



Organizing Democracy

The Construction of
Agency in Practice

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Edited by
Göran Sundström
Linda Soneryd
Staffan Furusten

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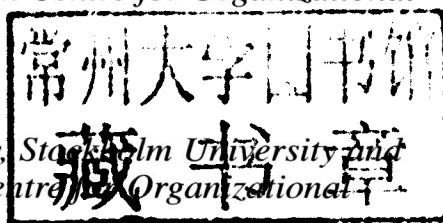
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Abbreviations

APP	Act for Public Procurement (Lagen om offentlig upphandling)
CI	Consumers International
CSR	Corporate Social Responsibility
DC	Developed Country
ECC	Export Control Council
EIA	Environmental Impact Assessment
FFV	Förenade Fabriksverken (a Swedish state-owned company)
GRI	Global Reporting Initiative
ICC	International Chamber of Commerce
ILO	International Labour Organization
IOE	International Organization of Employers
ISO	International Standardization Organization
ISO 9000	The ISO standard series on quality assurance and quality management
ISO 14000	The ISO standard series on environmental management
ISO 26000	The (future) ISO standard on social responsibility
ISP	Inspektionen för strategiska produkter (Swedish Inspectorate of Strategic Products)
ITUC	International Trade Union Confederation
KBS-3	Method suggested by SKB. KBS stands for Kärnbränslesäkerhet (Nuclear Fuel Safety)
KMI	Krigsmaterielinspektionen (the War Matériel Inspectorate in Sweden)
LRF	Lantbrukarnas Riksförbund (Federation of Swedish Farmers)
LTF	Liaison Task Force (of the ISO 26000 committee)
MBO	Management by Objectives
Milkas	Miljörelsens kärnavfallssektariat
MKG	Miljöorganisationernas kärnavfallsgranskning
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NGO	Nongovernmental organization
NOU	Nämnden för Offentlig Upphandling (Swedish Committee for Public Procurement)
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PBB	Pharmaceutical Benefits Board
RD&D	Research, Development and Demonstration

SAI	Social Accountability International
SFA	Swedish Forest Agency
SKB	Svensk Kärnbränslehantering AB (Swedish Nuclear Fuel and Waste Management Co.)
SKI	Statens kärnkraftsinspektion (Swedish Nuclear Power Inspectorate)
SPAS	Swedish Peace and Arbitration Society
SR	Social Responsibility
SSI	Statens strålskyddsinstitut (Swedish Radiation Protection Authority)
SSRO	Service, Support, Research and Others – a stakeholder group
UN	United Nations
UNIDO	United Nations Industrial Development Organization
WBCSD	World Business Council for Sustainable Development
WHO	World Health Organization
WP	Weight Project
WTO	World Trade Organization
WWF	World Wide Fund for Nature (World Wildlife Fund in North America)

Acknowledgements

This book is the result of continuous discussions about governance, democracy and organization among our colleagues at Stockholm Centre for Organizational Research, probably better known as Score. Our common interest in organization has contributed to our conviction that the phrase “from government to governance” connotes a displacement with very different democratic implications, which depend upon various ways of organizing and degrees of organization. This is what we aim to show in this book.

The book is a genuinely collective product. Throughout the process, the authors of the empirical chapters and our other colleagues at Score have been involved in discussions about the overall framing and conclusions. We owe special thanks to Rune Premfors and Nils Brunsson, who have provided valuable comments on several chapters.

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Göran Sundström, Linda Soneryd and Staffan Furusten
Stockholm, April 2009

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1. Democracy, governance and the problem of the modern actor

**Göran Sundström, Staffan Furusten and
Linda Soneryd**

It has often been said that modern democracies are becoming more complex, fragmented and multilayered. In recent decades we have witnessed decentralization in many organizations, increasingly complex social problems, accelerating internationalization, growing and more specialized public administration, increased demand for expertise, and rapid development of information and communication technologies. Several scholars have argued that with these changes power has slipped away from the political centre (the government) in several directions: upwards to international organizations (not least the European Union), downwards to local authorities and municipalities, inwards to semi-autonomous state agencies, and outwards to private organizations. As Rhodes (1994, 1997) would say, the state is ‘hollowing out’.

In societies with hollowed-out states, decision-making processes have taken new forms, and “from government to governance” has become a catch phrase (see e.g. Rhodes 1997; Pierre & Peters 2000; Kjær 2004; Marcussen & Torfing 2007). These changes mark a shift, or one could even say a displacement, from state-centred, authoritative and hierarchical to more society-centred, egalitarian and network-based forms of decision making; and they signal the dissolution of previously established boundaries between private and public organizations.

The extent to which displacement has actually occurred is widely debated (Hajer & Wagenaar 2003 p. 4). Yet it is clear that governance is an important concept in current research on state and public policies. We also believe that there is more governance today than was the case two or three decades ago, and that the focus on governance is increasing. Furthermore, the current discussion and debate includes not only researchers; today’s politicians and various types of practitioners also frequently discuss governance. And talk can be critical. As Hajer and Wagenaar point out (*ibid.*), the widely used language of governance can cause practitioners and researchers to ‘unlearn embedded intellectual reflexes and break out of tacit patterns of thinking’ and make them ‘rethink governing, politics and administration’. These phenomena provide strong rationale for studying governance structures.

As the use of governance structures has become more common in modern societies, a question has arisen about their democratic implications. Some researchers have argued that governance structures threaten fundamental democratic values (Sørensen & Torfing 2005; Hajer and Wagenaar 2003; Przeworski et al. 1999; Strom et al. 2003; Klijn and Skelcher 2007). The representative-democratic chain of power, it is argued, has weakened as governance structures become highly self-organizing and difficult to control from the centre; the state may no longer be seen as the strong coherent organization at the centre of society. Rather, the state is described as highly fragmented, with a plurality of autonomous agencies. And when these state agencies participate in decentred decision-making processes and have frequent exchanges with other types of organizations, the boundaries between the public and private spheres become increasingly blurred, hampering such basic values as representation, transparency and accountability.

This prediction of a weakened democracy has been discussed in the governance literature primarily from a top-down perspective. Few researchers have used a bottom-up, actor-driven perspective (for exceptions, see especially the work of Erik-Hans Klijn: e.g. Klijn 2008; Klijn et al. 2008). It is far from certain, we argue, that organizations participating in these highly self-organizing governance structures will passively accept the deterioration of essential democratic values. Such values may well become critical issues in policy discussions within governance structures. Thus we believe that within each policy field, different individuals participating in concrete decision-making processes will interpret, frame and negotiate the meaning of democracy in their own terms and make more or less conscious decisions about the democratic values to consider: how to balance those values, for instance, and how to trade them off against the values of the market and of administrative efficiency (see e.g. Thatcher and Rein 2004). This process, in turn, will trigger changes in the way the decision-making process is organized. Accordingly, democratic values that surface and are discussed during policy processes, and the way they are discussed, will largely determine the democratic content of the processes. In this sense, democracy is actually formed and reformed in ongoing practices.

It is unclear, however, how much democratic values are actually being discussed, and how and why they are discussed. There is a shortage of empirical studies addressing these questions. The aim of this study is to increase our understanding of the shaping of democracy in different types of organizational settings within governance structures. By studying contemporary decision-making processes in these structures, our goal was to locate and discuss important mechanisms behind the surfacing of democratic values in governance structures.

We address the research questions using a specific theoretical perspective:

the construction of the modern actor. Most governance scholars take their theoretical stand in the rational choice tradition and through ideas about the modern actor. This actor is ascribed certain capabilities, particularly the ability to articulate interests and preferences and to obtain perfect knowledge about future consequences of choice options. This means that the potential to uphold democratic values in decision-making processes is high; failure to do so is interpreted as a managerial problem such as lack of time or commitment, inappropriate working routines or misunderstandings.

We think that this view is much too simplistic to explain social behaviour. In contrast, we take the perspective of social constructivism, based upon the idea that the identities, interests and preferences of individuals, organizations and states are typically unclear and unstable (Berger & Luckmann 1966; Powell & DiMaggio 1991; March & Olsen 1976). We further assume that perfect knowledge is unattainable, because knowledge is ambiguous and contested (Jasanoff 2006; Haas 2004). Thus the potential for participants to uphold democratic values in decision-making processes is not high. And failure to uphold these values will not necessarily be seen as a managerial problem, but as a problem connected to the expectations for participants to act as modern actors.

THE AIM AND DESIGN OF THE STUDY

We undertook this study in order to increase our understanding of how and why various democratic values are discussed or not discussed in decision-making processes within governance structures. We pursue this question through a number of detailed empirical studies of decision-making processes within various policy fields in various organizational settings, in which, for example, standards are established, objectives formulated and priorities set. We have posed the following empirical questions to guide our studies.

- Which democratic values are discussed in the decision-making process?
- Who brings values to the scene?
- When do democratic values become an issue: at the beginning or end of the process?
- Are values perceived as contradictory and difficult to combine?
- How are value conflicts resolved?

The empirical studies presented in Chapters 2 to 8 are single case studies of longer or shorter decision-making processes in various organizational settings. They are critical cases, chosen because they exhibit basic characteristics of governance structures. Thus they all focus on decision-making processes that

occur at a considerable distance from the political centre and involve a number and variety of participants who have extensive exchanges with each other.

DEMOCRACY AND GOVERNANCE

In this section, we discuss how governance structures may challenge democratic values. We also highlight efforts made by governments in recent years to strengthen democracy. This review is intended to facilitate our understanding of the decision-making processes we have studied and to help us focus our analyses on the democratic values most likely to arise as issues in the process of our study.

In governance structures, policies are viewed as resulting from decentred cooperation among many types of organizations – public, private and voluntary (political, social and administrative), which interact on the basis of mutual dependencies, institutional incentives and shared conceptions that facilitate negotiations and joint decision making (Torfing 2007a p. 1). This cooperation is marked by rich and informal exchanges, which tend to blur traditional boundaries between politics and administration, administrative units and states, and public and private organizations (see e.g. Scharpf 1994; Djelic and Sahlin-Andersson 2006; Hall and Biersteker 2002; Slaughter 2005). Because of the collaborative character of the processes, the nature of the rules through which policies are expressed can change: traditional hard rules are giving way to soft rules (Mörth 2004).

Governance is often seen as a threat to democracy. One central idea within the governance perspective is the notion that the representative-democratic chain of power becomes weaker in governance structures, as they are seen as highly self-organizing and difficult to control from the centre. Rod Rhodes (1996) has even claimed that governance is ‘governing without government’. Not all governance scholars are prepared to concur with Rhodes’ extreme claim (see e.g. Pierre & Peters 2000; Kooiman 2003); many of them would argue that the state can no longer be viewed as the strong coherent organization in the centre, but merely as one organization among others. As Jacob Torfing says:

The state has gradually lost its status as the sovereign centre of politics. In many policy fields it has, at best, become *primus inter pares* in decentred networks of quasi-autonomous delivery agencies, interest organisations, private corporations, social movements, local citizen groups, and transnational organisations that are engaged in the formulation and implementation of public policy and governance. (Torfing 2007a p. 4)

The liberal-representative democratic model is based largely upon clarity in

political steering and control and upon rules and organizational boundaries, not least of which is the boundary between public and private organizations. Governance structures imply a more fragmented state, however, with a plurality of relatively autonomous agencies working in a largely uncoordinated way on various societal levels, thereby increasing the distance between politicians and civil servants (Jacobsson & Sundström 2009; Christensen and Lægreid 2006; Pollitt et al. 2004). And when these autonomous agencies participate in decentred decision-making processes and have frequent exchanges with other types of organizations, the boundaries between the public and private spheres become increasingly blurred (Dunn 1999; Hall & Biersteker 2002), and it becomes more difficult for politicians to define activities and formulate clear and stable goals for the agencies. It also becomes more difficult for politicians to delimit and control who does what and to assess if the measures taken have had the intended effect (de Bruijn 2002). Thus transparency and accountability problems arise (Behn 2001; Lewin 2007).

Although the state may have lost its status as the coherent sovereign centre of politics, it does not necessarily follow that the political centre has lost its power to control activities in governance structures. Several governance scholars prefer to talk about a shifting rather than a shrinking role for governments. Politicians can maintain the democratic chain of power, but in order to do so they must acknowledge the limitation of more traditional hierarchical steering and control methods and assume the role of 'meta-governors' (Jessop 2003; Sørensen 2006). This approach requires politicians to steer at arm's length by defining problems, creating incentive structures, mobilizing stakeholders, building networks, shaping identities and meanings, and other such actions. Thus governance networks need not be incompatible with representative democracy (Klijn and Skelcher 2007).

It is noteworthy that governments around the world have been trying to reinforce and strengthen hierarchical structures within the public sector. These efforts are reflected in titles like 'Back to the centre? Rebuilding the state' (Peters 2004); 'Investigating power at the centre of government' (Weller 2005); 'Hollowing out or filling in?' (Taylor 2000); and 'Joined-up government' (Bogdanor 2005). Such efforts to strengthen the centre have included attempts to identify responsible and accountable organizations by specifying and delimiting organizations and processes (Brunsson and Sahlin-Andersson 2000). Public organizations have been classified into units and subunits; "owners" of processes and results have been appointed; objectives and result requirements have been specified for each unit; systems for measuring and examining performances and results have been developed; and systems for quality assurance have been introduced (de Bruijn 2002; Radin 2006; Sundström 2006). This "managerialization" of the state is aimed at making public organizations more controllable from the top.

Various types of market mechanisms have been introduced in the public sector as another way of trying to strengthen the political centre (Brunsson and Olsen 1998). In the area of service provision, the most important mechanisms are outsourcing (competitive tendering and contracting out), Public-Private Partnership, and vouchers (Pollitt & Bouckaert 2004; OECD 2005 Chapter 5). Governments have also tried to change civil servants' role perceptions of both themselves and citizens. Thus civil servants should no longer act as stereotypically old and mossy bureaucrats, but as managers, modelled after the private sector, and citizens should be regarded as customers. From a liberal democratic point of view, this market turn is intended to strengthen democracy by unloading decisions and activities from the shoulders of politicians to those of civil servants, enabling politicians to concentrate on more important matters, by increasing pluralism, by empowering people to engage in governance networks, and by 'unleashing individual and collective energies, resources and ideas that have been suppressed by years of top-down government' (Torfing 2007 p. 91–92).

It appears, then, that governance structures threaten the democratic values of transparency, accountability and a weakened representative-democratic chain of power. The values of inclusion and representation are also threatened. These threats may be of particular interest to governance scholars who argue that assessments of governance structures should be based on both liberal-representative democracy and deliberative democracy, claiming that these two perspectives are necessary to capture the democratic potential of governance structures fully (Elster 1998; Hirst 1993; Sørensen & Torfing 2005; Hajer & Wagenaar 2003). It should also be noted that governments around the world have tried to strengthen democracy by increasing and intensifying the exchanges between the public and private sectors. Citizens have been given increased opportunities to express their opinions on public administration activities through surveys and interviews and through experiments with new forms of public participation. High hopes have been placed on the Internet; the creation of E-government is today a central ingredient within the public management policies of numerous states (6 2004; Rethemeyer 2007; Chadwick & May 2003; Hood and Margetts 2007). Former British Prime Minister Tony Blair, for example, strongly underlined this citizen orientation in his 1999 white paper, *Modernising Government* (Cabinet Office 1999 p. 16):

Rather than defending policies, government should lead a debate on improving them. This means developing new relationships between Whitehall, the devolved administrations, local government and the voluntary and private sectors; consulting outside experts, those who implement policy and those affected by it early in the policy making process so we can develop policies that are deliverable from the start.

The Swedish government, in its 2000 white paper, *An Administration in the Service of Democracy*, made similar statements (Government Office 2000 p. 10): ‘Public authorities should meet high standards for availability and compliance, be able to declare what services they offer and in what forms, and give citizens opportunities to dialogue and submit opinions on public activities that concern them.’ (This and all other translations in this chapter are ours.) It should also be noted that the Swedish government has supported this citizen orientation with a new “democracy policy”. In its most recent democracy bill of 2002, the government declared that public activities should be organized and evaluated not only from the traditional representative democratic model, but from other democratic models as well. Thus within the boundaries of representative democracy, the government advocates ‘a participatory democracy with deliberative characteristics’ (Government Bill 2001/2002: 27).

As Christopher Pollitt (2003 p. 52) argues, this citizen orientation, which can be observed in various countries, evokes a different picture of the state than that evoked by both old and new public management policies:

Government is now a good neighbour – someone who informs you about new developments that might affect you, cooperates with you, enables you to realize your own projects, supports you when you are in difficulty, learns from your experience – but hardly ever, it seems, orders you about or invokes the law to force you to do something you don’t want to do.

Thus some hopes are ascribed to various deliberative arrangements designed to strengthen democracy. Deliberative democracy, however, places extensive demands on inclusion and representation (Gastil and Levine 2005; Levine et al. 2005). According to this model, democratic legitimacy is attained if all citizens that are affected by a public policy are given the opportunity to participate effectively in the making of the policy through thoughtful deliberation. Deliberation is thus a discursive approach to decision making in which citizens collaborate in an open and noncoercive environment, identifying and discussing public problems and their possible solutions. This type of group reflection should ultimately result in consensus over the best course of action (Habermas 1996), or at least in decisions based on mutual understanding of the participants’ positions and values (Dryzek 2000).

There is one difficulty inherent in deliberative decision making: deciding whom to include in the deliberation. How much and in what ways must a citizen be affected by a policy in order to be included (Noble & Jones 2006)? And who should decide on the appropriate questions about inclusion? Another problem is that deliberative groups can easily turn into competing and closed elites (Rhodes 2007). Group members often tend to develop a common language and shared understandings of how things should be done: shared

administrative expertise. In order for one's voice to be heard, it is important to know the appropriate words and acronyms to use, whom to talk to, which meetings to attend, and what has been said and tried before (Thedvall 2006). It can be difficult for newcomers who do not know the history of a group or a network to enter it and participate effectively in its discussions.

Another problem concerns size. In modern societies, many people are affected by numerous policies that require them to form groups and appoint group representatives. Not all citizens have the same capability, however, of forming or representing groups. Some groups and organizations do not enjoy the financial resources that allow them to participate actively in all relevant activities, and some lack the capacity to define and express clear and well-anchored interests (Halpin 2006; Rhodes 2007). The risk does exist, therefore, that decision making in decentred groups or networks will give structural advantages to some interests and greater power to the already powerful (Greenaway et al. 2007; Klijn & Skelcher 2007).

Not all individuals and organizations have the same incentive to participate in policy making. Deciding on rules often entails negotiations, compromises and some degree of steering and control. This can be a difficult reality for some groups or organizations to accept, because it infringes on their autonomy and identity, both of which are central to 'the modern organization' (Mörth & Sahlin-Andersson 2006). It can be highly frustrating for competing firms to cooperate with each other and to try to reach agreement on rules; and it can be problematic for interest organizations to cooperate with big business and governments, given that they often see their primary task as criticizing them.

Whether the rules decided upon are soft or hard may also determine the incentive for individuals or organizations to participate in policy making. Soft rules such as standards, goals and advice depend upon voluntariness; because they lack explicit sanctions, the actors are free to follow them or not (Brunsson & Jacobsson 2000; Mörth 2004), allowing the rule makers to escape demands for accountability. On the other hand, lack of accountability can render agreed-upon rules toothless and ineffectively implemented, leading to stronger demands for rule makers in governance structures to claim responsibility for the rules. And there is an increasing number of organizations in the world, such as Greenpeace, Amnesty International and Transparency International (Dahl 2007) that are designed to monitor adherence to soft rules. Furthermore, accountability is, in itself, a highly institutionalized idea in contemporary society (Przeworski et al. 1999; Boström and Garsten 2008); citizens, politicians, and various organizations want to know who is responsible for what, and they want to be able to control activities. Studies within the so-called post-bureaucratic school of organizational theory also demonstrate that processes which include several interdependent organizations – processes in which people employed in other organizations can easily pursue the regular tasks in