the citizens in the city but also the majority in the city council. During the process the network always followed closely what happened in city council and tried to be an integrated part of the political activities in the council. The policy network was not moving away from the city council in the process but creating a very close relationship to city council. It illustrates that the city mall network never became a relatively autonomous policy network, as the governance theory states. The city council was in the whole process regarded as the only legitimate centre for decision-making in the city. This is of course important in the democratic discussion and I will return to the issue below.
One explanation for this close relationship between the city mall network and the city council can be found in the fact that the majority of the votes in city council for the city mall were never secure and stable. The Social Democrats refused to vote for such a project without the votes of the Conservatives, and the Conservative Party was split in half about the matter during the whole process. A lot of voting took place in the city council during the seven years and the result always favoured a majority for the city mall. But in the processes between there was a lot of arguing and scepticism about the city mall. The city mall-network could never be sure about the result of a vote and they had to work hard to establish and maintain the majority of votes, which I will elaborate on below.

The other expression of hierarchy in the city mall-network was bureaucratic rule-following represented, in particular, by the director of a new strategic planning department in the mayors’ administration. From the start of the project there was a lot of attention in city council and in the local press about this project because it was against all former principles for development of the city. And it was no surprise that the urban planning department who invented the double planning strategy opposed the project very strongly. All this attention and the internal administrative conflict about the project made the administrative executives very anxious to follow the bureaucratic rules in the planning process. They wanted everything to go by the book, so nobody could criticise the process for being unfair or illegal afterwards. This was the reason why the hierarchic element of formal bureaucratic rules became an important governing principle in the policy network.

The conclusion about the city mall-network is that it became an important instrument for acting, for constructing meaning and for decision-making. It had almost all the characteristics of a policy community except that it only functioned in relation to one political issue and it was dissolved when the job was done. The proper theoretical term for the city mall network would be a political issue community. But strong elements of government and hierarchy were also found in this network and governing logics from governance and government were intertwined in this closed and stable network. Hierarchy was expressed as more than just a shadow, as suggested in theory. Hierarchy did not take the form of e.g. formal regulation of the policy network and the city mall network never became a formal policy network. Hierarchy did not only work outside or beside this policy network. Instead, hierarchy was integrated in the policy network through the actors (the mayor and the administrative chief executives) and through the meaning of the political will and the bureaucratic rule-following as proper governing principles in the network. Hierarchy worked inside the network. Furthermore hierarchy influenced the networking process in the sense that this policy network was closely connected to and integrated in the hierarchical centre for decision making: the city council. So hierarchy moved out of its traditional places (the city council and the administration) and into the policy network process and it expressed itself in different forms.

The open and stable opponent network and the opposing meanings
In the beginning of the process in 1989, when the city mall-network was established and the city mall discourse under construction, there soon were several groups of actors in the city who opposed the idea of the city mall. At first there was three existing political groups, which had each their reasons to oppose the city mall. The Socialist Party in city council and the urban planning department both worked against the idea because they thought it would destroy the old city centre. And a trade organisation for a shopping mall outside the city worked against the idea because they would loose income. None of these groups joined resources (e.g. made a policy network) to stop the project. They worked isolated against the project. Part of the explanation was that they disagreed too much in other political matters to co-operate about this one.

The arguments against the city mall from these opponents were several. One was that the expansion of the trade in the city should follow the formal plans and take place in the shopping mall outside the city. Otherwise it would not be fair for the shopping mall outside the city. Another argument was that the new city mall would close down all the cosy small shops in the city centre. These arguments did not get a lot of attention in the process because they did not relate to the common interest of the city and they were easy to exclude from the city mall discourse. A third argument had greater importance in the discursive process. It was the argument of the destruction of the beautiful architecture in old city by this modern monster of a new city mall. This was a very difficult argument for the city mall-network to get around and the result was that the issue of architecture was integrated in the city mall-discourse with arguments about how nicely a new architecture could fit into the old one if competent and local architects who cared about the old city were involved. The argument about the architecture concerned the common interest of the city and it became the one, which made the citizens pay attention to the project later on.

But it was not until 1994 that we saw the establishment of the other policy network important in this case study. This was after all the new planning documents that cancelled the double planning strategy were decided in city council and the land (the parking lot) sold to the local private actors. However, the investors were still to be found. At this time some local party members, a group of citizens and some small shopkeepers from the old city centre realised that the majority of the politicians actually meant to realise the project and it made them furious. They decided to try to make the politicians change their minds. To make this happen they established the opponent-network.

The opponent-network turned out to function as an open, inclusive and unstable policy network much like an issue-network in the network theory. The participants changed according to the activities in the network, they only met sporadically and everybody could join the network if they wanted. All the participants in this network had experience in active political work as citizens or politicians. Some of them had been involved in former conflicts with city council, as mentioned earlier. In this policy network, they managed to co-operate about the resistance and as I will look into below they arranged a number of democratic
activities to stop the city mall. This opponent-network became an important instrument for resistance and their activities influenced the whole process and placed the issue of democracy at the public agenda during the process.

But this opponent-network did not join resources with the existing opponent groups in the city. The Socialist Party was informed about what happened in the network but they did not work together properly. Furthermore, there was no contact at all between the opponent-network and the planning department or the trade organisation. The opponent network never tried to make coalitions with other influential political actors in the city. In fact, the opponent-network chose deliberately to work outside “the system”, as they called it, because they saw the system as the enemy. Looking at all the opponents of the city mall in Helsingør none of them used the joint strategy of networking and the gathering of resources, which could have matched the strong relationship established in the city mall-network and between the city mall-network and the city council. This lack of a strong counter-networking made it easier for the city mall project to be implemented. In the challenge of the city mall discourse the same problem occurred. The opponents could not agree on a common understanding of problem solving in the city or an alternative future for the city and they never presented a strong alternative to the city mall-discourse. Each of them had their own reasons to resist the city mall as described but they did not co-ordinate or gather their arguments and they did not relate their arguments to the common interest of the city. Mostly they defended the exiting conditions and e.g. their own businesses (a self-interest) and that was a difficult discursive strategy to follow in a city dominated by numerous problems and in search for a new identity. This made it easier for the city mall-discourse to exclude the opposing arguments.

In the following I will look further into the context of these two policy networks and more into the functioning of the policy networks in the democratic processes. What were the democratic consequences in Helsingør of these policy networks? The theoretical answers varied. The question is how democracy was exercised and interpreted in the case of the city mall.

**The democratic consequences of policy networks**

In order to discuss the democratic consequences of the networking process in Helsingør two different kinds of relationships in the process were investigated. One was the relationship between the city mall-network and the city council in order to discuss especially the issue of representation. The other was the relationship between the two policy networks and between the city mall-network and the wider group of citizens in Helsingør in order to discuss especially the issue of participation. Furthermore I investigated the construction of democratic meanings in the process to reveal the different democratic interpretations of good and bad democratic processes.
Policy networks and the formal democratic system: the construction of the political will

I will argue that one important reason for the success of the city mall-network was the interaction with the existing political relations in the city and that the city mall network followed the dominant tradition of democracy in the city. What I found in Helsingør was not a development towards governance through policy network in conflict with the former political system, but in harmony with the former tradition.

As mentioned above, the driving force and the legitimacy for the city mall-network was the political will in the city council. This political will was never stable during the seven years and between the votes in city council scepticism and arguments against the city mall kept coming up. The question is therefore how this political will was constructed and maintained in all these years? It turned out that the city mall-network played a central role between the votes in the city council to establish and secure the political will in city council.

To obtain political support for their idea the local private actors followed the informal rules and traditions of the existing corporatist and centralised governing system in the city. They made sure that the top managers and the top politician became part of the network and by doing that they accepted the role of the representative democracy. And they started the process by making contacts to the large interest groups in the city to get their support. By that they accepted the old corporatist regime. They knew they would get nowhere without the support from the traditionally important political actors in the city. During the whole process they maintained close contact to the large interest groups to keep them informed and engaged in the project. And as mentioned above the city mall-network was closely related to the city council during the whole process. It was through all these contacts and a lot of energy used to argue and convince the central political actors – with the arguments developed in the city mall-discourse – the city mall-network managed to construct and maintain the political will about the city mall in the city council. They were “all over and everywhere”, as one of the actors in the network said to make sure that all problems, scepticism and arguments against the city mall were eliminated.

This way of making politics was not up for discussion in the first years of the process and the reason was that the city mall-network worked in harmony with the tradition for corporatist aggregate governing in the city. The closed and stable form of the city mall-network was well known in urban politics in Helsingør because the corporatist networks from the times of the shipyard had the same form. The city mall-network made contacts to and alliances with the former influential actors in the corporatist regime. They did what was appropriate in the city when a new political problem or issue entered the political agenda. It was business as usual.

The consequence of this networking process is an elitist and centralised governance process much like the one described by the neo-elitists researcher, but only related to one important political issue in the city not to the governing of the whole city. An urban policy process
based on a closed and stable political issue community like the city mall-network and the elitist and centralised governance form in the city could indicate a closure and colonisation of politics in the city. But this did not happen in the case of the city mall. Instead a very dramatic and long political public debate developed about each of the important decisions in the city council and in the local press during these years. The political issue of the city mall was always brought out of the closed city mall network and into the city council where the whole group of representative politicians was integrated in the political debate. This also gave the opposition the chance to attack the idea again and again and make the discussions more public. And the local press could follow the discussions, which they certainly did very closely. In this political process policy networks, representative democracy and public debate were combined.

The question is why there was made this disconnection between an elitist network process and a closure of the political debate in Helsingør? First of all it was due to the long planning process and the choice to follow the rules of the formal planning process in the city mall-network. The planning law dictate public hearings and political decisions about changes in local plans and this caused the project to be brought up in city council and into the public debate numerous times. Second the high level of disagreements and conflicts about the issue in the city council and in the city in general caused the project to be discussed over and over again and in various political arenas. Finally the opposition in the city council and the opponent-network worked hard to control the process and bring the issue of the city mall up in city council as often as they could. Each of these factors illustrates ways to democratise an elitist network process.

In the first years of the networking process in Helsingør (until 1994) the democratic idea of aggregative and corporatist democracy dominated the process and was developed into a network democracy. The representative democracy was the democratic point of reference in the process but different network-relations was accepted in the process to find the best political decision and to implement political decisions made in city council. It illustrated a certain interpretation of democracy where representative politicians were supplemented by other representative elites regarded as affected interests in urban politics. The definition of the elite was in the city historically expanded first from the politicians to the representatives of the large interest groups and later on in the case of the city mall to the local private actors. But as I have described above, all the actors involved in the city mall network claimed that they did not represent self-interest but the common interest of the city they were living in. I have also described how the core element in the city mall discourse was the argument about the common good for the city. This illustrates the importance of representation and the common good in the interpretation of democracy in Helsingør.

Looking at the issue of participation there was quite a distance between the former elites and the citizens and their relationship was characterised by conflicts. In the process of networking in the case of the city mall this distance was uphold. The citizens were only informed about
the process and not really integrated. In fact, they had to integrate themselves later in the process when they formed the policy network. The consequence of this development was that the channels for influence and integration in Helsingør historically were widened from the parliamentary channel (the city council) and the organisation channel (the large interests groups) to the policy network channel (policy networks related to different political issues and areas). During the years of the city mall the network channel became increasingly important and the organisation channel less so. But the network channel in the case of the city mall took a certain direction. As described it developed to be an elitist and centralised form of governing and by that it became part of an aggregative version of a network democracy. This form of democracy was not thought much about and it did not give rise to a lot of discussion and conflicts in the first years of the process because it was in harmony with the tradition of democracy in Helsingør. But later on in 1994, the opponent networks expressed a quite different perception of a network democracy. When the citizens of Helsingør took action and started to participate directly in the process it caused the process to be very dramatic suddenly proper democratic behaviour and meanings became important issues in the process.

**Policy networks in conflict: the clash of two democratic understandings**

All the actors in Helsingør wonder about why the resistance did not occur earlier in the process but started as late as in 1994 when all the plans and the decisions were made and the land sold to the private actors. The Danish planning system demands several public hearings during a planning process to let the citizens’ comment on the plans. As I have mentioned the formal planning process was followed in Helsingør and it worked to promote public debate about the city mall, but it did not work as the channel for the citizens’ resistance. Nothing happened in the hearing periods and no comments were made except from the professional political actors, like the interest groups. It was a big surprise when “hell broke loose”, as one of the actors in the policy network expressed it, in 1994 and the participation of the citizens was expressed through other channels. The citizens explained their late reaction with their trust in the common sense of the politicians not to implement the project after all. But when they realised that the politicians actually intended to build this city mall and destroy their beautiful city they became furious and acted. The opponent-network was established and this network organised several democratic activities to change the political decision about the city mall. As one of the citizens said: “We used every democratic means we could think of”.

The opponent-network used various classical and well know democratic means of participation in their resistance. Several of the participants had experience in using these channels because their had been involved in former urban conflicts, so they knew what to do. Four different forms of protest and participation were used. One form was the use of citizens’ meeting and the public media to initiate public dialogue. They wrote letters and comments to the local newspaper and arranged several public meetings joined by hundreds of people. The meetings and the writings became battlefields for very confronting and aggressive forms of dialogues especially between the city mall-network and the opponent-network. At every
meeting the conflict just increased and no common understanding was ever reached. The second form was the tradition to establish a new organisation (a new trade organisation) to defend the interests of the small shopkeepers in the city centre. The opponent-network made sure it received a lot of public attention as a manifestation against the city mall but the new organisation only survived a couple of months. This illustrates the use of the organisation channel as a channel for influence. The third form was official complaints about specific decisions and procedures in the process in order to get the decision out of the local public bodies and into a higher public body (the state) to stop the project. Some of the complaints were actually successful, but the higher authority decided not to take action because the land was already sold. By making formal complaints the opponent network used the system itself to fight a decision made by the system. The fourth form was a large petition against the city mall where the opponent-network and a lot of supporters in the city managed to collect 12,500 signatures against the city mall in a municipality of around 57,500 inhabitants. This was the form of protest and resistance that the citizens' thought would be most successful due to the large number of signatures. But it did not work either.

These democratic activities took place during one year from 1994-1995 and none of them were successful. They illustrate a variety of democratic means to protest against a political decision: networking, public dialogue, forming organisations, formal complaints and making a petition. Combined they were a significant form of protest and resistance from a small group of competent citizens but with a wide support from other citizens in Helsingør, who joined the meetings, wrote letters to the newspaper and signed the petition. The two policy networks never developed any consensus in the matter of the city mall. During the whole process they acted to undermine the arguments, decisions and activities made by the other part. During the years it became worse and it culminated in 1994-95 with dramatic confrontations around the activities initiated by the opponent network. The questions were why the activities of the opponent network never succeeded and why the process became so dramatic? The answers were found in the reaction of the city mall-network towards these activities and in the different interpretations of democracy in the two policy networks.

All the actors in the city mall-network worked actively to prevent the activities of the opponent-network from being successful. They acted towards every activity to exercise damage control, as one of them said. At the public meetings, the mayor, in particular, and the supportive politicians from the city council defended and fought for the idea in the debate. When the new trade organisation was established the city mall-network activated their supporters in the large interest groups to stop the new one from gaining any support. In the matter of formal complaints, the administrative executives took over to explain and defend the procedures to higher authorities. And when it came to the petition the private actors played their special part in trying to undermine the petition by signing over and over again to illustrate that it had no value. These co-ordinated reactions from the city mall network towards each of the activities of resistance made it difficult for the opponents to gain support and get success.
Furthermore I found that the two policy networks had a common understanding of politics but very different understandings of the proper democratic processes and proper roles of politicians and citizens in these processes.

All the active actors in this process had a common understanding of politics as a battlefield for conflicts and a fight for power. Confrontation was the choice of strategy for both parts and they talked in the language of war when they told about the process. They had to handle mines, avoid the use of hand-grenades, win the arguments, watch over the enemies etc. Mistrust and lack of respect for the opposite side was the dominant characteristic in the process. In this sense, they all agreed in the aggregative perspective on politics and this caused the process to be even more based on conflicts. Nobody tried to mediate or change the perception of politics into consensus and integration. Again the tradition of urban politics in Helsingør explains this expression of politics. The closed, corporatist governing form from the time of the shipyard had developed a political culture in Helsingør where citizens and politicians often ended in conflicts and shouting. In the matter of the city mall it was politics as usual. The central actors established from the start a battlefield that influenced everybody who joined the process and by doing so the process became very dramatic.

If we look at the two policy networks’ concept of democracy they agreed on representative democracy as the final argument. During the process there was never any challenge of representative democracy as the best form of democracy and nobody questioned the city councils right to take the final decision about the city mall. The two networks also agreed on policy networking as a proper democratic extension of representative democracy and both used this channel for influence. The disagreement was found around other issues. One was the interpretation of the proper relationship between representative democracy and policy networks. The other was about the proper roles for politicians and citizens in such a network democracy. No common understanding about these two democratic issues was ever developed.

The city mall-network and its supporters saw the elitist and centralised network process as democratic because they had the aggregative and corporatist view of the proper practice of representative democracy. The network channel was an extension and a development of this well known governing system and they did not think much about it. They argued that integration and participation was fulfilled by the direct integration of the large interest groups and by the rule-following in the planning process where formal procedures secured the citizens and opponents their chance of influence in the public hearings. Their argument was, that when the opponents missed that chance they had failed in the process and had to accept the final political decision. Furthermore the city mall-network and their supporters in the large interest groups had a view on themselves as those who guaranteed the common good for the city. The citizens and the small shopkeepers in the city centre were only motivated by self-interest and short sighted interests. They did not have the responsibility for the development
of the whole city and therefore the decision-makers had to stay clear of all this special interests. This was one of the most important arguments for keeping a distance to the citizens and for trying to stop and obstruct the dialogue about the city mall in 1994-95.

These arguments illustrate the aggregative perspective on politicians and citizens in a representative democracy. The responsible and competent politicians (the city council) and elite (the large interest groups) had to keep a distance to the citizens to avoid the populist trends among the citizens and the irrational will of the people. It was argued in the city mall-network that if they had changed the decision as a result of the resistance in 1994 it would be a sign of political weakness and incompetence as a politician. They saw politics as a matter of being brave and stick to the decisions in spite of resistance and opposition from citizens. If we combine these arguments with the perception of the elitist and centralised network democracy as a proper aggregative version of democracy it makes if possible to understand why the city mall network and the majority in the city council saw their own actions as democratic and thereby defendable in a democratic discourse. For them it would have been a democratic failure to listen to the will of the people and change their decision just to please the citizens for a short while. It would have been against their democratic values.

The citizens had quite the opposite interpretation of the proper network democracy. They too accepted the network channel as an extension of representative democracy towards a network democracy but they strongly opposed the closure of the networking process and demanded the right to challenge the closed city mall-network and its political supporters whenever they found it necessary. They did not accept the integration and participation to be limited to the formal procedures in the planning process. They wanted to participate in forms of their own choice. Their saw themselves as very competent and rational decision-makers who had a duty to watch and control the work of the politicians, and to act when the politicians failed in making sensible decisions for the city. They had to make sure that the decisions in city council were based on the common interest and it was only possible if there was a close relationship between the citizens and the politicians/elites. When decisions were not sensible, they had to interfere and try to stop the politicians. Otherwise, they would not be responsible citizens. Actually, they saw the politicians as persons who could easily be corrupted and abuse their power due to self-interest. In the case of the city mall they accused the politicians to be in the pocket of big investors. For the citizens it was appropriate democratic behaviour to participate in every part of the process if they wanted and when they chose to act the politicians had to listen and change their decision. Especially, when more than 12,000 citizens had the same opinion. For the citizens the actions of the politicians and the city mall network in the process were completely unappreciative and very far from being democratic.

What we saw then in this urban governance process in Helsingør was the rise of two completely different interpretations of what the proper democratic networking processes and the proper relationship between politicians and citizens should look like in an urban policy process. These two perspectives are both democratic in a theoretical sense and both can be
found as traditions in the Danish democratic institutions. The different democratic understandings represented in the two policy networks made us understand the very dramatic policy process in Helsingør and also understand why both parts accused the opposite part to be undemocratic in their behaviour. It also showed us that the development of governance and policy network can follow very different democratic directions and can be evaluated from very different democratic perspectives.

7. Conclusion

The article has discussed the relationship between urban governance and democracy in theory and in practice in a Danish urban policy process. The purpose was to highlight the democratic consequences of policy networks in urban policy processes.

The article showed that policy networks were not unknown in Danish local politics but in a governance situation like the one in the case study they changed character (they were established in very different forms) and focus (they related to political issues). The case study illustrated a certain governance process. It was an example of an elitist and centralised governance process with one informal closed, exclusive and stable policy network dominating the process and fighting for the city mall. This network caused the establishment of another informal policy network as an open, inclusive and unstable issue network trying to stop the city mall. The policy networks became effective instruments for acting and constructing meanings in urban politics. During the whole process the governance process was dominated by conflicts and the explanation was partly found in the common understanding of politics in the two networks. They agreed in the aggregative idea of politics as a war scene and they never accepted and respected the other part.

The Danish network process illustrated a policy process between governance and government, as expected from the theoretical discussion. We saw a mixture of the two theoretical governing forms in practice and it did not make any sense to talk about either governance or government in the case of the city mall. In the city policy networks were accepted as a proper way of making politics and the network channel were used as a channel for influence and participation. But hierarchy was integrated and expressed in different forms in this policy network process. Hierarchy was expressed in the close relationship between the dominating city mall network and the representative city council, but it was also expressed through the participants in the network (the mayor and the administrative chief executives as the public actors) and in the governing logic of the network (e.g. the political will and rule-following). The case study illustrated how hierarchy did not work outside or beside policy networks but actually moved out of its traditional places and into the network process to work inside policy networks and in the relations between networks and other political decision centres.

The questions were how this process affected the democracy and whether this was a democratic process or not? One conclusion is that the policy networks did not undermine the
representative democracy but became part of it and can be interpreted as an extension of representative democracy in an aggregative version of a network democracy. Surprisingly a combination of policy networks, representative democracy and public debate were the result. The elitist and centralised governance process did not result in a closure of urban politics in the city and the factors that prevented this closure illustrate ways to democratise such an elitist and centralised governance process in a network democracy. In the case study (1) formal laws (the Danish planning law secured important political decisions to be brought up in city council and in public debate through hearings), (2) conflicts and different meanings about the political matter (the disagreement about the city mall kept the issue on the political agenda during the whole process) and (3) the active opposition in the city council and the active citizens (who worked hard to keep the process open) were the most important factors.

Another conclusion is, that different meanings of democracy make it difficult to evaluate a network process as democratic or not. In the case study there were two very different interpretations of network democracy and the actors never agreed on one proper form of democracy in the city. They all agreed in the city council (representative democracy) as the final argument and that participation through network was proper democratic behaviour. But they disagreed about the proper democratic process and the proper role of politicians and citizens in this process – about the proper relationship between the elite and the people. The citizens and the opponent network represented an integrative version of a network democracy characterised by a close relationship between the elite and the people and by comprehensive democratic activities from the citizens to inspire, challenge and control politicians and city council. The city mall network and the city council represented an aggregative version of a network democracy characterised by a distance between the elite and the people to prevent populist trends among citizens and to make it possible to stick to sensible decisions made by the competent politicians. In the first version of democracy the city mall process was characterised as a very undemocratic process. In the latter version it would have been very undemocratic to change the decision about the city mall.

There is no simple answer to the question of whether governance through policy networks is democratic? The answer depends on how governance and policy networks are expressed in practice and this practice might be influenced by path-dependency in policy making. Policy networks can be expressed in an elitist or plural form and it will affect the democratic consequences. The answer will also depend on how democracy is defined. Different definitions and democratic values will produce different answers.
References


