Linking governance networks to local democracy in Flanders through the concept of democratic anchorage

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Introduction

This working paper will deal with the analytical challenge of linking governance networks to local democracy regarding our four-year lasting research project on ‘the democratic anchorage of local governance networks’ in Flanders (Belgium). In Flanders, like in most western democracies, one can identify a proliferation of local network-like arrangements. This new organizational layer on top of the local political landscape challenges traditional merits of local democracy like popular control, local sovereignty and the primacy of politics. A central issue concerning these new arenas is their democratic anchorage or how to link them with the classic institutions of representative democracy. Here the paper argues local elected politicians can be seen as the lynchpin between both worlds. Specifically, the concept of democratic anchorage as developed by Sørensen and Torfing provides a good starting point. They argue that democratic anchorage is not a certitude but depends on the way and the degree elected representatives adopt their role as metagoverners in order to steer these relatively self-governing arrangements. However, to understand the role of actors regarding the anchorage of governance networks, the paper prompts one needs to re-think the relationship between actors and their forums not only in terms of metagovernance but also regarding practices of accountability and representation. The prime purpose of the paper is to expand the conceptual framework of democratic anchorage concerning governance networks bringing in recent theories of accountability and representation in order to develop an analytical guide to research these emerging arrangements in Flanders. We will illustrate this stance with preliminary empirical material coming from a pilot case in the Flemish region of Kortrijk. Therefore the working paper will shortly examine the regional windmill strategy in Kortrijk in order to explore and illustrate the emerging concepts of accountability and representation in relation to our own emerging research agenda.

1. Background: the rise of the governance network paradigm

Since the last decades of the 20th century there has been much ado about the so-called rise of governance within political studies, public administration and related fields (Sørensen and Torfing 2005; Stoker and Chhotray 2009; Bevir 2011). The term governance is borrowed from a broad variety

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of approaches that all use governance to describe and explain changes in our world in general and changes in the nature and role of the state in particular. To underpin the rise of governance the argument often goes that we nowadays live in a ‘network society’ (Castells 1996). References are made to advancing processes of urbanization, globalization, Europeanization or the rise of new societal demands in terms of knowledge and civic participation (Hajer and Wagenaar 2003; Koppenjan and Klijn 2004; Denters and Rose 2005). As a result, it is argued that our societies are becoming more fragmented. This growing fragmentation is then quoted to explain how the new demands on governments have led to changes in the organization of public policy making, namely the shift away from bureaucratic hierarchical government structures towards more open, responsive and interactive governance arrangements which blur the traditional distinctions between the state and civil society, the public and the private sectors, and the various levels of government (Bevir 2011; Enroth 2011). As such, governance is seen by some scholars as a new paradigm (Kuhn 1962) through which we can deal efficiently and effectively with the specific complexity, interdependency and dynamics of contemporary public policy issues (Sullivan, Sørensen et al. 2011; Klijn and Koppenjan 2012). A new paradigm goes hand in hand with alternative ways of envisioning once taken for granted notions on a particular topic. In this paper we will explore how traditional notions of democratic representation and accountability are rethought to come to terms with the interactive governance paradigm.

In Flanders as well, the rise of a new organizational layer on top of the local political landscape is debated due to a proliferation of (inter/intra-supra) local governance-like arrangements. Local governments increasingly establish relationships with e.g. autonomous agencies, other governments, private organizations or with a combination of these. For example a screening of extra-municipal collaborations in Flanders indicated a strong increase in collaborative arrangements during the 1990s, which boomed after the year 2000. In 1990 there were for instance less than 250 collaborations identified. After 2005 the number of collaborations increased over 1000, which equals an average of over 70 collaborations per municipality (Agentschap voor Binnenlands Bestuur 2012). However, we need to proceed with a certain degree of caution here. Certainly not all of these new intermunicipal collaborations can be seen as exemplifying the new governance arenas or governance networks the literature enthuses over. This became specifically clear during our own process of case selection (Van Parijs and Steyvers forthcoming) which we initially based upon the database of the aforementioned screening. For this paper, it is sufficient to state that exercises like this at least illustrate the increased awareness to the complexity of the inter- and multi-organizational landscape of local governments nowadays. For example within the region of Kortrijk some particular actors seem to interact frequently with each other on various occasions: the intermunicipal company Leiedal, the informal conference of mayors, the RESOC (Regional Socioeconomic Consultation Committee) and especially some entrepreneurial politicians and administrators, who seem “to act like the spiders of their webs” (De Rynck, Temmerman et al. 2013). In line with many governance scholars (Koppenjan and Klijn 2004; Torfing, Peters et al. 2012) we argue that precisely this relational awareness grants analytic value to the governance paradigm.

Notwithstanding the success of the governance paradigm one needs to counter the popular but too simplistic claim that traditional governments simply gave way to a new governance reality for two

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2 A rather general term, we use here, to emphasize the mishmash of organizational units in this database: the range goes e.g. from a very particular informal local colleague groups of spatial planners to socioeconomic consultation arenas top-down imposed by the Flemish government.
reasons. Firstly, it is highly problematic to conceptualize any societal shift as a zero-sum game between present and past. Secondly, this understanding might mistakenly ignore the actual role of governmental actors regarding the establishment and daily business of governance practices, even if this role may be understood entirely different from our conceptions of ‘pre-governance’ times, as we will argue later in this paper (Torfing, Peters et al. 2012). Therefore one should not confuse the hollowing-out of a mode of government with the hollowing-out of governmental power as such (Macleod and Goodwin 1999). Rather one can conceive this as a new understanding on how society is governed. Hereby the emphasis is made on the interdependence of multiple relatively autonomous public and private actors that interact in iterative game-like situations (Rhodes 2007). Hence governance approaches share an attempt to “open the black box of the state” (Bevir 2011) because they all “draw attention to the processes and interactions through which all kinds of social interests and actors combine to produce the policies, practices and effects that define current patterns of governing” (ibid.). In this paper we follow the understanding of Rhodes (2007) that governance equals “governing with and through networks”. The emergence of networks is then not understood as the end of the state authority but rather as a redefinition of it (Hajer and Wagenaar 2003).

We base our understanding of governance networks on the definition as formulated by Sørensen and Torfing (2007) who define a governance network as a (more or less):

“stable articulation of mutually dependent, but operationally autonomous actors from state, market and civil society, who interact through conflict-ridden negotiations that take place within an institutionalized framework of rules, norms, shared knowledge and social imaginaries; facilitate self-regulated policy making in the shadow of hierarchy; and contribute to the production of ‘public value’ in a broad sense of problem definitions, visions, ideas, plans and concrete regulations that are deemed relevant to broad sections of the population.”

While we follow this ideal-typical definition, we add that governance networks are “being formed, reproduced, and changed by an ecology of games between these actors” (Klijn 1996) as will be pointed out further on.

Governance networks have been praised for several reasons. Many scholars have been highlighting the potential of networks to make public policy perform in more effective and more efficient ways (Sørensen and Torfing 2005; Sørensen and Torfing 2009). For instance, some have argued that the affected communities of a certain policy network benefit from an improved access to services and from lower overall costs. Also enhanced client satisfaction and an improvement of the policy outcomes have been quoted as advantages of governance networks (Provan and Milward 2001). Hence, for some time discussions on the democratic quality of these governance networks stayed more or less in the background. However a second generation of network studies added a new layer on top of the managerial and “apolitical” foundations of the first generation network studies (Sørensen and Torfing 2005). In concrete, potential tensions have been recognized between our idealized conception of representative democracy and decision-making practices by governance networks. There is for example not necessarily an equal opportunity for individuals to influence and/or participate in the political arenas formed by these networks. Governance networks also raise questions regarding the distribution and exercise of political power and responsibility. Subsequently, as pointed out later in this paper, governance networks put pressure on traditional ideas on unambiguous representation and vertical accountability (Sørensen and Torfing 2009; Klijn and Koppenjan 2012). Analytical concepts like
‘democratic anchorage’ and ‘metagovernance’ have been developed to debate and get knowledge of the democratic quality of governance network processes. We endorse the analytical value of these new conceptual lenses, yet, we argue in this paper that these concepts might benefit from a closer look on recently redeveloped concepts of accountability and representation. We will first elaborate further on the former two concepts in order to make the bridge later in this paper to the latter two concepts.

2. Rethinking local democracy through a multifocal lens

Any account on democratic quality is based upon a certain definition of democracy (Sørensen and Torfing 2005). We argue that the analytical lenses we use guide our perspective on the democratic quality of a governance network. Therefore we do not straightforwardly label governance networks as (un)democratic but regard this question as a contingent empirical puzzle to be solved in relation to a particular case and a specific perspective on democracy. Of course democracy is in its very nature a contested concept since it consists of a wide range of interpretations. Defining democracy is thus not an easy and uncontested task. However we can delimit our field of research to approaches formulated within the (post)liberal tradition of democracy (Sørensen and Torfing 2005). Perspectives within this tradition share an interest in the balancing act between conceptions of individual liberty and collective decision making. If we take this road, we can see two broad ideal-typical stances on democracy.

On the one hand, we have a traditional instrumental approach to democracy (van Gils and Klijn 2006), with a narrow focus on traditional representative forms of government. They stress formal procedures and a strong connection with representative institutions, for example, through elected officials that should represent citizen preferences in an unmediated way. In this understanding citizens have a rather passive role. Hence democracy is seen as a method for making legitimate decisions. Thus, one can say these theories are characterized by a formalistic and state-centered idea on democracy (Skelcher 2005; Sørensen and Torfing 2005; van Gils and Klijn 2006; Sørensen and Torfing 2009; Barnett 2011).

On the other hand, we have a substantive version on democracy (van Gils and Klijn 2006), with a broader focus on stakeholders, including interactive, inter-subjective and deliberative approaches, as well as integrative post-liberal theories. This vision conceptualizes democracy more as a societal ideal whereby citizens are seen as civic subjects capable of debating matters of social concern. Scholars akin to this approach emphasize rather participatory and direct forms of democracy. Hence one can say this latter model is talk-centered and goes beyond the formulation of mere formalistic touchstones on democracy (Skelcher 2005; Sørensen and Torfing 2005; van Gils and Klijn 2006; Sørensen and Torfing 2009; Barnett 2011).

Obviously within each stance one can still recognize many varieties that lay different emphasizes and consider different lines of reasoning. Yet, we argue that this distinction gives us a good starting point, since it is obvious that both stances will consider and approach the democratic quality of governance networks in a different way.

From the first view governance networks will be straightforwardly labeled as problematic since they undermine the institutional setup of idealized representative democracy. Hence they are seen as
a threat to the traditional boundaries and safeguards of democracy (Sørensen and Torfing 2005; Sørensen and Torfing 2009; Torfing, Peters et al. 2012). It is argued, for example, that such arenas potentially lack an equal opportunity for individuals to influence and/or participate in the decisions made by these networks (Sørensen and Torfing 2009). Another potential critique stresses there is not necessarily any direct democratic control on the activities employed by these network arrangements nor a clear, free and open competition between democratic elites considering the power distribution within these networks (Mathur and Skelcher 2007; Sørensen and Torfing 2009). Governance networks can for instance provide some room for steering maneuvers by some actors to combine power and resources from different arenas to further their own interests (Block and Paredis 2012). For example in Flanders previous research of Block (2009) has demonstrated that “decision-making hardly follows the ‘normal’ democratic routines in city councils, college of mayor and alderman, and advisory councils. In fact, these traditional democratic bodies are mainly used for informing members of the council or stakeholders and formalizing decisions that are taken elsewhere” (Block and Paredis 2012). Hence, this standard image of politics reflects, in reality, merely the tip of the political iceberg. As we point out later in this paper, crucial decisions, like agenda setting, problem framing and solution crafting, take place within complex governance networks. Thus at this point we face the limit of the first understandings on democracy since they fail to capture this complexity (Sørensen and Torfing 2005). While the critiques formulated by these perspectives have analytical value on their own, the potential solutions are so limited that they seem to leave us empty handed. One can call for changes in the electoral system, for the streamlining of procedures or, at the most extreme, try to halt or reverse governance processes (Koppenjan, Kars et al. 2009). Yet, these seem all reactive attempts to confine the potential democratic drawbacks of governance networks to a minimum instead of proactive attempts to nurture the democratic potentials of governance networks to a maximum. Does this not seem like something of an uphill struggle?

From the second understanding on democracy, governance networks are not necessarily classified as undemocratic. Although they recognize the potential democratic pitfalls as stressed by critique from traditional instrumental views, they also acknowledge their democratic potentials. Governance networks, seen from this perspective, allow for necessarily variations in the channels of influence related to an affectedness-principle. That is to say that those individuals, groups and organizations should be more involved on a case-by-case basis e.g. when they are potentially affected by a particular decision. This contrasts to the traditional instrumental idea that all citizens living in a clear-cut territorial jurisdiction should have the potential to influence collective decision making. Another line of reasoning within this view on democracy argues that governance networks potentially enhance political mobilization whereby more actors participate, discuss and deliberate policy issues. Thus governance networks might respond to the fragmentation of society with tailor-made decision-making. In other words, the blurring of the traditional borderlines envisioned as problematic by modern liberal theories on democracy is not necessary seen as threat but actually as a prerequisite to increase the democratic potential of such governance settings (Sørensen and Torfing 2005; Barnett 2011; Torfing, Peters et al. 2012).

We argue in fact that both visions have value on their own since they point at different points of interests like various democratic linkages, norms and procedures. While the former model stresses instrumental linkages by elected representatives and through given procedures, the latter approach considers substantive linkages between various actors on the basis of an affectedness-principle and
negotiated procedures (van Gils and Klijn 2006; Torfing, Peters et al. 2012). Interestingly, Sørensen and Torfing (2005), in fact, borrow ideas from both perspectives in their analytical concept of ‘democratic anchorage’ (Sørensen and Torfing 2009; Sørensen 2010; Sullivan, Sørensen et al. 2011; Torfing, Peters et al. 2012). Democratic anchorage understood this way is like a multifocal lens. When one shifts view different elements appear. Hence their concept goes beyond the general discussion about the (un)democratic character of governance networks. They want to offer a toolkit that can assess and debate a single network through a qualitative study and is based on the investigation of four democratic anchorage points:

1. Anchorage by democratically elected politicians, i.e. linkage to representative democracy by elected politicians that control the formation, functioning and impact of governance networks.
2. Anchorage by the capacity to represent affected groups and organizations whose members can hold their representatives accountable, i.e. linkage to affected organizations and citizens.
3. Anchorage in a territorially defined citizenry that can hold the network accountable, i.e. linkage to a demos by transparency (or, if needed, an account on secrecy and closure), publicity, narrative account and ongoing mutual dialogue with rival accounts.
4. Anchorage in democratic rules and norms that are commonly accepted by the political community, i.e. linkage to an internal set of rules, norms and procedures. These rules are contingent and case-specific in character but general touchstones are the equal inclusion of affected actors, an account for the inclusion and exclusion of actors, the general democratic deliberation and negotiation of the rules, norms and procedures with reference to affectedness and on the basis of agonistic respect.

We agree with the basic assumption behind the model that it does not make sense to try to make any iron-cast rules regarding the democratic anchorage of governance networks. Rather one should stress that the importance of contextualization as the question of democratic anchorage is not a matter of either/or but a matter of degree (Torfing, Sørensen et al. 2009; Torfing, Peters et al. 2012). Depending on the anchorage point or vision on democracy one adopts, the interpretation of the democratic quality of a certain network or governance setting will be different. With regards to governance networks Torfing, Peters et al. (2012) suggest to stress the following elements:

1. An intense ongoing dialogue between the governance network and elected politicians.
2. Voice options that grant affected groups and organizations access to be represented and to reject representative claims as well as exit options that allow them to reject the whole network arrangement.
3. Public scrutiny of goals, procedures and outcomes of the governance network.
4. The presence of network constitutions that rely on democratic rules and norms.

The first anchorage point of Sørensen and Torfing (2009) relates to elected politicians directly. However they are not merely seen as one of the four anchorage points since they also play their part in assuring the other points. Indeed, the democratic anchorage points are not certitudes on their own but depend on the way and the degree elected representatives adopt their role as metagoverners in order to steer these relatively self-governing arrangements. Metagovernance is thus seen as the ‘governing of self-governing’. It involves the management, framing, design of governance networks as well as participation in these. De Rynck, Temmerman et al. (2013) look at metagovernance with Argus’ eyes since it seems to them that metagovernance in this understanding is conceptualized as one big
umbrella of all potential ways politicians can govern a governance network. However this is not a problem as such, since the core of metagovernance is its relational attribute between the governor(s) and the network that is governed, and not its substantive attribute. Hence, it is about describing governance at a distance in order to not confuse internal governance by the network and external metagovernance. Yet, it adds a hierarchical and hegemonic dimension explicitly back to the analysis of governance networks (Klijn and Koppenjan 2012). We therefore embrace metagovernance as an analytically helpful verbal invention but are not so convinced about its particular surplus value regarding the elaboration of the performativend act of actors in relation to the democratic anchorage of governance networks as such. Rather we would argue the concept might benefit from a re-thinking of representative and accountability relationships through an engagement with the respective literature on these study domains. What we feel is missing now in the model is the explicit unfolding of forms of representation and mechanisms of accountability that in practice could sustain (or flaw) the democratic anchorage of governance networks. Clearly, this idea is not the newest of the new since notions of accountability and representation are inherently but implicitly present within the democratic anchorage model. As indeed the four points scrutinize linkages with four different constituencies we want to build on and expand these notions within the democratic anchorage tool.

3. Looking for a complexity-acknowledging stance on representation

Representation in the basic understanding of the word means the “substantive acting for others” (Dryzek and Niemeyer 2008). The democratic ideal of representation reflects the desire that all potentially affected by collective decision making have the equal opportunity to participate or influence that decision making on their matters of concern (Hendriks 2009b). Indeed, representation underpins our (post)liberal understanding of democratic governance since it paves the way for the inclusion of any interests in governance processes. Hence the opposite word of representation in our democratic jargon is called exclusion (Urbinati and Warren 2008).

While representation in its traditional meaning often is regarded in electoral terms, our thinking on representation should go beyond the ballot due to the rise of non-electoral forms of representation like self-authorized representatives (NGO’s, private interest groups, lobby groups etc.) and new types of representatives (like citizen initiatives, panels etc.). Mansbridge (2011) calls these surrogate forms of representation and makes a distinction between various forms of these types of representation. When representatives act for the interests of their constituents without having a formal mandate of that so-called represented group, she calls it substantive representation. Think for instance about an environmental rights movement. When the representatives themselves are more important than the message they bring she speaks of descriptive representation. An example could be the representation of woman or sexual minorities in representative bodies. This can be because of who they are (symbolic representation) or because of the expertise they are claimed to possess (epistemic representation) (Hendriks 2009b). Hence, we not only see a proliferation of actors sharing power within governance networks but we also see along a proliferation of types of representatives and represented constituencies. While the advantage of this proliferation might be in the fact that the composition of governance networks can get more fine grained by including newly emerging and
potentially marginalized constituencies with regards to certain issues, also chances of unequal representation among citizens might be increased (Urbinati and Warren 2008). It is in this regard that good old forms of electoral representation and the notion of universal suffrage still might play a crucial role. Since, firstly, democratic attributes do not seem to follow as a matter of course, some institutional solutions need to be made (Hendriks 2009a). And, secondly, if we want to assure the democratic ideal of the equal inclusion of all (Hendriks 2009b), it seems impossible not to imagine an electoral linkage with some form of universal suffrage. Combining these two arguments we argue there rests an important role on the shoulders of elected politicians to ensure the democratic representative quality of governance networks. However their role is maybe more located in the realm of scrutinizing policy processes or as put by Hendriks (2008):

“rather than ‘anchor’ networks to elected officials, perhaps a more appropriate maritime metaphor is that of ‘coastal patrol’. Politicians might be better placed to influence networks from a distance, for example, by monitoring their movements and performance, and intervening when the waters get rough.”

Hence, Hendriks suggests a particular form of metagovernance. Yet, we must say that previous research in Flanders (Block 2009; Block, Steyers et al. 2010; De Rynck, Temmerman et al. 2013) demonstrates that besides a fair number of rather passively observing politicians and a substantial number of ignorant local politicians (mostly councilors), some entrepreneurial politicians (mostly aldermen or the mayor) take and are willing to take a very active role in and between governance arenas. These observations also require us to re-think the electoral representative relations of actors within the governance network, to include entrepreneurial politicians and go beyond the ballot box. Yet, the first anchorage point, which scrutinizes the role of elected politicians, remains solid.

Traditionally democratic representation has been conceptualized by making the dichotomy between trustees and delegates, also referred to as the ‘mandate-independence controversy’. In this understanding the trustee type of representatives are endowed with the autonomous judgment to act in the interests of their constituency. The delegate type of representatives are restricted in their behavior by the clear instructions or mandate they got from their constituency (Andeweg and Thomassen 2005; Mansbridge 2011; Willems and Van Doore 2012). Remarkably, when we take this conceptualization at its extreme, representatives are not any longer representing but merely judging autonomously in the trustee case or executing political affairs in unmediated ways in the delegate case (Andeweg and Thomassen 2005). We argue that this understanding of representation reflects formal, static, one-dimensional, electoral and territorial notions of representation (Andeweg and Thomassen 2005; Urbinati and Warren 2008; Hendriks 2009a; Mansbridge 2011) that are clearly at odds with the aforementioned non-conventional political boundaries and groups of representatives as recognized within the interactive governance paradigm.

A distinct way to envisage representation might be to conceptualize political representation as a dynamic relationship between principals and agents (Andeweg and Thomassen 2005). Principal - agent relationships can but do not have to be electoral (Hendriks 2009b). Hence, they might better comprehend self-authorized and new forms of representation. We argue that a relational understanding of representation adds a new layer on our analytical frame that contains both electoral, territorial, self-authorized, functional and discursive forms of representation. Since different forms of
representation might be present at the same time in a variety of degrees, one needs to take a context-sensitive and contingent approach to representation. Hence, we argue not only for a relational but also in favor of a complexity-acknowledging perspective on democratic representation to fully comprehend the democratic anchorage of governance networks (Dryzek and Niemeyer 2008; Urbinati and Warren 2008; Mansbridge 2009). We will elaborate on this point further in this paper during the discussion of accountability mechanisms regarding governance networks.

4. Looking for a dynamic understanding of accountability regarding governance networks

a. Limits to electoral accountability

Accountability is one of those conceptual umbrellas that have the tendency to become a loaded buzzword, therefore we will specify it as a social mechanism of relations. Each of these relations holds “the obligation to explain and justify conduct” (Bovens 2007). Just as the notion of representation, accountability is an essential element of our understanding of democracy. It simply forces agents to answer for their deeds, which is needed in order to get sufficient information to pass judgment as a principal (Bovens, Schillemans et al. 2008). Hence, it is not about ‘giving an account’ in an unspecified void but by justifying and explaining conduct in regard to a significant other.

Obviously, representation and accountability are intertwined. According to Andeweg and Thomassen (2005) accountability is even a specific mechanism of representation characterized by a dimension of time and a sense of direction3. When the representative act is followed by an account given by the representative, then they argue it is guided by a mechanism of accountability. Hence, they regard accountability as a retrospective relational practice. It is likely that this understanding of accountability fits better the analysis of representatives that act like a policy entrepreneur since they are occupied with promoting policies proactively in the anticipation of a beneficial judgment of their actions when things start to become visible in the daily life of their constituency. Regarding the democratic anchorage of a governance network this concept of accountability assumes however an electoral choice and a clear responsibility for performance. Hence, it is not particularly helpful to understand accountability related to non-electoral forms of representation. This is why Willems and Van Dooren (2012) argue to leave the principal-agent path since this is often based on the misleading assumption of a one-dimensional relationship imagined as a vertical chain of delegation, analogous to a set of Matryoshka dolls, whereby one actor is held accountable by another actor that again is giving an account to yet another actor and so on. However in network settings principal-agent relationships are often not clear-cut (Bovens, Schillemans et al. 2008). In line with Koppenjan, Kars et al. (2009), we think that our analysis should align with the characteristics of governance networks and not the other

3 According to their idealypical model of representation, acts of representation are guided by mechanisms of authorization (ex ante from above), delegation (ex ante from below), accountability (ex post from above) or responsiveness (ex post from below).
way around. If we do not want to follow any reactionary logic one requires to re-think and go beyond the traditional conception of formalistic and state-centered views on decision-making processes. In the following intermezzo we will elaborate on the specific character of governance networks before we turn back to accountability.

b. Decision making within a differentiated polity

In this short intermezzo we will argue why governance networks deserve an adapted understanding of democratic quality, representation and accountability. In particular we think our understanding might benefit from a thick and complexity-acknowledging (re)construction of the decision making processes under investigation, before we apply these concepts. Three elements deserve special attention in our analysis: complex processes, actors and arenas.

Following Teisman (2000) we define the complexity of governance networks by their composite character. They consist of many (sub)systems, parallel circuits and tangled series of decisions whereby formal documents, plans, actors and institutions do play a role, but that role is depending on the meaning and recognition that is given to these. Hence our (re)construction should not only focus on formal actors, decision-making moments and documents (Teisman 2005; Block, Steyvers et al. 2010) but should interpret their meanings and put them in a broader perspective. Moreover the genesis of a decision is not centered on one supreme moment in time but composed by many moments. All these moments can be seen as tipping points where the whole process could have proceeded in a different direction (Block, Steyvers et al. 2010). Chains of explicit and implicit decisions and meanings get interwoven in a nexus of different governments, various arenas of governance and informal channels. In fact instead of one smooth linear process, we argue, a decision is inherently preceded by many disorderly or chaotic processes creating an intertwined series of decisions (Kingdon 2003; Block and Paredis 2012). “The progress of the decision-making process can, indeed, run very gradually, sometimes by leaps and bounds, then again, in a zigzag line” (Block, Steyvers et al. 2010).

For our own understanding of the analysis of decision-making processes we are indebted to Teisman (2000), in particular his conceptualization of the rounds model, whereby almost an infinite complexity of events can be combined in the analysis. According to this model decisions both conclude rounds as initiate new rounds with new chances for all actors involved to influence again the outcome. Interdependent actors do not only make decisions jointly but also separately from each other. All these decisions mutually influence, elbow or build on each other. Seen through this lens a decision-making process consists of a series of decisions in various arenas. The policy game itself takes place in and between these arenas. A particular arena includes a set of specific actors that want to influence a particular policy issue at hand and is constituted by some organizational arrangements and code of conduct. The complexity of such a process comes from many factors. First, we have the amount of players and their, often unpredictable, strategic choices. Second, we have the amount of arenas within a game which play their part and interact at different places in space and time. Lastly, policy games are not played in a vacuum so (parts of) other policy games might interfere with a specific policy game we are interested in (Teisman 2000; Koppenjan and Klijn 2004; van Gils and Klijn 2006). If we want to analyze the democratic anchorage of a governance network we need to take this complexity and
dynamic into account.

Governance networks reflect a differentiated polity with multiple actors that are pulling and pushing decisions (Sørensen and Torfing 2005). We think we can improve our understanding on the decision making process of governance networks by investigating the role which actors might play in it. Here we draw upon Kingdon's concept of policy entrepreneurs (Kingdon 2003). Through this lens local politicians, among other decision-makers, can be seen as “advocates of certain problems and/or solutions that are willing to invest resources (time, energy, reputation, money) to promote their ideas for policy change” (Block and Paredis 2012). Drawing upon this concept one can recognize how local politicians among others reorganize the possibility for change through the combination of agendas, the employment of different (sub)systems and parallel circuits within the governance landscape and the convincing of other actors en route. As there is no particular recipe for this behavior, it can be done through various ways, like e.g. the development of particular discourses, story lines or scripts that reorient interests and problem definitions, or, by strategically combining power resources, networks and institutional arrangements which are not necessary the traditional one’s (Hajer 2005; Zahariadis 2007; Block and Paredis 2012). As this role is mostly not restricted to a particular actor, different policy entrepreneurs will try to introduce their different problem definitions and solutions. Again interactive decision making becomes far more complex and context sensitive than one at first sight might think (Teisman 2000).

Hence, we argue that in order to analyze the democratic quality of a governance network, we need to map the actors and arenas of such a network first. Next, we can draw the relations regarding representation and accountability in this web and start to scrutinize their meaning.

c. Revisiting accountability as a relationship between actors and forums

According to the traditional approach to accountability an agent has to answer a single principal. However, as we pointed out, in networks, an agent has to manage the expectations of multiple principals. More than the fact of being held accountable, accountability becomes a strategy in itself. Both through a continuous process of anticipation, identification and definition of political events and actions, as well as via responses to pressures on certain policy issues, an agent is constantly giving an account to many stakeholders (Willems and Van Dooren 2012).

Alternatively, Bovens, Schillemans et al. (2008) introduce a forum-actor approach to analyze accountability. In this understanding actors are giving accounts to various forums through iterative and interactive processes. Both forums and actors can be individuals, public officials, organizations, boards or administrations etc. This process is thus relational and dialectical in nature. The actor informs the forum, the forum debates, passes judgment and possibly comes down with certain consequences regarding the actor. This last feature is essential since it makes accountability distinct from non-committal forms of information spreading. We think this notion helps us to study the second democratic anchorage point, namely the linkage with affected groups or organizations. Where Bovens, Schillemans et al. (2008) have well-known legal, professional, administrative, social or political institutions as forums in mind, Willems and Van Dooren (2012) expand the forum vocabulary to the
The notion of a public forum. When accountability is seen as giving account to a public forum it is regarded as a form of discursive interaction within the public realm (Dryzek and Niemeyer 2008). Hence, this compromises the third democratic anchorage point.

Drawing upon the forum-actor understanding of accountability, we can start to look for accountability and representation practices in the multiple arenas or nodes of a governance network. From a systemic view on the network we are hence widening the circles of opportunities to explain and justify conduct, or in other words, we are opening up accountability to align better to the nature and characteristic of governance networks and hence, we argue, we will get a more nuanced understanding that combines classic notions with emerging notions of representation and accountability.

So how do we map these relations in practice? Bovens (2007) identifies four questions related to the analysis of accountability. First, one can wonder to whom accountability is given. Here we witness a situation of many eyes since there are many forums in a governance network setting. Second, one can ask who gives an account. Here we encounter the many hands or actors that are active within a governance network. Third is the question what the account is about. An actor can give an account on the process/procedure, can explain the content/outcome of the governance network or can prefer one over the other. Last, one can wonder why an actor feels compelled to give an account. Here we can make a distinction between vertical (hierarchical), horizontal (social) or diagonal (indirect) forms of accountability. This last question relates to the character of the relationships between actors and forums. In Belgium in particular it seems to be that political parties and party barons play a significant role as forums (Bovens 2007) since politicians feel compelled to give an account to these. Therefore we consider these rather indirect and/or social forums as important nodes of our research too. This multitude of representative links also makes the situation wicked for the very representatives themselves. Since they need to walk the thin line between external legitimacy towards their various constituencies as such as well as keep in line with the internal legitimacy among the actors within the network (Hendriks 2009b).

There are some consequences related to this revised perspective on accountability. In a traditional sanction model on accountability forums are merely dealing with monitoring. However in a selection model actors and forums are seen in a continuous interaction, whereby actors give accounts after events (Mansbridge 2009; Mansbridge 2011). Hence we can speak of a form of narrative, even deliberative accountability, in line with the third and fourth democratic anchorage point. Moreover, while in a sanction model transparency is regarded as absolute, transparency or the mere access to information is seen as insufficient when we understand accountability as a social mechanism. By necessity there is a need for the possibility to debate, to ask questions and to give answers between different players. Furthermore this approach to transparency might be more aligned to the reality of governance networks since transparency can destroy the necessary space to negotiate for actors. Here we can make the distinction between transparency in process and transparency in rationale. The former prescribes the disclosure of all the details to the public, the latter regards transparency as a practice of giving account through public hearings, debate, official documents, media reports and so on. Besides, as accountability is conceptualized as a dialectical relationship also strategies of prevention and anticipation take part in this practice. Lastly, we need to distinguish accountability from practices of responsiveness and participation because they lack elements of justification, judgment and the potential of consequent events (Bovens 2010).
Bovens, Schillemans et al. (2008) also warn for an overkill of accountability mechanisms regarding public policy making whereby accountability risks to become a burden due to too much bureaucracy. They add however that social, informal or horizontal forms of accountability might sometimes be more beneficial than traditional rigorous forms of accountability and, yet, sustain the democratic legitimacy of a governance process.

5. Preliminary results from our pilot study regarding the regional strategy for the implementation of windmill farms

Our research in the region of Kortrijk wants to take a closer look at a couple of governance networks through the lenses elaborated in this working paper. For this paper however we will restrict ourselves to one case, namely the regional strategy on the implementation of big wind farms (with a capacity over 5 megawatt). The preliminary material we use here is based upon 10 expert interviews with involved key figures from local administrations and regional bodies, and a document analysis (see appendix for an overview). To introduce the case briefly, the regional windmill strategy has been prepared two times by the intermunicipal company Leiedal (once in 2003 and once 2009). Both times the vision got accepted by the board of directors of the company, which consists of representatives of the respective municipalities, and reached consent in the (informal) conference of mayors and the regional socioeconomic consultation committee (RESOC), both consisting of representatives from the very same municipalities. There was broad agreement in the region that the implementation of wind turbines, an emerging policy issue, needed an intermunicipal or regional approach, since there was little space left for such spatial interventions and if there was space it was found in most cases at the fringe of several municipalities. The final documents proposed potential zones of implementation as well as mandatory guidelines for their implementation. Notwithstanding the general agreement in the region, the vision has been questioned over the course of time, since two municipalities did not observe the rules of the agreement. However, this was no big deal in juridical terms since the strategy was never formalized by any legally binding institution. Still new attempts were made to start the whole process from scratch, hence opening a new round, and make the vision this time legally binding.

Many actors, arenas and moments can be identified where new decisions influenced the present constellation of decisions: there was the EU decision in 2009 to revise its renewable energy targets. The demanded share of renewable energy production by its member states has been doubled for 2020 as compared to 2010. Also in 2009, there was the decision of the Flemish government to allow for wind turbines in agrarian areas. Both these decisions have been identified as a reason to revise the original vision. There has been the decision of two municipalities to allow wind turbines on their territory outside the foreseen regional implementation zone. However the municipalities only have advisory competences thus these decisions were coupled to other decisions, like the planning permission from the Flemish government and the environmental permit from the province for at least one of these wind farms. For one mayor the threat of one particular company to search for other horizons has been decisive to reconsider the regional strategy. However, by now it seems that the particular interpretation of that threat has been more important than its actual value since the company is still there but there is no trace yet of the wind turbines. Still the respective plans of these
municipalities are quoted to have undermined the whole strategy and to demonstrate the limits of voluntary collaboration between municipalities. However, at the same time, it seems that in practice some municipal administrations still credit the regional vision as a tool to evaluate wind mill applications.

In the case of the regional wind mill strategy it seems that the influential policy entrepreneur was rather the general manager of Leiedal than any politician. As a representative of the intermunicipal company he was present in all three intermunicipal arenas (the board of directors of Leiedal, the conference of mayors and RESOC) that discussed the vision, he could actively aim for support from the vast majority of players within these arenas. No political actor is by the interviewees identified as a crucial policy entrepreneur in this case. In fact, it has been argued that the smooth consensual process was considered a strength of the vision in the beginning, while now it is interpreted as the actual weakness of the vision. It seems that persuasion by the general manager and/or the expertise of Leiedal (symbolic ‘speaking for the region’ and epistemiologic representation) were convincing enough for all three aforementioned arenas to accept the regional vision almost unanimously. However, it should be said that from the beginning on one mayor expressed his disagreement with the vision. He argued he would not be able to pass over the aspirations of a major company within his municipality to build wind turbines on its own terrains. Yet, he decided not to veto the process. Maybe this can be explained by the Christian-democratic party homogeneity of the region at that time. Many interviewees stressed the long standing consensual tradition within the region those days. Maybe there was little room to evoke political conflict within this harmonious group (social accountability). Some interviewees also explained that some mayors were very much respecting and looking up to the mayor of Kortrijk, a former minister and national party president. This mayor had a good understanding with the general manager of Leiedal, however it is not yet clear if this mutual understanding hindered any objection of other mayors in this case.

All three arenas (Board of Leiedal, conference of mayors and RESOC) consist of democratically elected representatives of the municipalities (electoral representation). However it seems like none of them actively involved nor informed their respective municipal council in the decision making process (lack of electoral accountability). Earlier in this paper we mentioned that previous research pointed out that decision making in the region hardly seems to follow the ‘normal’ democratic routines in city councils, college of mayor and alderman, and advisory councils. This finding seems to gain renewed resonance in our preliminary findings since the regional wind mill strategy had not been ratified by any municipal council. The only time wind turbines, not even the vision, got mentioned in one particular council was when the council took notice of their implementation. Also regarding the regional arena RESOC, it is clear that in this case they have not been actively involved but rather been asked ‘to give their approval’, in order to underpin the regional consensus (symbolic representation and social accountability).

Regarding the inclusion of third parties it seems that the strategy development stayed rather within the official circuit of municipal administrators, individual politicians, political parties and employees of Leiedal. Yet, the general manager of Leiedal tried to extend the network surrounding the strategy with the informal parliamentary workgroup of West-Flanders. This is a platform of all members of (federal and Flemish) parliament that got elected in the province. They were considered by the general manager as a potential lynchpin between the region and decision makers on a higher
governmental level (attempt for diagonal accountability). However he did not manage to let them combine forces to speak out for the regional strategy and seek support from these overarching levels. One interviewee argued that the weakness of the strategy might have been that it sought support from the usual suspects. It seems that no wind mill developer nor other affected organizations or citizens have been consulted during the strategy development (lack of nonelectoral symbolic and epistemic representation). Since much of the process stayed behind the closed doors of the involved arenas, it is rather difficult to hold the network accountable for the process. In particular the conference of mayors has no open and transparent agenda. As seen before, this lack of transparency does not necessary have to be regarded as problematic from a relational perspective on accountability and the third democratic anchorage point, if it was coined with an increase of accountability. However this does not seem the case. Yet, from our preliminary understanding it seems that all involved arenas, internally at least, perform along formal rules of democratic conduct such as an equal right to vote and an equal chance to express an opinion, yet it is difficult to catch up with the informal (socialized) rules of conduct and the personal networks of some actors.

Too conclude this short example, we argue that it makes sense to apply the democratic anchorage model in this way, since the recent perspectives from the representation and accountability literature give us extra insight in the mechanisms that underpin (or not) a democratic anchorage point. For example, from the first anchorage point one can argue that elected politicians are in large amounts represented in the arenas of the governance network. The network actors, if not politicians themselves, maintain an active dialogue with them. However it seems that these representatives are not actively maintaining their respective forum-actor relationships, hence this so-called democratic anchorage falls short in terms of accountability.

**Conclusion**

In this working paper we elaborated on potential tools and perspectives to analyse the democratic anchorage of local governance networks in general and in Flanders (Belgium) in particular. We argued in line with the democratic anchorage model of Sørensen and Torfing that this analysis should be based on a (post)liberal understanding of democracy and should be judged as a matter of degree and not as a matter of either/or. Hence, we stressed the importance of a context-sensitive and complexity-acknowledging perspective in order to get a nuanced understanding about the the potential (un)democratic character of governance networks. Moreover, we followed the argumentation of Klijn and Koppenjan that our approach to democratic network governance should be aligned to the nature of these political arenas and not the other way around. Thus, we aimed at broadening the horizon of our traditional democratic vocabulaire with more dynamic and relational concepts instead of yet another formulation of formalistic and state-centred touchstones regarding local democracy. We actually think that this is the very merit of the interactive governance paradigm. It allows us to open up our ways of thinking on governance and government processes.

We argued that the democratic anchorage model is a good starting point for the analysis of the democratic quality of governance networks. Yet, instead of focusing on metagovernance as a way actors might ensure the democratic anchorage points, we think the model can benefit from the further
explicit unfolding of forms of representation and mechanisms of accountability through an engagement with the respective literature on these study domains. While looking for a complexity-acknowledging stance on representation we found concepts that go beyond the ballot box and introduce us to so-called surrogate forms of representation like self-authorized, symbolic or epistemic representation. During the short analysis of our preliminary data we found that these surrogate or nonelectoral forms of representation deserve a good deal of attention since they were used in attempts to strengthen the democratic legitimacy of the regional strategy on the implementation of windmills. Likewise, we argued that there are limits to electoral forms of accountability. In a differentiated polity, like a governance network setting, we deal with many rounds, processes, arenas and actors at various moments in space and time. All are weaving a complex web of relations together that each represent different interests. Accountability mechanisms are thus not only part of the realm of traditional government but are key to many of these representative relations. We found the forum-actor conceptualization by Bovens, Schillemans et al. helpful to comprehend this nexus of potential accountability practises. Accountability is then regarded as a strategic, narrative and deliberative act by actors who give accounts to their respective forums in order to legitimize the decisions that came out of the negotiations within such a network. Thus, we argued that this conceptualization might be better suited to come to terms with entrepreneurial actors and what Teisman calls the composite character of governance networks. We also recognized the analytical strenght of the distinction, made by Bovens, between different forms of accountability based upon the character of the relationship between the forum and the actor. Hence, we can distinct between hierarchical, social or indirect accountability relations, which is demonstrated in the analysis of our case. Finally, we argued with regards to our short case description, that it makes sense to apply the democratic anchorage of governance networks in relation to these recent perspectives on representation and accountability since they give us an extra insight in the mechanisms that underpin (or not) a specific democratic anchorage point.

References


Some interviewees have been interviewed more than once.

- Local chief executive city of Kortrijk
- Local chief executive municipality of Zwevegem
- Chief spatial planning Kortrijk
- Member of the administration spatial planning Kortrijk
• Former General Manager intermunicipal company Leiedal
• Staff member intermunicipal company Leiedal
• General Manager RESOC Zuid-West-Vlaanderen
• Deputy of the province of West-Flanders

Documents:

• Regional vision implementation big wind turbines, Leiedal 2009
• Regional pact Zuid-West-Vlaanderen 2007-2013
• Regional pact Zuid-West-Vlaanderen 2013-2018
• Annual report intermunicipal company Leiedal 2012
• Circular letter EME/2006/01 - RO/2006/02 on the assessment and guidelines for the implementation of wind turbines, Flemish administration 2006
• Clarification on new environmental conditions wind turbines, Flemish administration: LNE, 2011
• Reports on meetings of the conference of mayors (10/03/06, 13/04/07, 12/10/07, 14/03/08, 12/09/08, 10/04/09, 09/04/10, 11/02/11, 11/05/2012)