

The future of the welfare state: paths of social policy innovation between constraints and opportunities

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Civil Dialogue as Inclusion and Incorporation

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INTRODUCTION

In contemporary societies, lower levels of voting and involvement in political parties make politicians anxious about a 'decline of representative democracy'. Throughout Europe we see the emergence of new discourses on citizens' involvement and a search for new forms of civic participation beyond representative democracy, often under the heading 'civil dialogue' (Grote & Gbikpi 2002; Fung 2004; Fung & Wright 2003).

The European Union (EU) has made 'participatory democracy' a key objective, aiming at an open, transparent and regular dialogue with citizens, representative associations and civil society (Kohler-Koch & Rittberger 2007; Smismans 2003; EC 2001). The proposed Lisbon Treaty introduces provisions for 'Citizen's initiatives' to overcome the barriers between European citizens and Brussels decision-makers. The European Parliament has installed a model of a Citizen's Agora, bringing together citizens, civil society representatives and elected politicians debating key challenges for the EU. Similarly, national governments are establishing new forums and channels for participation and interest articulation, including not only long-term actors (e.g. social partner organizations), but also self-help groups, user-organizations, community based organizations and other civil society actors speaking on behalf of marginalized groups (Newman *et al* 2004; Barnes *et al* 2007).

The introduction of new forums and channels of participation – at supra-national, national and local levels – appears to give civil society actors a wider scope for voice and co-determination (Schmitter 2002). Not only does the establishment of these forums promise to recognize issues and considerations that until now have been disregarded in governance processes but also to address existing disparities of power between social actors. In sum, emerging forms of participatory governance seem to modify the broader field of 'representation' (Fraser 2008). First, this modification might be achieved by changing the framing of issues (symbolic representation), i.e. by reducing the likelihood that decision-rules and practices effectively exclude the concerns, requirements and demands of poor and disadvantaged groups (structural exclusion). Second, being included in participatory governance arrangements could prevent that these groups are left voiceless and outside the closed spaces of bounded politics (Fraser 2007: 313-319; 2008: 144-147).

We have, however, limited research-based knowledge about the extent to which this potential for inclusion is realized in practice. The scope for voice, participation and influence as experienced by members of the marginal groups may be more uncertain and ambiguous than suggested by the stated aims of the arrangements for participatory governance. We lack knowledge about under what conditions this uncertainty and ambiguity may be reduced. Although participatory governance may in theory be based on a partnership between equals, civil society actors may experience that they are not recognized as equal partners by politicians or government officials. Parity of participation is likely to presuppose a fair balance of knowledge, bureaucratic skills and self-confidence. Participation in civil dialogue may disempower rather than empower, unless arrangements for participatory governance involve measures to stimulate capacity-building and joint policy-articulation among civil society actors. More generally, we may ask whether emerging forms of participatory

governance may function as means of ‘incorporation’ (subordination, control and discipline) of organized civil society. Will participation undermine civil society actors’ autonomy and capacity for criticism and contestation, rather than include them as equal partners? Is organized civil society co-opted to legitimate or implement public policies or provide services on behalf of governments? Is the state renouncing its ambition to exert control, or is it just doing it in new ways?

We approach these issues by analyzing two examples of civil dialogue in the Nordic countries. In 2007 the Norwegian government established a twin-model of a ‘Contact Committee between the Government and Organizations of Poor and Disadvantaged Citizens’ and a publically supported ‘Collaborative Forum’ of such organizations. In Sweden, a ‘User Committee for Social and Welfare Issues’ was initiated a few years earlier. Based on interviews with stakeholders, participation and observation at meetings and analytical reading of key documents, we investigate the processes leading up to the establishment of these arrangements and participants’ experiences with them so far. Here we want to highlight two interrelated issues; (i) under what circumstances are arrangements for participatory governance most likely to give civil society actors enlarged scope for real participation and voice? (ii) What practical significance or outcome does involvement in participatory governance arrangements have from the point of view of civil society actors? We begin, however, by briefly reviewing earlier literature about the meaning of participatory.

LITERATURE REVIEW: (1) PARTICIPATORY GOVERNANCE

The shift from ‘government’ to ‘governance’ has attracted much academic and political interest over the last decade (e.g. Pierre & Peters 2000; Newman 2001 & 2005). Many authors have argued that national governments’ decision-making capacity has been circumscribed by new international regulations, stemming from the EU and other international organizations. Economic globalization, the construction of an internal market within the EU and labour market mobility across borders have made it more difficult for national governments to make autonomous decisions and retain capacity to enforce decisions taken. National governments appear to be less capable of determining social development within their national boundaries, a symptom generally described as a ‘hollowing out’ of the state (Kooiman 2002). This analysis suggests a flow of authority away from traditional institutions of government: ‘upwards’ in terms of greater significance of trans-national and supra-national decision-making and regulatory structures and processes, and ‘downwards’ in terms of greater role of regional and local authorities, actors and decision-making bodies (Daly 2003). Moreover, governments are increasingly working in networks and developing joined-up services in partnership with different societal actors for the purpose of effective resource allocation and conflict containment (White 2008).

The term ‘participatory governance’ refers to a relocation of authority from traditional political institutions to new arenas for political participation (Schmitter 2002; Heinelt 2007; Greven 2007). Involved are also innovations in decision-making processes, i.e. the ways in

which governments engage diverse societal actors in discussion and deliberation about policy development at large, policy implementation and policy delivery (e.g. Grote & Gbikpi 2002). In the literature, participatory governance is often linked to ideals about deliberation or collaboration, i.e. horizontal relationships between equals. But relocation of power does not replace but rather complement preexisting hierarchal systems of decision-making, leading to complex dynamics of conflict and collaboration.

To unpack the notion of ‘participatory governance’ four questions are critical: who has the right to participate; how are decisions made; what degree(s) of influence do participants have (and on what); and what capacities are needed to participate. Schmitter has offered a general definition of participatory governance: ‘the regular and guaranteed presence when making binding decisions of representatives of those collectivities that will be affected by the policy adopted’ (Schmitter 2002:56). This definition highlights an important issue in any analysis of participatory governance: which actors (individuals or organizations) are entitled to participate? Few participatory governance arrangements are open for everyone. Instead participants are expected to have resources or positions relevant to the problem to be discussed or solved. For instance, citizenship is a key resource or position giving the right to participate in national political elections and referenda. However, other types of positions are more exclusive.

TABLE 1: CRITERIA FOR PARTICIPATION

Positions	Necessary resources or qualities
Citizens	Participation based on the rights (and duties) attached to membership in a national political community
Residents	Participation based on spatial location, providing citizens <i>and</i> denizens with a participatory status
Experts	Participation based on knowledge, i.e. persons or organizations that have certain information or skills in resolving problems
Owners	Participation based on who owns the property that will be affected by the issue in question
Beneficiaries	Participation based on all those that will be affected by the issue or policy measure in question (i.e. beneficiaries as well as victims).
Spokespersons	Participation based on all those who have an interest, show sufficient interest and claim participation based upon some kind of constituency.
Representatives	Participation based upon governments accreditation, i.e. those organizations that have a recognized right to represent a certain group in society.

Source: Schmitter (2002: 62-3)

Each of these positions comes with different rights and duties, expectations and requirements. In practice, however, participatory governance tends to include several categories at the same time, e.g. mixing experts, owners and beneficiaries to discuss and debate a given issue. Moreover, single actors (individuals or organizations) tend to occupy several types of positions. For instance, in a local community project drawing on participatory governance

arrangements, an actor might very well be involved as a resident but also be a beneficiary of the measure in question and possibly even a recognized spokesperson of persons living in that area. Multiple positioning might be an advantage to the extent one can draw on different resources, experiences or competences in efforts to impact and influence public authorities. Other actors' framing may, however, force a person into one exclusive category and denying him or her recognition of qualities and resources that he or she might otherwise possess. For instance, a person may be pressed into the role of representing 'beneficiaries' while his or her expertise as a person with higher education or even experience from research is disregarded.

One possible reason for the optimistic purport of much recent discussions of participatory governance may be their framing in terms of ideals of deliberative democracy. According to these ideals all political discussion should take place in public, allowing open and unrestricted exchange of views. The best argument should be the basis for jointly binding agreements and action. In other words, the position or background of the person arguing should have no significance. All parties must comply with generally shared norms of rationality, fairness and social justice. Discussions about participatory governance arrangements tend to be prescriptive, seeing them as forums where the aim should be to make decisions by consensus among participants. According to Ansell and Gash (2007) participatory governance implies collaboration between the actors involved, based on mutual respect and recognition of each other's right to present arguments.

Such ideals are hard to live up to in practical governance arrangements, but may still be important as frames of reference for assessments. Unsurprisingly, such assessments have demonstrated a gap between the stated objectives of participatory governance and the actual experience of citizens and civil society actors. Assessments often refer to Arnstein's 'ladder of participation', arguing that participation often stops with a form of 'tokenistic participation'. Such participation means that individuals and organizations have the right to listen as well as a right to be heard, yet without any guarantee that their views are noticed or will have practical impact. Rarely, one can find cases of 'delegated power' and 'citizen control', i.e. situations in which citizens – or organizations representing them – have a real influence, for instance by obtaining the majority of decision-making 'seats', or full operational control of a programme (Arnstein 1969). Scholars emphasize that the aspirations behind deliberative democracy in general and participatory governance in particular tend to overlook what it takes to be a participant and that different participants have different resources, skills and capacities (e.g. White 2000).

We often assume that poor and disadvantaged citizens and organizations representing them almost per definition command less resources and capacities than their counterparts from public authorities or professional agencies. This assumption may or may not be valid in the concrete case. To the extent that we find such disparity, it is likely to increase the strain associated with the participation. A deficit of knowledge, bureaucratic competence or skills in arguing or forming alliances with others may lead to uncertainty and uneasiness with the situation. Civil society organizations representing marginalized groups have their main experiences from acting outside formal political institutions. Becoming involved in participatory governance arrangements and claiming recognition and respect from one's

counterparts require a shift of focus and a sensitivity to the specific demands associated with operating in this new context, e.g. taking a co-responsibility for reaching agreements and achieving practical results. Yet, the better representatives master this shift and difference in demands, the greater the risk of tension within the organizations, especially in relation to 'grass-root' members without experience from the participatory governance context.

If participation is an ideal and something that governments have the right to expect from their citizens and beneficiaries, have governments a corresponding obligation to facilitate capacity-building among citizens? This issue is often raised within developmental studies, pointing to the process that needs to take place before or as part of the establishment of participatory governance arrangements. To what extent can governments take the existence of a collective identity or even an association among the citizens they want to involve in such arrangements? Should governments actively stimulate the formation of such collective identity or association? Should governments support initiatives to raise self-confidence, competence and skills among marginalized groups to enable them to deal with counterparts with greater resources than themselves (Coelho & Favareto 2008)? The answers to these questions will influence the extent to which participatory governance contributes to greater parity of participation and power.

LITERATURE REVIEW: (2) POWER AND PARTICIPATORY GOVERNANCE

As we have seen, discussions of participatory governance tend to imply that it is possible to establish arenas where the actors treat each other as equals, where the best argument wins and serves as basis for jointly binding agreements. A further implication may be a bracketing or even denial of conflicting interests and power differences between the actors involved. Obviously such underlying assumptions have been challenged, for instance by the argument that the broader context of societal relations of power will necessarily constrain the interaction in these arenas and their practical impact (Barnes et al 2007; Swyngedouw 2005). Whether this argument is devastating in the sense that participatory governance is doomed to result in tokenistic or 'phony' participation (CPPP 2000) depends on what understanding of power relations we take as our frame of reference.

First, in terms of Weber's theory of domination and authority politicians and government officials involved in participatory governance arrangements appear in general to be more powerful than the representatives of organized civil society. Since politicians and officials exercise legitimate power (authority) on behalf of and through the state, they can expect, and if necessary, enforce obedience and compliance from citizens and their organizations. Having gained their positions through democratic elections politicians can claim to represent the 'will' of the electorate. Officials enjoy delegated authority, based on mandates from politicians and existing legislation. This authority is strengthened to the extent officials are perceived to have technical expertise and adhere to norms of rationality, effectiveness and accountability (Weber 1978: ch. III).

Yet, it is not quite clear how politicians and officials can use their general authority in the context of participatory governance arrangements. Such arrangements are based on ideas about a mutual exchange of information and opinions with the aim of identifying potential zones of common interests, agreements and joint action. Rather than being told what to think or do civil society representatives are participating in such arrangements to change existing government policy, even if in small ways, through discussion and negotiation. The desired changes are likely to concern combinations of ‘redistribution’, ‘recognition’ and ‘representation’ (Fraser 2008). On the basis of their authoritative positions government representatives can promise to change existing policy but also present demands about what action the organizations should commit themselves to, in return for such changes. To the extent politicians and officials only did the latter; i.e. require obedience and compliance, the very notion of participatory governance would quickly break down.

Second, if we adopt a Coleman-inspired perspective on power as an aspect of exchange relations the important question becomes whether civil society representatives control resources or events that are of interest or value for politicians and government officials, i.e. resources and events that they cannot gain in other ways than through the involvement of civil society representatives (Coleman 1990: 132-133). Politicians and officials are obviously controlling resources and events of value for civil society organizations and their constituencies (change of access to financial resources, services, housing or rules and regulations, etc). More significantly, we expect that civil society representatives may control three types of resources and events of considerable interest for politicians and officials; (a) detailed knowledge of the situation, needs and world-view of the citizens they speak on behalf of, (b) ideas and proposals for more relevant and appropriate policies, given (a), and (c) possibilities to question or even undermine the legitimacy of politicians and officials, and potentially threaten their ability to uphold current positions¹. Obviously all three types of resources depend on the existence of a fairly well-functioning mass democracy, including freedom of expression and critical media, and a political culture where politicians need to demonstrate commitment and ability to improving the situation of the least well off in society. Given that these conditions are fulfilled, power may potentially be more equally distributed between the actors involved in participatory governance than a simple Weberian understanding of power suggests.

Both social theory and empirical research do, however, indicate that more powerful actors may seek counter-strategies to diminish the uncertainty or potential vulnerability created by the strategies of the relatively less powerful. One possibility is to achieve some form of ‘cooptation’ in the sense clarified by Selznick (1949: 13); ‘the process of absorbing new elements into the leadership or policy-determining structure of an organization [e.g.

¹ An illustration of civil society organizations’ potential impact of the governments’ credibility is the ‘poverty camp’ a coalition of Norwegian organizations of poor and disadvantaged citizens set up outside the conference hotel where the three parties behind the incoming Centre-Left government negotiated about their joint political declaration over some weeks in the autumn of 2005. During the election campaign all the three parties had pledged to eradicate poverty in Norway and the organizations wanted to ensure that the new government following up this pledge in their declaration and practical policy. The camp received a lot of media attention and spokespersons of the campers were regularly interviewed in newspapers and national television.

government] as a means of averting threats to its stability or existence'. Selznick mentions that involvement of elements reflecting the attitudes or possessing the confidence of relevant publics – even normally disenfranchised groups – may lend respectability or legitimacy to 'organs of control'. By inviting external critics to join government-dominated bodies and exposing them to expectations about collegiality, consensus and shared responsibility for decisions governments may partly reduce public debate, partly be better prepared to meet critical views. Alternatively, governments may seek to control which organizations become represented in participatory governance arrangements by selective recruitment strategies and marginalization of the most critical opponents of government policy (e.g. out-defining the 'less serious' or 'unrepresentative'). In this way the government may also promote 'opportunity hoarding', i.e. increasing inequalities among civil society organizations by allowing some of them to accumulate financial resources, prestige, public visibility, memberships of public bodies and influence on public policy at the expense of other organizations (Tilly 1978). By exploiting organizations' perceived need to protect and strengthen their own position, governments may create a 'divide and rule' situation.

Third, some understandings of power relations question the fruitfulness of seeing power as possessed by particular actors or residing in positions. Such alternative understandings of power are in particular associated with Foucault and the Post-Foucauldian strand in social theory. A key idea here is that power is diffused throughout social relations and all activities of society, rather than being located in special places or exercised by any particular actor or ruler. Power is internalized in the social organization in general, interwoven in the way in which society operates. Society's affairs are regulated where they take place, instead of regulation emanating from a distance or in a coordinated way; hence power becomes ubiquitous. To the extent that power is disciplinary, it is not mainly because it punishes but rather because it promotes well-disciplined citizens and workers who are prompt and obedient. At the same time Foucault claims that disciplinary power and resistance always go together. The development of new power relations or forms of discipline and control does also provide spaces for reactions against it. Resistances are also distributed, mobile and transitory, and of varying density. In sum, Foucault sees power and resistance as dispersed, omnipresent, multiple, positive, productive and relational (Foucault 1980: 142; 1990: 92-97).

In our context, this understanding appears to suggest that participatory governance arrangements may be analyzed as measures to exercise disciplinary power over the civil society organizations and their members but that such arrangements – as other power relations – also offer opportunities for resistance and opposition. During his later years, Foucault seems to emphasize more strongly the ambiguity of power relations than in his earlier work on discipline, punishment and control. Moreover, nobody knows exactly what Foucault himself would have made of the current notions of participatory governance. In 1981 he argued that under the appropriate circumstances the governed might work together with government, without any assumption of simple compliance or co-responsibility, on actual problems of policy: 'To work with a government implies neither subjection nor global acceptance. One can simultaneously work and be restive. I think the two go together' (Gordon 1991: 48).

After Foucault's death a number of scholars have built on his work and in particular aimed to develop his concept of 'governmentality' (e.g. Marston & McDonald 2006; Dean 1999; Rose 1999). Key ideas here are that contemporary governance arrangements need to promote agency (individual or organizational), opening up for a new set of technologies that define them as prudent actors, able to plan and exercise responsibility ('responsibilization'). For instance, citizens are discursively constituted as responsible agents, encouraged to be capable to anticipate and handle social risks of different kinds. Similarly, the growing complexity in society demands that governments can only control the conduct of non-governmental organizations if their leaders operate under self-perception that they are autonomous, able to pursue their goals, make choices and influence how the decisions of others affect their affairs. Public authorities interact with non-governmental organizations using methods such as contracting, consulting, negotiating or creating partnerships. Governments regulate organizations' behavior by setting 'norms, standards, benchmarks, performance indicators, quality controls and best practice standards, to monitor, measure and render calculable the performance of these various agencies' (Dean 1999: 165). These processes are generally depicted as 'governance at a distance', i.e. states govern through, and not in spite of, the autonomous choices of non-governmental actors (Rose 2000: 324). Arguably, these analyses imply a stronger emphasis on the disciplinary function of government arrangements like participatory governance than at least some readings of Foucault's later writings and statements suggest.

All in all, existing theorizing and empirical research around participatory governance point in different directions. Some parts of the work carried out in this field are fairly positive and optimistic in their assessments of participatory governance arrangements, maintaining that such arrangements demonstrate both substantial potentials and actual achievements. Other parts of existing work are much more doubtful and critical, especially of the practical results of such arrangements, arguing that there is a considerable gap between the stated goals and outcomes, or that the arrangements serve other functions or objectives than official goals indicate. In our view there is a need for more theoretically informed empirical studies to make further progress in this field and clarify whether, and if so under what circumstances or conditions, participatory governance can live up to its promises. As a contribution to meeting this need, the rest of the paper will present and discuss a comparative case study of participatory governance arrangements, one from Sweden and one from Norway.

CASE STUDY: TWO PARTICIPATORY GOVERNANCE ARRANGEMENTS

The *Swedish* 'User Committee on Social and Welfare Issues' (hereafter 'the User Committee') was established in 2003. Low public visibility and little recognition characterize the process up to the establishment, except for those directly involved. Although user involvement and broader participation were key issues in the general public debate and even of some concern for the Social Democratic government (in office until 2006), the User Committee was and still is generally unknown, also for many organizations working in the field. One possible explanation is that the User Committee had a link to the EU open method

of coordination (OMC) process on Social Inclusion (Johansson 2007; Jacobsson & Johansson 2009), another fairly unknown process in the Swedish political debate. However, this OMC process had key relevance for the sake of this 'User Committee', above all as it constituted the inspiration to for civil society organizations working against poverty and social exclusion to form a network, for information exchange and joint efforts to influence the OMC process on social inclusion (hereafter 'the Network').

The Network established itself as a collective actor for a spectrum of national organizations that previously worked separately or with different agendas. Top officials from a broad range of organizations (from the Swedish movement of people with disabilities, anti-poverty organizations, religious organizations and communities, user organizations, client organizations, social economy organizations, immigrant organizations and ethnic associations) became parts of the Network. For strategic reasons key actors decided that membership in the Network should be kept on informal basis, i.e. that top officials from different organizations did not need to have official approval or a mandate from their organizations, as a way of avoiding complex and time-consuming nomination procedures.

During its first years the Network lobbied extensively to change the ways in which the government 'spoke with' sector representatives. The Network proved successful in these efforts as the Swedish government in 2003 initiated a forum for information exchange and consultations with user organizations, aiming to highlight the perspective of poor and socially excluded people and to strengthen user involvement and influence related to the formulation and implementation of National Action Plans on Poverty and Social Exclusion. According to Network members, the idea to establish this forum – what became the User Committee – originated among Network members and was then picked up by officials, proposing them to the Minister.

Anyway, the Minister in charge played a key role in establishing the User Committee, and he had his own reasons for including organizations working against poverty and social exclusion. His main ambition was to institutionalize the contact with organizations having 'direct and personal experiences of people being socially excluded, poor and marginalized', as a way to get information and knowledge on what took place 'at the ground'. His key concern was to have face-to-face discussions with key stakeholders 'working on the field' regarding the effects of public interventions and upcoming social problems. Another objective was also 'to give associations a forum to express ideas and proposals', and an arena for him 'to test ideas and proposals before presenting them to the parliament', i.e. to limit the risks for political failures and set-backs (interview 2007).

This example illustrates how different actors may have contrasting views on what positions should be represented in participatory governance arrangement and what purposes such arrangements should serve. The Minister saw participation from beneficiaries and possibly experts as more important than involvement of the kind of top spokespersons that the Network was comprised of. When the election of representatives to the User Committee' was handed over to the Network, it proved a difficult task to solve. Several organizations wanted to join the User Committee, seeing it as a forum of direct contact with the government and the Minister. Yet, the Network needed to recruit persons or organizations to fulfill the official

requirements for delegates to the User Committee. The selection of delegates caused some tensions within the Network. To become a delegate to the User Committee one had to fulfill a long list of criteria, such as having the ability to express the voice of users and their organizations vis-à-vis the Ministry in a critical and constructive manner; experiences of working in organizations with socially and economically vulnerable (at grass-root level) and capability to contribute to the committee's role as strengthening user involvement in the completion of the National Action Plan. The Network also emphasized that delegates had to include people from women and ethnic groups and the Ministry also required an equal gender composition (Minutes Network meeting 28th of August, 2003). The final list of delegates comprised a mix of positions; as experts, beneficiaries and spokespersons.

After a complex process of clarification, the Network decided that the Committee should include representatives from church organizations; disability organizations; social economy organizations; immigrant organizations; organizations for homeless people; and the client movement umbrella organization. After the User Committee started its work delegates have reported confusion whether they represent the Network, their own organization, a specific group of users or just themselves having a background as users. Others claimed that they firstly represented a group of users and secondly their organization, and not the Network at all. This uncertainly demonstrates one of the dilemmas in participatory governance arrangements, i.e. between representing a broader collective (in this case the Network) and a narrower constituency. Some members of the Network have responded to this situation by strategically nominating delegates to the Committee on the basis of personal affiliation and ties, rather than any kind of informal membership in the Network.

Turning to the *Norwegian* case we will see that the issue of membership of the participatory governance arrangement was solved in a different way. First, key actors in the Norwegian process spent more time and attention on clarifying what kind of forum for civil dialogue one needed. Second, the government largely left the decisions about recruitment of representatives from organizations of poor and disadvantaged citizens to a major non-governmental actor involved in servicing such organizations.

Norwegian governments' efforts to develop new and more effective strategies to combat poverty were the broader background for the search for good models of civil dialogue in this field. Since 2001 both Centre-Right and Centre-Left coalitions expressed ambition to enhance cooperation with civil society organizations to find appropriate and user-responsive policies. While the Centre-Right government (2001-2005) emphasized cooperation with non-governmental organizations engaged in social work more broadly (St.meld. nr. 6 2002-2003), the subsequent Centre-Left government (from 2005) focused on strengthening the dialogue with organizations of poor and disadvantaged marginalized groups (AID 2006a & 2006b).

The Norwegian case demonstrates an interesting U-turn in the process of developing a workable arrangement for civil dialogue, including who the participants in this participatory governance arrangement should be. Early in the process, politicians and senior officials in the Ministry of Labor and Inclusion were impressed by what came to be called the 'Danish model'. Denmark has since 2002 had a 'Council for Socially Marginalized People' (CSMP 2008). This council aims at developing more effective measures to improve the situation of

the most disadvantaged, including facilitating the representation of disadvantaged groups. However, this council has a strong participation of professional experts and providers, both public and private, and a more limited involvement of persons with experience as socially excluded and users of services. The Council had achieved a high profile in Denmark, through its numerous and thorough proposals for reforms in different areas of public provisions for disadvantaged persons.

Key officials became gradually less convinced about the desirability of the Danish model, being concerned about what appeared to be the experts' dominance of the council. These officials wanted to give priority to how an arrangement for dialogue and consultation could give representatives of poor and disadvantaged groups a more prominent role, promote collaboration between the organizations, facilitate their voice and contribute to capacity-building among the organizations. These judgments and priorities corresponded to the views among several organizations, not the least within the Welfare Alliance, an umbrella organization for and of poor and disadvantaged people. The Alliance is a member of the European Anti-Poverty Network (EAPN 2008) and key activists in the Alliance had worked in EAPN's Brussels Secretariat and participated in EAPN projects. Consequently, these activists had first-hand knowledge about the EAPN's experience with dialogue and consultations with the Commission and also detailed knowledge about the successful models of contact and collaboration between the government and poor and disadvantaged people's organizations in other parts of Europe. The Welfare Alliance used the experience and knowledge to substantiate their demands for more regular and closer forms of dialogue and consultation in Norway.

In the end, the Norwegian government opted for a 'beneficiary'-oriented model resting on three different elements: first, a 'Contact Committee' with representatives of the government and organizations of poor and disadvantaged groups of citizens; second a 'Collaborative Forum' of capacity-building, cooperation and joint policy articulation between organizations and groups representing poor and disadvantaged groups, and third the 'Battery' – a service office for self-help under the Church City Mission – in the role of secretariat and provider of practical support, assistance and backup for the Forum, facilitating organizational development and training and stimulating agreements on joint policy positions and demands on the part of the associations and spokespersons of poor and disadvantaged citizens. The Battery had been in operation for three-four years and enjoyed wide trust and acceptance among groups of poor and disadvantaged citizens, especially in the capital, Oslo. The key actors within the Battery do also participate in the meetings for the Contact Committee. Arguably, the Norwegian model is much more developed than the Swedish model, and also much more in the hands of the organizations involved.

Interestingly, the selection of members of the Contact Committee and Collaborative Forum from organizations of poor and disadvantaged citizens was not a significant issue in the planning and implementation stage. Basically, the Battery nominated members to the Collaborative Forum and the Ministry accepted that these organizations send one representative each to the meetings of the Contact Committee. Around ten organizations have been involved in the Collaborative Forum and the turnover of organizations since the start has

been almost nil. The ten organizations span positions as poor (and beneficiaries of public income support), drug users, ex-prisoners, victims of debt problems, alternative entrepreneurs, self-defined 'losers in society', survivors of child care measures in addition to the Welfare Alliance. Ethnic minorities are currently not represented in the Forum.

ORGANIZATIONS' SCOPE FOR VOICE AND INFLUENCE

As emphasized earlier in the paper, ideas about deliberation and full participation have played an important role in discussions on participatory governance. In the cases studied here organizations acting on behalf of poor and disadvantaged citizens have to different degrees been recognized as participants on equal terms with politicians and government officials.

As we have seen, the Norwegian government decided to establish a civil dialogue arrangement in the form of a Contact Committee, but with the two important additional elements of (i) a Collaborative Forum for organizations of poor and disadvantaged citizens, and (ii) additional financial support to the Battery to enable it to provide practical support and training for representatives of the organizations. The Contact Committee had its first meeting 17 April 2008, chaired by the Minister. The Battery arranged the first two-day training workshop 10-12 June 2008, with participants from twenty organizations and groups, facilitated and coordinated by the Battery. Both arrangements were successful and encouraging from the participants' point of view.

The Contact Committee has met three times since the summer 2008 (i.e. during autumn 2008 and spring and early summer 2009). In all three cases the organizations had preparatory meetings in the Collaborative Forum, discussing the items on the agenda and seeking to agree on the issues and demands they were to prioritize at the meeting with the Minister in the Contact Committee. The Battery has facilitated these meetings, giving advice on how to have a productive, effective and focused process of exchange and reach clear conclusions. Through the Battery, the Collaborative Forum has been able to propose items for the agenda for the meetings in the Contact Committee.

Judged on the basis of the minutes from the meetings in the Contact Committee, information and self-presentation from the individual organizations took up a substantial part of the time at the first two meetings of the Committee. One reason could be the Minister who played a main role in the process leading up to the establishment of the Contact Committee and the Collaborative Forum was transferred to another Ministry and replaced by new Minister. The latter obviously needed some time to familiarize himself with the model and develop ownership to it. Another reason might be that challenges related to the implementation of a new integrated Labour and Welfare Administration took up a lot of the Ministry's attention in the autumn 2008. The two first meetings of the Contact Committee discussed some of these challenges, e.g. delays in payments. However, attempts from the individual organization to hoard opportunities, dominate and make their voice heard, i.e. compete rather collaborate; do *not* seem to have been an obstacle. On the contrary, available evidence suggests that the preparatory meetings and support structures have ensured that the organizations have met

well-prepared, acting in a coordinated manner and in line with their jointly agreed positions, at the meetings in the Contact Committee.

At the last meeting so far, in June 2009, three of the organizations gave presentations about ways in which they could become more directly engaged as partners in measures to assist individual members to return to work. The purpose would be that the individual to greater extent should be heard in the planning process and receive relevant forms of assistance and support. In general, the Minister and key officials reacted positively to these aspirations from the organizations. At the same time they also pointed out that the complexity of the rules for public procurement and contracting with private providers of services meant that few organizations would be able to take on such roles on their own. However, both the Minister and top officials were careful to acknowledge the unique insights and competence of the organizations. They also emphasized that Norwegian municipalities and the Labour and Welfare Administration ought to collaborate with the organizations about practical measures for the benefit of the individual user.

However since the Norwegian arrangements become operative as recently as 2008 it is still too early to make a complete analysis about what scope for participation they provide. So far the organizations appear to be satisfied with the work of the Battery within the framework of the Collaborative Forum and new organizations want to become included in the Forum. Some of the organizations have entered into closer cooperation on specific issues and events, despite earlier disagreements and differences on ideological issues. These organizations have for instance agreed to arrange joint training courses and form tactical alliances to promote the interests of their overlapping constituencies.

Similarly, it is still too early to assess what influence on government policy the organizations achieve through their participation in the Contact Committee. To the meeting in February 2009, the Minister invited the organizations to present specific proposals for the coming state budget (to be finally decided by the parliament in late autumn 2009). Some of the demands of the organizations imply increased public spending on cash benefits and services (or in some cases; a change of priorities for such spending). The Minister did not make any commitments to the list of specific demands presented by the organizations but promised that the government would take them into consideration. For instance, one of demands was that the government should introduce social insurance coverage of expenses for dental care in order to diminish existing social inequalities in dental health.

A first moment of truth for this and other demands will be when the government presents its budget bill in early October 2009. A second moment of truth will be which demands that are still in the final budget decided by the parliament later in the autumn. Especially as Norway will have a General Election in September 2009 it is not obvious that a majority of the representatives of the 'Storting' will accept all the budget lines proposed by the current government.

If hardly any of the demands of the organizations survive this process the result is likely to be disappointment and doubts about the value of the Contact Committee on the part of the organizations, unless the government manages to accommodate other of the organizations'

concerns to a significant extent. Representatives of the organizations have appreciated the official recognition and the increased visibility in the public domain they achieved by being members of the Contact Committee. At the same time it is improbable that the latter gains will be sufficient in the long run. The representatives clearly wish to see actual changes for the benefit of their members or constituencies, not to be involved in 'phony participation' without influence (CPPP 2000: 18).

The Swedish User Committee has been running for six years. In this case we can find evidence of increasing participation, yet without any formal influence. For the Network, the establishment of the Committee represented substantial progress as it gained access to a forum in which top politicians and top public officials participated. As in Norway, the Swedish Committee has been chaired by the Minister, accompanied by senior political advisers. The Swedish Committee has also been attended by the Director General of the National Board of Health and Welfare and higher officials from the Swedish association of local authorities. During its first years the Committee met twice a year, yet have expanded its activities and now meets at least four times a year. Every meeting is being chaired by the Minister (Social Democratic 2003-06, and Christian Democrat, from 2007). In addition to these meetings, the Committee has arranged annual seminars on different topics with an interest either for the Minister or for members of the Committee: for instance, two seminars in 2005 on homelessness and on the encounter between people and power; and two seminars in 2006 on homelessness and social enterprises. However, despite this participation of key actors and the support of key Ministers, the Committee has no power to make formal decisions; it has remained a forum for information exchange, discussions and analyses regarding the possibilities and challenges for extended user involvement (Socialdepartementet 2004). The shift in government (from a Social Democratic to a Liberal-Conservative) has not affected the work of the Committee. Contrary to the Network members' fear, the new government has been even more interested in issues relating to the voluntary sector (minutes Network meeting 1st of February, 2007).

As in Norway, members of the Committee state that they are generally pleased with the Ministers (Interview 2009). They have not excluded anyone from the discussions. They also maintain that the discussions have been open and that the Ministers have shown interest in their opinions, experiences and views. When the Ministers have had another opinion, he/she have been clear in explaining their way of reasoning, inviting members of the Committee to general discussions. Members of the Committee further express that the Minister often asked everyone for their opinion, making sure that everyone in the room had had the possibility to express their voice. However, some informants argued a few delegates tend to claim more space than others at the User Committee meetings.

Since the start of the User Committee, the Network has continuously tried to influence its agenda. The Swedish model does not include any financial support or formal arrangement regarding capacity building among participants. Network meetings have, however, been held just before the User Committee's meetings to enable delegates to come up with joint positions on key issues and which topics that one would propose the Minister to focus on. These pre-meetings have also aimed to help new delegates – as a form of capacity building – and to

distribute information among delegates before the start of the formal Committee meeting. However, it has been an issue for constant debate within the Network whether individual delegates follow up the jointly agreed strategy. Some organizations appear to pursue strategies on their own, as a counter-action to the Network's steering strategies, e.g. representing only their own organization or a group of users, and not the Network.

Delegated have limited possibilities for influencing government policies and even the agenda of the User Committee meetings. Although the User Committee was formally presented as one of consultation and information exchange, during the first years, meetings mainly concentrated on topics of interest for the Minister. When the government invited external experts to meetings, delegates were not allowed to invite their own. The agenda for meetings was distributed only a few days in advance, restricting Network to limited preparation and the Minister tended to leave the meetings early (minutes Network meeting, March 2004).

The Swedish government's behavior in this context highlights several of the potential challenges of representing organized civil society in public policy-making. Some members of the Committee even called it 'a hostage situation', in which they mainly functioned as 'experts' on the user perspective, answering questions from the Minister when asked. Other members of the Committee believed that these problems resulted from the committee having just been established and not yet having found its procedure or form. They expressed a pragmatic approach, arguing that civil society actors had to accept some difficulties when working closely with public authorities, as a necessity for gaining additional influence. Moreover, some Network members criticized the Network itself for focusing only on establishing contacts with the government and failing to develop an agenda for further action.

However, talks with delegates indicate that some of the unresolved ambiguities were worked out after a short time (even though some of the principal issues tend to remain unresolved). They express that recent meetings, hearings and seminars have resulted in new working methods, and greater opportunities for the organizations to present their views and opinions. At Network meetings delegates have reported that they can actually have an impact on the topics being discussed in the Committee (minutes Network meeting, February 2005). They also stress the significance of the seminars, as these tend to be very popular among civil servants and decision-makers. Having the opportunity to influence the agenda at these seminars, e.g. being invited as a speaker, is naturally chance for civil society actors to explain their view on key issues to an important audience.

Yet there is little evidence that the discussion in the User Committee has had impact on the Ministers policy agenda, or the government's for that matter. We do not find similar invitations as taking place in Norway, and delegates comment upon their scope for influence in the following manner: 'I do not think we do so much of a difference'; 'I want to believe that we can make an influence, yet think that we are there to legitimize decisions taken elsewhere'; and 'They want to hear the views of users, yet we do not set the agenda'. Others express a more pragmatic view, stressing the advisory role of the Committee and the sovereignty of the Minister to make decisions (Interviews 2009).

CAPACITIES AND SKILLS: BARRIERS TO PARTICIPATION?

The Swedish case of the User Committee provides ample examples of the barriers to participation in dialogue and discussion with governments and public authorities. These barriers do not only include economic resources, even more so the skills, experience and contacts necessary to make one's voice heard in similar arenas, both in relation to decision-makers, and in relation to representatives from other organizations.

Members of the User Committee with little experience with lobbying and strategic policy work or knowledge on the policy-making process expressed the situation as a conflict between 'two worlds', a political world and a grass-root world. They pointed to a clear difference between themselves representing small grass-root organizations or even having a personal background as users, and delegates representing the more established organizations, i.e. having extensive networks with decision-makers, personal contacts with public officials, long experience of working with the government and being backed up by large resource-rich organizations. To take part in the 'other world' was a major challenge for them above all as they meant to lack the necessary 'language': on what to say, how to phrase it, to whom and at what timing. Taking part in the User Committee they observed how other delegates had these skills and experiences.

Personal experience of being a user puts extra pressure on delegates. Even though they expressed a great privilege of being invited to participate, they were uncertain what the government really was after and what 'they as users could offer'. One delegate even expressed that taking part as a user in similar forums often felt as one prostituted oneself, providing decision-makers with personal stories without any control of what happened afterwards. The pre-meetings organized by the Network appears to have had limited impact on the challenges experienced by some delegates. Delegates with personal user experience maintained, however, that membership in the Committee was of great significance for them personally and for the organizations they represented. Participating in the Committee provided them with a different status. They were met with greater respect in their local municipalities and thought Committee membership made them (and their organization) a more trustworthy partner for public actors.

The Swedish government has not taken any initiative to establish similar structures for support and capacity-building as one finds in Norway. Such structures might probably have helped to equalize the perceived scope for participation and voice, both between the delegates from the larger organizations and from the smaller grass-root organizations, and between the civil society representatives and the government representatives in the User Committee. Asked about how barriers for equal participation could be reduced, members of the Committee suggested internships at other organizations, learning about the policy process and lobbying strategies from more experienced colleagues and draft documents on the topics to be discussed at the Committee (interviews 2009).

IN THE SHADOW OF A NEW ARENA FOR PARTICIPATION?

Finally, the Swedish case is interesting also because the User Committee seems to have lost some of its momentum and is possibly being complemented and/or replaced by a larger civil dialogue process. In 2007 the Swedish government decided to initiate a 'Dialogue Process' with all interested voluntary associations working with social welfare issues. In his first speech, the new Prime Minister had already expressed a more positive standpoint to a redefined relationship to the voluntary sector – not only for general ideological reasons, but also this could serve the government's reform plan.

In summer 2007, two Social Affairs Ministers launched the idea of a broader Dialogue Process with the sector about each partner's rights and responsibilities in a news paper article (Sabuni and Hägglund 2007). The two Ministers claimed that the Swedish welfare state was facing a number of different challenges, such as an increasing number of people at old age and a large number of immigrants without an established position in the labour market. However, the central message in the article was an explicit criticism of the previous Social-Democratic government and its way of working with voluntary organizations. The Ministers argued that the traditional way of dealing with new welfare issues had been to increase the involvement of public authorities and developing new forms of public services. They accused the previous government for being ideologically blinded and failing to realize what the voluntary sector actually contributed and could contribute with, in the Swedish welfare state. For these and other reasons, they expressed the ambition to increase the number of private service providers combined with an expanded role for the voluntary sector in service provision.

The idea of setting up a Dialogue Process with stakeholders was not only a response to the domestic situation and needs. The Ministers referred explicitly to changes taking place in other countries, stating that their role-models were the agreements made between the state and the voluntary sector that are already in place in several EU Member States, in particular the British Compact, but also the agreements in Denmark, Estonia, Canada and France' (ibid.).

Moreover, several voluntary associations or coalitions of associations had also lobbied the government to initiate such a process in Sweden. For instance, one member of the Network had campaigned to change the 'rule of the game' between state and the voluntary sector. These actors initiated an umbrella organization, the National Forum for Voluntary Social Work (hereafter 'the Forum'), including members like the Salvation Army, the Swedish temperance organization, Save the Children, Lions Club International, Swedish Red Cross and others. The Forum's efforts to change the rules were also strongly inspired by the processes leading to the establishing such agreements in a number of European countries.

These activities led up to a formal Agreement on the 23rd of October 2008, between the government and voluntary associations working in the field of social welfare (Integrations- och jämställdhetsdepartementet 2008). The Agreement aims to secure the status of voluntary associations as interest organizations and representatives of citizens and users in the Swedish welfare state, as well as to promote their role as providers of services (Swedish government 2007; 2008). The Dialogue Process was innovative as representatives from the sector was

directly involved in writing a draft proposal to an Agreement together with Ministry officials. In principle, this process will not replace the role of the User Committee as it takes a broader and slightly different scope, regarding the issues being discussed (broad topics regarding voice and service delivery, the role of the sector etcetera) and the actors involved (open to almost every voluntary association working in the field of social welfare). The Agreement has even spurred voluntary organizations (Forum 2007) to form a broad umbrella association, aiming to bring together all voluntary associations in Sweden. Yet, it is an open question what role the User Committee will have in this new landscape of relations with government and organized civil society.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

In the introduction we raised these two issues:

- (1) Under what circumstances are arrangements for participatory governance most likely to give civil society actors enlarged scope for actual participation and voice?
- (2) What practical significance or outcome does involvement in participatory governance arrangements have from the point of view of civil society actors?

Put a bit differently, the first issue concerns the most fruitful design of participatory governance arrangements, including criteria for recruitment to or involvement in such arrangements and the forms and amounts of resources made available in connection with the establishment of these arrangements. The second issue points to relations of domination, power and control: is the actual functioning of participatory governance arrangements promoting greater parity of power or rather reproducing pre-existing relations of dominance?

To the first issue: In the introduction we touched upon provisions for capacity-building as a way to ensure that civil society actors improve their actual participation and scope for giving voice to the concerns and demands of their members or constituencies. Even if the two arrangements for participatory governance we compare have existed for different periods of time it is striking that structures for capacity-building and joint policy articulation play a key role in the Norwegian model but not in the Swedish model. The experience with the models so far indicates that there are considerable differences in the perceived scope for equal participation and voice among the Swedish civil society actors but not among the Norwegian ones. More generally, the Norwegian participatory governance arrangement seems to have benefited from more thoughtful attention and financial resources than the Swedish arrangement. All in all, the somewhat limited evidence presented here suggests that further research should examine in great detail the extent to which arrangements for participatory governance offer opportunities for systematic capacity-building among the civil society actors involved.

To the second issue: The different duration of the Swedish and Norwegian arrangements for participatory governance makes it even more difficult to say anything very definite about

similarities or differences in the practical significance of these arrangements from the point of view of civil society actors. It is, however, quite clear that the civil society actors regarded the involvement in these arrangements as important and valuable in itself. They saw the involvement as significant expressions of socio-political acknowledgement and inclusion (cf. Fraser about recognition and representation). To greater extent than before they experienced that high-level politicians and officials not only heard them but also listened, took seriously what they said and were willing to discuss their ideas and proposals. Cynical observers may say that these reactions only show how excluded and disregarded the civil society actors had been before, but this is probably only part of the story. The process of direct dialogue and how it is framed and performed by government representatives are of great importance.

The Swedish civil society actors do, however, report that the participatory governance arrangement had not had any practical impact in term of changed government policy. In Norway the general opinion is that it is still too early to assess what outcome the corresponding arrangement has – or will have – on government policy. In general, the key actors in the Norwegian arrangement seem to be quite optimistic about achieving such outcome. This optimism is related to the general feeling that thanks to the Battery and the Collaborative Forum the meetings with the high-ranking politicians and officials have been well prepared and that the atmosphere at the meetings have been positive and constructive.

In terms of the understandings of power we outlined, the Coleman model is probably capturing quite well the mechanisms underlying the working of the arrangements for participatory governance, but more so in the Norwegian than the Swedish case. In the latter case the government seems to have been more reluctant to give up or delegate traditional hierarchical control in line with a Weberian understanding of authority, cf. its demonstrative control over criteria for recruitment to the User Committee and the agenda for meetings.

The co-existence of power and resistance that Foucault points to, both theoretically and pragmatically in relation to direct dialogues between the governed and government; appears also to be relevant for further investigation of the kind of participatory governance arrangements we have discussed here. Taking part in such arrangements involves the risk of being dominated or even subordinated by the politicians and government officials, at least in the context of meetings. But we have no evidence that the involvement in these arrangements had diminished civil society actors' ability and drive towards criticizing and contesting the government's decisions or priorities in the public sphere, through campaigns, demonstrations or interviews in the media. Neither is there any indication that government representatives at meetings have talked the civil society actors into accepting commitments or responsibilities that they would not otherwise have favored or accepted. Basically, the significance of being involved in participatory governance arrangements emerges as *ambiguous*.

Similarly, it is debatable how helpful Post-Foucauldian elaborations of governmentality and responsabilization or Selznick-inspired hypotheses about cooptation and incorporation are for our understanding of participatory governance arrangements of the type we have discussed. For instance, the organizations involved in the Norwegian arrangements were quite keen to take over responsibility for the provision of particular services to their constituencies (e.g. poor citizens). Yet, this ambition was related to the organizations' goal of making services

more relevant and responsive for excluded citizens' situation and needs. It is difficult to judge on general grounds whether accommodating such ambitions would imply responsabilization in the governmentality sense and transmission of government policy in the Selznick sense, or rather a government capitulation to group interests and a delegation of full operational control over the services in question. Furthermore, the perspectives of Post-Foucauldians and Selznick may prove to be more relevant for the kind of Dialogue Process aimed at establishing a Compact between the government and the voluntary sector outlined in Swedish case, than for working of the Norwegian Contact Committee and the Swedish User Committee. Governments in a growing number of countries are entering such Compacts with organized civil society involved in providing social services. This development offers ample opportunities to explore the relevance of different perspectives further. As a final caveat we emphasize the need for future research on participatory governance to carry out detailed fieldwork and careful analysis of available data before concluding whether participation is real and having significant impact.

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