Interactive – or counteractive – governance? Lessons learned about citizen participation and political leadership

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Panel P219:
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"Liberal democracy has many faults, but it also has a well-established and relatively successful practice. Strong democracy may derive from an attractive theoretical tradition, but it is without a convincing modern practice" (Barber 1984:261)

1. Introduction

Self-governance and citizen initiatives are on the rise, adding a new channel for participation in addition to traditional liberal or representative democracy. The literature on interactive governance, being one of several academic fields especially concerned with this development, tends to see self-governance and citizen initiatives as a fruitful and welcomed expansion of democracy (eg. King 2003; Sørensen and Torfing 2003; Mayer et al. 2005; Sørensen 2006). For example, there are widespread claims that interactive governance opens the door for a new – reinterpreted – and strong model of liberal, representative democracy (Barber 1984). In opposition to traditional public consultation procedures, interactive governance involves citizens much earlier in the processes of formulating and implementing policies. Stakeholders, including ‘ordinary’ citizens and non-experts, may contribute not only to open up policy-making processes, but also to inform and support the policy-making process, ease implementation and evaluate policies (Arnstein 1969; Pateman 1970; Irvin and Stansbury 2004; Mayer et al. 2005; Sørensen 2006; Nabatchi and Amsler 2014).

Despite the positive contributions interactive governance may add to democracy, many scholars argue that there is a tension between interactive governance and traditional governmental institutions (Mayer et al. 2005; Sørensen 2006; Klijn and Skelcher 2007; Edelenbos et al. 2010). This is by no means a new argument. Actually, academics defending representative democracy have formerly argued in favor of putting limits on the influence individual citizens have on political decisions. Robert Dahl, the distinguished American scholar, more than fifty years ago highlighted the potential dangers of an increase in political participation. For Dahl, too much participation could erode the norms that guide the working of public institutions, possible producing systemic instability as a consequence (Dahl 1956; Anduiza et al. 2008).

Many will argue, in the spirit of Dahl, that the two types of democratic arrangements are incompatible on principle grounds. Other would argue that the tension could be (partly)

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1 A former version of this paper was written as a submission to: Edelenbos, J and I. van Meerkert (eds): Critical Reflections on Interactive Governance. Edward Elgar (forthcoming).
overcome. In the latter case, the importance of institutional embedding is often pinpointed in the literature, that is, the connections or interfaces between interactive governance and existing democratic institutions (eg. Klijn and Koppenjan 2000; Sørensen 2002; Bingham et al. 2005; Edelenbos et al. 2010; Nabatchi and Amsler 2014). Emphasizing the instrumental choice of institutions, these connections are framed as a question of process design.

The two questions addressed in this paper are to what extent interactive governance actually can be combined with representative democracy, and how, possibly, the tension between interactive governance and representative democracy might be handled.

Building on the idea of participatory democracy (Pateman 1970), interactive governance is defined as the early involvement of all types of stakeholders – for example individual citizens, NGO’s and private companies – in the development, determination and implementation of public policies. That is, the lay public as well as stakeholders are involved to influence the exploration of policy problems; the development of solutions; and thereby the final political decision-making (eg. Klijn and Koppenjan 2000: 368,369; Mayer et al. 2005: 180; Edelenbos et al. 2010: 75; Torfing et al. 2012:3). In addition increasing attention is raised for civil society’s self-organizing power leading to new forms of community self-organization. This potentially opens up also for citizen induced interactive governance. While government induced interactive governance generally refers to ‘citizen participation’, then, citizen induced governance encompasses informal and loosely structured organizations that citizens may prefer to engage in (see also Edelenbos, forthcoming).

Interactive governance, according to this definition, encompasses democratic governance and community involvement – be it government or citizen induced, as well as public-private partnerships and collaborative policy-making or governance. This is a broad definition, however, that needs specification for analytical purposes (Nabatchi and Amsler 2014:13). In the following discussion interactive governance is therefore restricted to the relationship between governments and citizens as such. Citizens may or may not participate or engage as stakeholders, and they can choose to participate directly in person or indirectly through representatives (Nabatci and Amsler 2014:3). However, relationships between the public actors and private companies or other societal actors are excluded from our discussion.

While liberal or representative democracy belongs to one of the oldest topics in political science research, “interactive governance” is a recent concept where both theoretical and empirical contributions are modest so far. In the literature on public administration, we find some contributions on the changing role of politicians, but the evidence is based on in depth case studies representing a small number of countries (eg. Klijn and Koppenjan 2000; Koppenjan 2004; Sørensen 2005; Edelenbos et al. 2009; 2010; Edelenbos and van Meerkerk 2011). On the other hand, “interactive governance”
conceptualizes ideas and practices with a global spreading and long history. Even if scientific empirical research conducted in a strict sense is still limited (Mayer et al. 2005: 196), in fields such as planning and planning studies the phenomenon of interactive governance is most likely involved in empirical studies. Although the conceptualizations differ, we will argue that the topic is well known in the literature, for example under labels such as “network governance”, “governance”, “participation” and “communicative planning”. In the context of interactive governance, leaving room also for citizen induced initiatives, these studies have not been systemized so far. Without any ambition to systemize all studies, we will discuss interactive governance on a broader scale by the use of examples from selected studies based on a systematic review of ten years of publishing in ten top rated journals within the field of “urban studies”. The procedure and results from this review are accounted for in the appendix.

The paper proceeds as follows: Based in the existing literature on interactive governance, we will discuss why interactive governance has developed, focusing on the many benefits highlighted in the literature. Thereafter, we will discuss the tension between representative democracy and interactive governance. To structure this discussion we have developed a typology of four possible outcomes, and based on some of the lessons learned from cases of interactive governance we will describe each of the outcomes in detail. In the fourth section we will discuss to what extent the possible tension between elected leaders and citizen involvement can be handled. Focus will be on the development of institutional arrangements, as well as political leadership, the role of civil servants and citizens. In the last section the paper will be concluded.

2. Why interactive governance?
The principal way for citizens to exercise power to influence on policies is through the electoral process. In most democratic countries voters choose among politicians or list of parties which represent their interests and make decisions on their behalf. In many ways this system of governance resembles the market, with the voter as the customer and the politicians as the entrepreneurs, “selling” packages of political goods (Macpherson 1979; Schumpeter 1942).

The effectiveness of this representative system has been attacked from different angles over the years (eg. Rhodes 1997; Pierre and Peters 2000; Sørensen and Torfing (ed). 2007). Defenders of more citizen participation represent a heterogeneous group with different answers both to the extent of participation and to the articulation of interests (Anduiza et al. 2008). Some would highlight the importance of participation through organized associations (Putnam 2000), others point to direct forms of participation arguing that direct democracy has become both technologically feasible and desirable due to the new communications and information technologies (Budge 1996). The two types of participation are not necessarily easy to combine (Ganuza, Nez, and Morales 2014). What these different contributions have in common, however, is the intention to
find ways in which representative democracies can be improved – and not to provide an alternative to representative democracy.

While the quest for more participation has many roots in the European literature on network governance, interactive governance is commonly seen as a necessary response to the contemporary forms of governance. Governance networks are, according to Torfing et.al (2012: 9-10), founded on a critique of the modus operandi of traditional forms of government. Because of an increasing fragmentation of political decision-making, caused by functional differentiation and institutional fragmentation of governing processes, a large number of public and private actors have a substantial effect on the way a society is governed. Addressing complex governance problems, interactive governance are understood as a strategic response to the decline of formal power in representative bodies. Indeed, it becomes increasingly difficult for democratically elected bodies of politicians to exercise sovereign rule (Mayer et al. 2005; Sørensen 2006: 98; Edelenbos et al. 2010:76; Nabatchi and Amsler 2014:1). There are, therefore, recognized a need to remediating democratic and citizenship deficits. Interactive policy-making may be looked upon as renewal and revival of democracy – an injection of citizen participation in a decaying system of representation (King 2003; Sørensen 2006; Haus and Klausen 2011; Nabatchi et al. 2012; Nabatchi and Amsler 2014:1). We find arguments for strengthening and even replacement of representative democracy with more direct forms of participation that fit into the complex interactive nature of many multi-facettted decision-making processes (Klijn and Skelcher 2007; Edelenbos et al. 2010: 76).

Theory suggests many benefits from interactive governance. Taking the perspectives of the citizens as a point of departure, interactive policy-making may give citizens straight influence on political decision-making (Irvin and Stansbury 2004:56–58; Sørensen 2006: 104). Through participation, citizens also gain civic skills for an activist citizenship (Putnam 2000). Ordinary citizens are educated to participate in deliberative processes, enhance interest in and understanding of politics, increase the likelihood that people will participate more in politics and in their communities and facilitate recruitment of party members and candidates for election (Irvin and Stansbury 2004:56–58; Mayer et al. 2005: 187; Sørensen 2006: 104; Nabatchi and Amsler 2014:12).

From the perspective of local governments, interactive policy development makes policy makers more responsive to the diverse interests and desires of different stakeholders and stakeholders-groups. Interactive policy development may also be efficient in forcing the policy-making process open. Inward-looking assessment processes may make decision-making opaque and exclude important stakeholders (Klijn and Koppenjan 2000: 385; Mayer et al. 2005: 180, 181).
At the institutional level public participation and engagement can improve policy-making and the quality of governance. Citizens and pressure groups can *enrich the policy-making process* by providing knowledge, information and other forms of input that policy-makers otherwise would not have had (Mayer et al. 2005: 180; Nabatchi and Amsler 2014:13). Due to the many sources of information and insights, government may gain from avoiding litigation costs and make better policy and implementation decisions with a more solid base (Klijn and Koppenjan 2000: 385; Irvin and Stansbury 2004:56–58; Mayer et al. 2005: 181).

This, in turn, may improve the justice of decisions, ease implementation and increase the effectiveness of public action (Nabatchi and Amsler 2014:13). Involving parties with obstructive power in the development of a policy at an early stage may reduce the risk of a policy *implementation* being impeded by legal proceedings and other tactics employed by those who oppose it (Mayer et al. 2005: 180). Participatory processes allow as well for informing as for persuading citizens, building trust and allay anxiety or hostility, building strategic alliances and gaining legitimacy for decisions (Irvin and Stansbury 2004:56–58).

### 3. Representative democracy and interactive governance – an uneasy relationship

Clearly, the link between the praise of interactive governance and the idea of participatory democracy is strong. However, several of the mentioned observations and arguments also have a root in the theory of liberal, representative democracy. For example, participation may inspire citizens to engage in politics, and facilitate recruitment of party members and candidates for election. Potentially, decisions get better informed and decisions made by representative government on both the development and the implementation of policies are improved.

However, here the tension between representative and participatory governance becomes visible: initiatives and citizen participation may not be easy to control. The risk is that political representation as an expression of the political will of the people, through elections, is contested (Sørensen 2002:593). Then the question is who decides, in the very end? Thus, in theoretical terms there is an inherent tension between representative and participatory governance. Representative democracy is grounded in a procedure in which elected political institutions, at the end of the decision making process, pronounce a final judgment in which they represent the general interest unconstrained. On the other hand, interactive decision-making is aimed precisely at settling the question of what is in the common interest through interaction between interested parties (Klijn and Koppenjan 2000:378; Edelenbos et al. 2010: 76). So, what kind of role can – and should – elected politicians play?
Depending on how strong the tension is between interactive governance and representative democracy and the type of interactive governance in question – in terms of whether induced by governments or citizens – it is possible to deduce some likely outcomes of interactive governance. Table 1 presents four such outcomes, which will guide our discussion.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of interactive governance</th>
<th>Relationship between representative democracy and interactive governance</th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Complementary outcomes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Government induced (top-down)</td>
<td>(1) Empowering</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Citizen induced (bottom-up)</td>
<td>(2) Authorizing</td>
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Table 1 Four outcomes for the role to be played by elected politicians – dependent on the relationship between representative democracy and types of interactive governance

Vertically, the table separates between complementary and conflicting outcomes. Outcome (1) and (2) depart from the position that it is possible to combine representative democracy with interactive governance, and represents the ideal situation often described in the literature (e.g. Lelievelt et al. 2009; Haus and Klausen 2011; Torfing et al. 2012). Outcome (3) and (4) represent a more challenging result where the underlying tension between the two types of democratic participation, as described above, becomes a problem either for citizens or for their political leaders. With reference to Klijn and Skelcher (2007), suggesting various conjectures on the relationship of governance networks to democratic institutions, this distinction echoes their incompatible supposition. Indeed, the tension originate from different sets of institutional rules characterizing representative democracy and the logic of representation on the one side, and participatory governance on the other.

Horizontally, we distinguish between interactive governance induced by governments and by citizens, respectively. The latter may come from citizens wanting to keep at distance from existing political and governmental structures. Citizen initiatives represent a kind of self-governance, with self-organized actors offering ideas and projects on their own. Examples are citizen initiated referendums and other kinds of bottom-up initiatives contributing to solve common problems and involving governmental response (Edelenbos and Meerkerk 2011; Forthcoming).

The first outcome found in table 1 (empowering) resembles the complementary conjecture on the relationship of governance networks to democratic institutions depicted by Klijn and Skelcher (2007). Here a representative elected government initiates interactive governance, and citizens’ participation represents a widening and strengthening of democracy in terms of better decisions and increased legitimacy. The second outcome (2) represents a more radical but still preferred result from interactive
governance, with a less active but *authorizing* role for elected politicians. Here elected representatives sanction proposals produced in citizen-induced processes of interactive governance.

In outcome (3) citizens participation through interactive governance is *disconnected* from the decisions made by representatives. Thus, the arrangements for negotiations and deliberations taking place in interactive governance are more symbolic than real. This outcome bear a resemblance to the instrumental conjuncture on the relationship of governance networks to democratic institutions described by Klijn and Skelcher (2007), where interactive governance is understood as a means for representative government to increase their authority.

In the last, and what we have labelled *threatening* outcome (4), decisions taken in interactive governance arrangements with elected representatives in an insignificant role. At the best, elected leaders are acting as one of many participating actors. Thus, in this outcome the very idea of representative democracy may be threatened. With reference to the transitional conjuncture on the relationship of governance networks to democratic institutions described by Klijn and Skelcher (2007), political power have moved out of representative assemblies and have become more or less replaced by societal decision-making.

Discussing interactive governance, the elected politicians are key actors – either as a collegium or as individual leaders. The business carried out by political actors are, however, heavily dependent on their advisers and executive staff (Rhodes and ‘t Hart 2014). This is especially true in cases of interactive governance, where administrative actors are particularly important because of their central facilitating and coordinating functions (Sørensen 2002:699–701, Torfing et al. 2012:145). To describe the management suited to the emergence of interactive governance, Public Value Management is described as a new paradigm in the literature (Stoker 2006, see also Torfing et al. 2012:156–159). Indeed, Edelenbos et al. (2009:130; 2010: 76 ff.) have developed a specific framework for the embedding of participatory processes in representative political, as well as executive and professional institutions. As can be seen from table 2 below, we have therefore included the role of *elected politicians* as well as the role of *civil servants* in our discussion. Empirically, politicians may maintain a safe distance from the interactive processes, or they may establish the frameworks and conditions for the process, monitor progress, participate actively and get involved in the interactive processes (Edelenbos et al. 2009:130; Edelenbos et al. 2010: 78,79).

Accordingly, civil servants – the administrative officials and expert civil servants – can be more or less involved in the processes with citizens and/or treat stakeholder knowledge as legitimate in the actual process of interactive governance (Edelenbos et al. 2009:130; Edelenbos et al. 2010: 78–80).
Lastly, the role of citizens is pivotal in interactive governance – presupposing citizen engagement. Citizen engagement is not to be taken for granted, however, and may be a challenging endeavor leaving citizens with the choice between influence and responsibility (e.g., Torfing et al. 2012:161). According to the literature, furthermore, participation is time consuming and the transaction costs in the form of spent time, lost wages, childcare and transport may be considerable. Some argue that the public is generally disengaged and disinterested in politics, or that the requirements for participation generally are too high for “ordinary” citizens. As pointed out in the introduction to this book, however, there seems to be a recent trend towards new forms of civic engagement or self-organization, where societal actors take initiative and aim to develop ideas and projects on their own. In any case, those who already possess a high degree of participatory skills may utilize the offered or created arenas for influence more efficiently than will the less empowered (Irvin and Stansbury 2004: 58–60; Mayer et al. 2005: 187; Sørensen 2006:104; Nabatchi and Amsler 2014:13). Thus, interactive governance will be dependent not only on the role played by elected politicians and administrative staff, but also on the role played by the citizens.

By retelling some of the stories derived from the literature review, we will further detail and discuss each of the four outcomes in the following.
### Table 2: Main characteristics of four outcomes of interactive governance processes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Outcome</th>
<th>(1) Empowering</th>
<th>(2) Authorizing</th>
<th>(3) Disconnecting</th>
<th>(4) Threatening</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Complementary outcomes</td>
<td>Conflicting outcomes</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>Government induced</td>
<td>Citizen induced</td>
<td>Government induced</td>
<td>Citizen induced</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Main characteristics of the outcome</td>
<td>Decisions made by representatives, but based on inputs from interactive governance</td>
<td>Decisions made by citizens, sanctioned by representatives</td>
<td>Decisions made by representatives, citizens participating symbolically</td>
<td>Decisions made by citizens, Representatives serving symbolic functions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relevant theoretical discourses</td>
<td>Network governance</td>
<td>Participatory democracy (light) (e.g., J. S. Mill and A. Tocqueville)</td>
<td>Elite democracy, critical theory (e.g., A. Gramsci, M. Foucault)</td>
<td>Participatory democracy (extreme) “Governance without government”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Role of elected politicians | Elected politicians using interactive governance
Board of directors: setting the stage, sorting and selecting inputs, making decisions
Ultimate decision-making power by the elected politicians is softened/shared | Elected politicians responding to interactive governance
Board of directors: setting the stage, sanctioning inputs
Ultimate decision-making power by the elected politicians is softened/shared | Elected politicians using interactive governance
Sovereign political ruler
Ultimate decision-making power is left by the elected politicians | Elected politicians responding to interactive governance
Elected politicians one of many actors making shared decisions
Ultimate decision-making power by the elected politicians is abolished |
| Role of civil servants | Setting the stage, sorting and selecting inputs in dialog with representatives | Setting the stage, receiving and forwarding input to representatives | Setting the stage for citizen participation | Implementing citizens’ decisions |
| Role of citizens | Participate when relevant | Setting the stage, wide scale participation | Voting | Wide scale participation, making decisions |

**Outcome 1: Interactive governance empowering the role of elected politicians**

The presumption that interactive governance may extent representative democracy has a strong position in network governance theory. A common point is that governments must interact with its citizens due to the fragmented character of modern society and due to wicked problems. In most cases this is done through government induced forms
of interactive governance, like e.g. forums, committees, projects, hearings or public meetings. On such occasions political leaders will choose the type of arrangements to employ, and they must sort and select among the different inputs that are produced through the process. Elected politicians use interactive governance processes to increase involvement in policy formulation, and maintain their role in goal setting and the final arbiters between competing views (Klijn and Skeltcher 2007). Clearly, this kind of interactive governance spells out under the shadow of hierarchy.

Civil servants will assist the political leaders in organizing the arrangement in point, and they will often be deeply involved in the different practical activities taking place among the citizens. The citizens themselves will spend time and resources on the relevant activities. Elected leaders will take the final decisions and potentially the political outcome will be improved – compared to a situation where elected leaders or citizens acted alone.

The “empowering-outcome” represents the ideal model often described in the network governance literature. Even if most scholarly work in this field will point to problems and limitations of interactive governance, our literature review shows that numerous books and articles resemble this outcome. Many of these examples relate to “participatory budgeting”, a set of Latin American experiments which has been adopted as best practice by organizations such as the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) and the World Bank (Hernandez-Medina 2010). These experiments root in a growing consensus about the value of citizen participation in urban policies, and most of the research draw positive conclusions on the outcome.

One example is found in Postigo (2011), comparing the participatory budget processes in the Latin American cities Porto Alegre, Montevideo and Mexico City. Postigo finds that the process had a transformative effect on social spaces and civil society, and increased citizens activism and consciousness, which in turn boosted the efficiency, transparency and legitimacy of the local representative institutions. A European example of the “empowering outcome” is Plüss’ study of Swiss city councilors (2014). According to Plüss there are good reasons to believe that Swiss city councilors would understand citizens’ participation in the policy process as a threat to their elected role. Surprisingly, the study clearly shows that they do not perceive interactive governance as a danger to local democracy, neither to transparency of decision-making or political equality. Rather they have adapted to a role of “steering, not rowing”.

**Outcome 2: Elected politicians authorizing interactive governance**

The “authorizing outcome” results from citizen induced interactive governance, where elected leaders make their decisions based on the common will expressed through interactive governance arrangements. In normative terms this outcome resemble the type of participatory democracy that Carol Pateman argued for (1970), and there are
also links back to Mill and Tocqueville. A recent version of this position is expressed in the “Agenda 21” agreement made in the 1992s Rio Summit on Sustainable Development. Agenda 21 was a plan for citizen involvement based on the idea that the main challenge is not lack of popular attention or attitudes, but rather that citizens are not allowed to express and make real their ideas and solutions to global challenges (Lafferty and Eckerberg 1998).

In an “authorizing outcome” political leaders have a passive role until the final decision. Thus, they sanction the common will expressed through interactive arrangements in the end. Citizens will, however, have an active role in setting up interactive arrangements and spend much time and resources in their participating endeavor. The operation of these arrangements may involve civil servants, and in most cases civil servants will serve as the linkage between citizens and elected leaders.

The literature review shows that within the selected journals and time-span, it is not easy to find examples fitting perfectly into this theoretically constructed outcome. There are generally few studies of “pure” citizen induced forms of interactive governance. To the extent they exist, citizen inducement is typically combined with some government initiatives. One example, partly fitting to this outcome, is the planning process of two large Californian projects (airport and ballpark) reported by Baxamusa (2008). This study shows how citizens can strengthen their voice by “Community Benefits Agreements”, a type of coalition among affected communities and citizens leading to a partnership arrangement with a private developer. Given this kind of arrangement, accepted by the elected representatives, citizens were able to partly bypass the city government when influencing on the future of their own neighborhoods. According to the author, this specific kind of participation makes a fruitful alternative to traditional planning in a setting where a project involves considerable uncertainty.

A similar argument is made by Ganapati (2009), studying the process of housing reconstruction after an earthquake catastrophe in Turkey. Due to how the World Bank, funding the reconstruction efforts, defined the public in “public participation”, involvement of citizens were limited in this case. However, the article makes a strong normative argument about the need for a wide participation in such extraordinary contexts, and state that “people should be put before plans” in post-disaster housing reconstructions.

*Outcome 3: Elected politicians disconnecting interactive governance*

On an institutional level, participation and engagement are time consuming and may be challenging for the scarce time, money and other resources held by public and political officials in local governments. For a local council interactive governance may also mean to share power with an uninformed, hostile and disrespectful public. Furthermore there is a risk that power will be concentrated in the hands of those who oppose development,
shout loudest and have the time or resources to campaign. The ability to develop compromises and satisfy diverse demands may be diminished, and there will be a possibility of bad decisions that are politically impossible to ignore and thereby a loss of decision-making control (Irvin and Stansbury 2004: 58–60; Mayer et al. 2005: 187; Nabatchi and Amsler 2014: 13).

Based in such presumptions it is argued, in line with the idea of elite democracy, that elected representative should and must enjoy a superior position in decision-making. Even when governments induce interactive governance, for a variety of reasons, it is not hard to imagine that the inputs will be ignored in the formal decision-making procedures. Even more so, based in a Gramscian or Facaultian analysis, interactive governance may be viewed as an instrumental method used by elected leaders to control actors and to realize the elected preferred policies (Klijn and Skelcher 2007; Davies 2011).

The “disconnecting outcome” is produced by elected leaders making decisions based in information and inputs different from those developed by interactive governance. The basis for decisions may be ideology, party competition, party manifesto or strategic positioning. Given that citizen participation through interactive governance has a symbolic value only, to influence politics citizens will have to redirect their attention from active participation to the more passive role as a voter. The role of civil servants will basically be to serve the elected representatives in preparing decisions as well as implementing the chosen policies.

The literature review reveals a relatively large number of examples fitting into this theoretically constructed outcome. Only a few of the studies, however, perceive interactive governance as an instrument employed by elected leaders to control actors. A more common narrative in the reviewed literature points to the shortcomings in the interactive arrangements leading to results that is deeply problematic for elected leaders. One example is Baud and Nainan’s (2008) study of neighborhood participation in India, showing how active participation favors the more resourceful citizens, while elected councilors serve as channels for low-income groups. In this case, turning inputs from interactive governance into policies would have severe consequences for a large and vulnerable part of the population.

Similarly, based in a broad analysis of Spanish local governments, Anduiza et al. (2008) reveals that interactive governance is no guarantee to political parties’ electoral success. In the end, the effect interactive governance has on the support for political parties depends on how participatory experiences are dealt with, and how participatory democracy fits into the wider notion of representative democracy. Anduiza (et.al. 2008) argues that democratic participation, or what we would label interactive governance, is neither an electoral blessing nor a cure for the shortcomings of representative democracy.
A last set of contributions show how citizens lack of knowledge and expertise reduces the value of interactive governance. One example is Gupta (2014) study of environmental projects in India, showing that there is a general awareness about environmental issues among the general public on the one hand, but on the other hand there is a lack of knowledge among the citizens that get involved. For this reason, Gupta argues, one cannot disconnect participation from knowledge and competencies. A similar argument is made by McGovern (2013), studying participatory planning in Philadelphia, US. Here a progressive leadership initiated ambitious interactive governance, which developed into symbolic participation as the process went on. The main explanation for this outcome is, according to McGovern, found in the tension between the expertise held by educated planners and the lack of knowledge among the citizens, combined with immense expectations.

Outcome 4: Interactive governance threatening elected politicians

To some extent, the question about power has been neglected in the literature on governance networks and interactive governance (Goetz 2008, Davies 2011). Focus is typically on “getting things done” through consensual deliberation and exchange among relevant actors, and not through the use of public authority (Klijn and Skelcher 2007: 601,602; Torfing et al. 2012: 50). However, interactive governance, and especially when induced by the citizens, can form a threat to the elected leadership, turning them, not the citizens, into symbolic actors. This theoretically possible outcome we have labelled “threatening” – that is, a threat to representative government. One can imagine several reasons producing this outcome. In some instances, elected leaders may lack the formal power to make authoritative decisions, or their citizens do not recognize their formal power as legitimate. Alternatively, the elected representatives may be unable to accommodate the complexities in play, and are therefore replaced by alternative governance arrangements (Klijn and Skelcher 2007).

This outcome resembles an extreme version of participatory democracy, in theoretical terms, close to direct democracy and conceptually related to the notion of “governance without government” (Rhodes 1997) or “self-governance” (Edelenbos and van Meerkerk 2011). Citizens will make decisions in interactive governance arrangements, while the role left for elected representatives mainly is to serve a symbolic function. Power has moved out of city hall and into different kinds of interactive governance arrangements. Elected politicians do not take the real political decisions, and in the worst scenario for representative democracy – elected representatives may be excluded as one of the many actors making shared decisions on behalf of the local communities.

The literature review shows examples only partly fitting into this outcome. None of the articles report from cases where interactive governance leads to a full replacement of elected leaders. In some studies, however, elected leaders faced with interactive governance choose to resign for various reasons. One such example is a study of
neighborhood governance in British Baltimore and Bristol (Davies and Pill 2012). However, the rise of neighborhood self-governance in these cases is primarily explained by austerity and the elected leaderships choice to withdraw – and should to a lesser extent be interpreted as a threat from the citizens.

Still, some studies argue for a potential threat even if the interactive governance arrangements themselves are limited. This is the case in Mitlins (2008) study of co-production in the Global South. Even if co-production is a clearly limited and instrumental form of interactive governance, the involved organizations tend to see this cooperation as a strategy for deeper involvement and increased power vis-à-vis public authorities. Some of the benefits for involved organizations are related to lobbyism, more stable relationships with the state, and political influence. The involved organizations tend to have a broader set of political objectives than those directly related to co-production. According to Mitlins, co-production may challenge elected political leadership in the longer run, thereby representing a kind of interactive governance that may turn out as a possible threat to local elected leaders.

4. Dealing with the tension – closing the gap?

The above discussion has confirmed that both on theoretical and empirical grounds, there are tensions between representative democracy and interactive governance. In this section we will limit our discussion to the two outcomes where the democratic principles seems to collide, and ask to what extent it is possible to convert these outcomes into complementarity. Theoretically, we intend to discuss the necessary conditions for a more successful interaction.

For many scholars in this field, and certainly those who base their arguments in critical theory (see eg. Davies 2011; Goetz 2008), this question is neither relevant nor interesting. If interactive governance is understood simply as public governance by other means, no real intentions to transfer power to citizens need to exist among elected leaders. Well aware of the valuable theoretical contributions from critical theory, the following discussion will not elaborate on this position. To simplify, we rather take as a premise that political leaders and citizens both share the vision of a fruitful combination of representative and participatory democracy. Taking this as a starting point, we will discuss the degree to which institutional arrangements, political leadership, appropriate management of interactions and the role played by the citizens can contribute in order to deal with the tension and overcome the gap between interactive governance and representative democracy. Underlying this discussion is the presumption that actors are not only role takers, but also role makers (Torfing et al. 2012: 148). Our main arguments are summarized in table 3.
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<th>Disconnecting</th>
<th>Threatening</th>
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<td></td>
<td><strong>Conflicting outcomes</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Government induced</strong></td>
<td>Elected politicians use interactive governance processes symbolic or as a means to control actors and realize policy</td>
<td>Elected politicians are unable to accommodate the complexities of the modern world, and become ceremonial actors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Citizen induced</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td>To a larger degree elected leaders should join interactive governance arrangements</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Institutional linkages</strong></td>
<td>Closer links between elected leaders and citizens, develop frameworks allowing all citizens to participate</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Role of civil servants:</strong> Management of interaction</td>
<td>Design binding and encompassing processes of interaction between stakeholders</td>
<td>Adapt process designs to the urge for increased citizen impact Make stakeholder knowledge and interests legitimate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Role of representatives:</strong> Political leadership</td>
<td>Accept the limits of representative government Redefine political leadership</td>
<td>Develop a more open and inclusive approach Redefine political leadership</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Role of citizens:</strong> Responsible citizens</td>
<td>More realism, behave compatible with the primary representative institutions</td>
<td>Accept that, so far, we have no complete alternative to representative democracy</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3 Possible measures for reducing the tension between representative democracy and interactive governance

**Reducing tension through institutional linkages**

Interactive governance involves, per definition, public authorities and citizens. In many cases, however, the participators relate to civil servants as elected representatives not necessarily are directly involved in interactive governance. That is, interactive governance is often reduced to a relationship between civil servants like planners and administrators on the one side, and citizens or organized citizen interest on the other. Contrary to the argument above, interactive governance is often a professional tool kit for public administration. Although questions centering on agenda setting, problem formulation, giving direction for change, regulating access to interactive arenas and mobilizing support go far beyond the administrative responsibility to make interactive governance efficient and effective, interactive governance is not necessarily depicted as a political activity (Sørensen and Torfing 2009).

From this perspective one of the major challenges in terms of institutionalization of interactive governance is to create stronger links between elected leaders and citizens (eg. Edelenbos et al. 2009, 2010). Elected leaders need to be part of the interactive process simply because elected leaders should be part of any process where policies are
developed and made (Torfing et al. 2012: chapter 8). A stronger involvement of elected leaders will ensure that their preferences, attitudes and presumptions become part of the interactive governance process, which in turn will diminish the tension between citizen participation and elected leaders’ superior decision making. Furthermore, and referring to the “threatening outcome”, if the problem is elected representatives unable to accommodate complexity in actual problem solving, a more pronounced political leadership accommodating interactive governance would probably raise the competencies among elected leaders.

Reducing tension through political leadership

The expectation that local politicians shall function as boundary spanners blurs the well-established distinction between the governing and the governed as well as between political and administrative governance tasks (Torfing et al. 2012: 151 ff; Sørensen and Waldorff 2014: 5). However, following the line of thought in the literature on metagovernance and facilitative political leadership, this challenge may, at least partly, be overcome (Sørensen 2002; Greasley and Stoker 2008; Torfing et al 2012: 152 ff; Sørensen and Torfing in press). There is a need, however, to redefine political leadership from “sovereign” decision makers to facilitators or metagovernors. One relevant contribution in this regard is Tucker, arguing that “politics in its essential nature is leadership of a political community and all the activity, including participatory activity by citizens, that may enter into the process of leadership” (1981:vii). In the context of interactive governance this would mean that the link between representative democracy and interactive governance is not as much a question of representativeness as it is a question about leadership.

Facilitative political leadership involves “...the capacity to blend together resources and put together a vision that can be shared across a community” (Greasley and Stoker 2008: 723). The exercise of political leadership involves (1) defining the situation, that is offering a diagnosis of the key problems and challenges for the political community. Furthermore, to (2) prescribe a course of group action that will meet the challenging situation, that is, formulating policy or giving direction to and participate in developing new solutions. And finally (3) to mobilize support in order to ensure the realization of new policies, implemented for example through programs and plans (Tucker 1981:31,47,59; Sørensen and Waldorff 2014).

As pointed out by Sørensen and Torfing (in press:10), politicians who exercise political leadership by engaging in metagoverning interactive governance arrangements will be able to influence the processes and outcomes of collaborative policy making. They will have to, however, give up the idea of controlling the governance arena. Thus, if local politicians take on the role as facilitative leaders, a disconnecting outcome is less likely. The limits of representative democracy will to a greater extent be accepted, and participation will be understood as a valuable contribution. Accordingly, to
accommodate the complexities of local governance an open and inclusive approach might be the best strategy for local political leaders.

Reducing tension through management of interaction

Administrative actors are particularly important in interactive government, demanding a facilitating and enabling administrative role. Stoker (2006) points out traditional public administration and new public management as management paradigms where civil servants are left to ensure that procedures are followed and performance targets are met (see also Moore 1995; Torfing et al. 2012:156–159). Actions are not legitimized by pointing out that they are legal, in line with the common or advocated by leading experts. In contrast, stakeholder conception of legitimacy is pivotal. Therefore, civil servants need to play an active role in organizing arenas for deliberation and delivery and maintain the overall capacity of the system. In opposition to the former paradigms, where politics are confined into the input and final judgement of the policy making process, political and administrative tasks are not separated in public value management. On the contrary, governance of the public realm involves arenas for deliberation and delivery in pursuit of public value.

In the need for making conflicting outcomes complementary, public value management would contribute to genuine involvement of citizens in government induced interactive processes. To know whether public value is delivered requires an engagement and an exchange between the relevant stakeholders and government officials. Processes of interaction between stakeholders will therefore have to be binding and encompassing – involving as well elected representatives as citizens. Furthermore, because the very paradigm relies on a stakeholder conception of legitimacy in its governance arrangements, public value management will facilitate processes that meet the urge for increased citizen impact. That is, stakeholder knowledge and interest contribute to legitimate what is public value and what is not.

Reducing tension through responsible citizens

A change from conflict to complementarity is, however, not dependent on the role played by elected politicians only. It is dependent also on the behavior of the citizens – the self-organizing actors. For public organizations there are many challenges when dealing with citizens through interactive governance. In our discussion, we have argued that even if citizens have great expectations about interactive governance, many are less informed and lack the skills and competencies necessary to give valuable inputs to elected leaders. Furthermore, those who actually hold these competencies and resources may not be representative for the citizenship as a whole.
On the positive side, the rationale behind interactive governance is extensive, as we discussed in the introduction. With reference to the urban studies examined in the paper, it is for example widely believed that civil society organizations are in an ideal position to ensure the quality of neighborhoods in an effective and democratic way, increasing the legitimacy of their actions and of neighborhood governance in general (Lelieveldt et al. 2009:5).

A lesson learned from some of the studies reviewed is that participation needs to go hand in hand with education and development of competencies. This is a crucial question in the Global South as mentioned above, but it is probably also an important reminder for the developed North.

5. Conclusion

In theory, there is an inherent tension between representative democracy and interactive governance. Representative democracy is leaving elected political institutions with the role of pronounce a final judgment in decision-making processes, in which they represent the general interest unhindered and without consultation. Through interactive governance, on the contrary, what is in the common interest is settled through interaction between interested parties. Thus, the question discussed in this paper is to what extent interactive governance in any way can be combined with liberal, representative democracy, and whether it is at all possible to handle the tension and overcome the gap between interactive governance and representative democracy.

Along two dimensions, the paper elaborates on four possible outcomes from combining interactive governance with representative democracy. The first dimension captures the complementary or conflicting outcomes, the second dimension distinguish between interactive governance induced by either governments or citizens. The two complementary options discussed are the ones that are either empowering for local elected representatives, or where they play an authorizing role. On the contrary, the two conflicting outcomes either disconnect the interactive processes from the elected representatives, or become a threat to their role as pivotal decision-makers. The systematic review of ten years of publishing in ten top rated journals within the field of urban studies show that it is possible to give empirical examples on each of these theoretically deduced outcomes. The most frequently confirmed outcomes are the empowering and authorizing ones, where governments induce interactive governance. We find, however, few examples that fully resembles the two outcomes resulting from citizens inducing interactive governance.

As regards the possibilities of handling the tension between interactive governance and representative democracy, we discuss possible means for changing the two conflicting outcomes into complementary outcomes. That is, is it possible to change the framework or attitudes in such a way that the interactive processes in these instances comply with
the primary representative institutions? We argue that institutional linkages may reduce
tensions, through stronger links between elected leaders, civil servants and citizens.
Second, disconnecting outcomes are less likely if local politicians take on the role as
facilitative leaders and civil servants maintain the overall capacity of the system. Finally,
responsible citizens will probably contribute to reduce tensions in interactive
governance. Not only will education and development of competencies be essential, but
also the representative institutions – though which democracy is realized – need to be
accepted.

In this paper we have discussed interactive governance as a universal and de-
contextualized phenomenon. This is a simplification, some would possibly say over-
simplification, since we know that the legitimacy of representative democracy vary from
one context to another (Gilley 2009). In some contexts having citizen initiatives
replacing elected leaders decisions would probably, by a large part of the population be
considered as a democratic gain, rather than as we have done, seeing it as a problem. But
following the influential works of Benjamin Barber on “strong democracy”, we will argue
that although liberal or representative democracy has its faults, all in all it has a well
established and relatively successful practice. On the contrary, even if citizens direct
participation can be derived from an attractive theoretical tradition, the modern
practice of this model is still limited and so far less convincing than its alternative. At
this point in time no widely accepted, complete and workable alternative approach to
representative democracy exist. Therefore, in the words of Barber (1984:262) “strong
democracy can only come as a modification of representative democracy”. Interactive
governance, where citizens’ initiative are successfully combined with elected leaders
decision making, would be one practical example of a strong democracy.

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6. Appendix: Identifying examples of interactive governance

Concern about public engagement in local governments is currently experiencing a revival, resulting in a considerable amount of research. This gives us the opportunity to base our discussion in a set of examples derived from a literature study of contributions in highly recognized international journals. To overcome the workload involved in our effort, we have concentrated on the literature on urban policies, which is one of the disciplines where interactive governance is particularly relevant. This is a relevant policy field also because we have restricted interactive governance to the relationship between public authorities and the citizens, of particular interest in the literature on urban planning and development.

Ten journals were selected for this review. When identifying journals we used the “SJR-ranking”, where scores are calculated based in data from the Scopus database. The search for journals used “Social science” as main category, and “Urban studies” as a sub category. A few specialized journals covering fields like urban economics and ethnography were removed from the list. We then selected the ten journals with highest score. These 10 journals were: Journal of the American Planning Association, International Journal of Urban and Region Research, Journal of Planning Education and Research, Urban Studies, Journal of Urban Affairs, Urban Affairs Review, Urban Geography, City, Environment and Urbanization and Housing Theory and Society.

Articles from these ten journals published between 2005 and 2015 were defined as the hunting ground for illustrative examples. To identify individual articles we used the following keywords: Citizen*, participation, interactive* governance, democracy. In total, these searches returned a larger number of articles from which we selected the most relevant based on readings of article titles and abstracts. 44 articles were dealing with interactive governance defined as citizen participation, of which 15 are reported in the text.