

Enhancing Collaborative Policy Innovation: a case study from a Danish municipality

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Abstract

Public sectors are increasingly expected to do something to become more innovative. Among researchers as well as among those seeking to enhance the innovative capacity of the public sector, the main focus of interest has been on enhancing service innovation while only a limited attention has been given to policy innovation. A case study of a policy innovation process in a Danish municipality supports the argument voiced by new innovation theories that collaboration between politicians and a variety of relevant stakeholders can play an important role in enhancing public sector innovation. However, the study also point out that there are barriers to collaborative policy innovation that must be overcome by means of skilful innovation management.

Introduction

While innovation has traditionally been viewed as relevant only for the private sector, it is increasingly perceived as equally important for the public sector. Today, public sectors all over the world are expected not only to support private sector innovation but also to enhance the innovation capacity of the public sector itself. The New Public Management (NPM) reform movement (Hood, 1991) has contributed heavily to place public sector innovation high on the political agenda of Western democracies. The link between NPM and public innovation is particularly outspoken in David Osborne and Ted Gaebler's famous book 'Reinventing government from 1993). NPM's call for a more innovative public sector took departure in criticisms of public bureaucracies for being change resistant raised by public choice theorists and their predecessors (Downs, 1967; Olsen, 1968; Mueller, 1979; Buchanan, 1986; Niskanen, 1971, 1987). The main remedies proposed by these theorists were forms of governing inspired by the private sector: Management and competition. These forms of governance have over the last decades spread with impressive speed in most Western countries.

After 20 years with NPM, however, new governance research indicates that the NPM reforms have not only functioned as a driver of public sector innovation. It has also in some respects become a barrier (O'Toole, 1997; Newman, Raine and Skelcher, 2001; Borins, 2001; Pollitt and Bouckaert, 2004; Rolland, 2005; Greve, 2008; Lubinski, 2009). On the one hand the reforms have

strengthened the public sectors' capacity for exercising strategic administrative leadership and increased the efficiency of public service delivery. On the other hand, however, NPM has weakened the politicians capacity for powerful political leadership because they have become isolated at the top of the pyramid, and led to the establishment of a performance measurement regime that reward those who follow 'best practice' rather than those who aim to develop 'next practice'.

In the new century, the critique of NPM for establishing new barriers to public sector innovation raised by governance theorists goes hand in hand with the advocacy for the advocacy for a new innovation strategy that aims to exploit the innovative potentials of collaborative forms of governance. Although strategic management and competition has a role to play in promoting innovation, governance theorists argue that collaboration between public authorities and relevant stakeholders has much to offer in making the public sector more innovative. Drawing on the theories of network governance developed in the 90s (Rhodes, 1997; Kickert, Klijn and Koppenjan, 1997; Agranoff and McGuire, 2003) as well as a and new strand of innovation theory (Lundvall, 1985, Freeman, 1991; Hagedorn, 1996; Edquist and Hommen, 1999; Halvorsen et al, 2005; Dente et al, 2005; Hartley, 2005; Nambisan, 2008; Bommert, 2010; Bland et al, 2010), a concept of 'collaborative innovation' is currently being launched as an alternative strategy for promoting public sector innovation (Sørensen and Torfing, 2011). This strategy argues that innovation tends to be a product, not of individual innovation heroes but of collaborative arenas in which actors with different ideas and competences work together. Early private sector innovation theory canonized the entrepreneur as innovation hero (Schumpeter, 1946), and in the case of the public sector, the politicians have been seen as the main source of innovation (Polsby, 1984) The NPM reform program put faith in the managers or private firms, and recently Eric Von Hippel (2005) have highlighted the users as the true innovation heroes. Seen from a collaborative approach to innovation it does not make sense to look out for an innovation hero. Inspired by Jan Kooimans (1993: 4) famous saying, this is due to the fact that no one actor has the capacity and knowledge necessary to make innovative public governance. This counts for service innovation as well as for policy innovation. By promoting collaboration between actors with different capacities, knowledge and experience resources are pooled and sedimented ideals, world views and role perceptions are disrupted and new thoughts can be thought and implemented (Gloor, 2005).

While governance theories express high hopes regarding the innovation potential of collaborative arrangements, they also identify barriers to collaborative innovation in the public sector (Roberts and King, 1996). Among these barriers count clashes between collaborative forms of governance, and traditional role images among the participating actors, and problems related to transporting new innovations developed in collaborative laboratories into the everyday life of an organization. The presence of barriers to collaborative innovation accentuates the need for what governance theorists denote metagovernance (Jessop, 1998; Meuleman, 2009; Sørensen and Torfing, 2009) and innovation researchers call innovation management (Borins 2001; Eggers and Singh, 2009).

Presently, we see a mushrooming of programs and project aiming to enhance collaborative innovation in the public sector public (Nambisan, 2008; Bommert, 2010; Mulgan and Albury, 2003; Danish Association of Municipalities, 2010). However, only few of these programs and projects

aim to enhance collaborative policy innovation. Much in line with private sector innovation, public sector initiatives target product innovation and innovation of the processes through which products are produced. Public innovation is mainly about service innovation.

This article aims to show that collaborative innovation holds an unexploited potential for enhancing policy innovation in the public sector. Not to say that policy innovation is totally overlooked in the research on collaborative innovation and in contemporary reform initiatives (Considine et al, 2009; Metze, 2010), but it has not obtained the attention it deserves. We push for a new research agenda on collaborative policy innovation by presenting the results of a case study of collaborative policy innovation in the Danish Municipality, Albertslund. The case study analyses the collaboration process that takes place in a policy committee composed of a small group of politicians, citizens and public administrators that work together in a collaborative policy process in which they get into dialogue with a broad variety of relevant and affected stakeholders. The goal is to formulate a new innovative municipal citizen involvement policy. The case study includes an analysis of the role that the policy produced by the committee played in the further policy process in the municipal council. The study provides important insights about the drivers and barriers that are at play in processes of collaborative policy innovation and the impact of different forms of metagovernance on the success or failure of the collaborative innovation process.

The argument is structured as follows: First we define the concept of collaborative policy innovation, point out potential drivers and barriers to this form of innovation, and discuss how the drivers might be released and the barriers overcome through different forms of innovation management. Then, follow a case description and an overview of the methods used. In the analysis of the collaboration process we focus on how the policy objective, roles and actor composition, and forms of collaboration change in the different phases in the collaboration process. The article concludes with a discussion of the extent to which the collaboration processes have enhanced policy innovation and/or affected the relationship between the involved actors in ways that might promote pave the ways for collaborative policy innovation in the future.

Theorizing collaborative policy innovation

For a start we need to consider the object of study in more detail. In condensed form collaborative policy innovation can be defined as *the formulation and implementation of new normative visions of and goals and strategies for realizing good society through collaborative processes involving relevant stakeholders*. Let us now take a closer look at the different components of this definition. Although innovation theory offers many different and often elusive definitions of innovation (Lloyd-Reason, Wall, & Muller, 2002) there tends to be a general agreement among innovation researchers that innovation involves the formulation as well as the implementation of new ideas (Hartley, 2005; Sørensen and Torfing, 2011). To be an innovation a new creative idea must be implemented and gain practical impact (Rogers, 1992; Van de Ven, 2007). Policy innovation can be seen as a specific kind of innovation that involves the formulation and implementation of new visions about what good society is, concrete goals inspired by these visions and strategies for moving society in the desired direction. Policy innovations do not only differ from service

innovations because they have a clear normative foundation but also because they take form in a heavily contested and conflictual context. The significance of collaborative forms of policy innovation is that policy innovation moves beyond the political parties as they bring together politicians and relevant stakeholders together in a shared attempt to develop new political visions, goals and strategies. Some claim that the innovation capacity of party politics is huge because of the high level of competition between parties that force them to develop new persuasive policy programs (Polsby, 1984). However, others argue that the high level of political competition has the problematic side effect that politicians are inclined to play it safe and stick to well consolidated ideological positions rather than to propose bold new ideas and strategies (Gray, 1989; Roberts and Bradley, 1991; Roberts and King, 1996). Moreover, the traditional institutional framing of policy innovation as an intra-party activity means that politicians seldom get a chance to develop their political visions, goals and strategies in dialogue with actors with radically different experiences, types of knowledge and frames of mind (Gray, 1989; Gray and Lowery, 2000). In collaborative processes of policy innovation, politicians can share the risk involved in developing new policies with a wide range of stakeholders, and develop their political ideas in discussions with actors who have different perceptions of reality than those at play in the political parties (Kingdon, 1984).

As mentioned earlier, theories of collaborative innovation point to a number of ways in which collaboration can drive public innovation. However, they also identify a number of potential barriers to collaborative innovation in the public sector (Sørensen and Torfing, 2011). Some of these drivers and barriers are particularly relevant in the case of collaborative policy innovation. As described in table 1 there are drivers and barriers at play both in relation to the formulation and the implementation of innovative policy ideas.

Table 1: Drivers and barriers to collaborative policy innovation

	Getting innovative policy ideas	Implementing innovative policy ideas
Drivers	Destabilization of consolidated world views caused by dialogue between actors with different forms of knowledge and experiences	Transforming stakeholders into well informed and committed innovation ambassadors
Barriers	Stalemate, defense of status quo or the lowest common denominator, and traditional role images that block policy collaboration	Resistance from competing policy arenas and tendency to protect routinized day-to-day practices

Let us first look at how collaboration can drive policy innovation. Collaboration between actors with different forms of knowledge and experiences can drive innovation because it creates disturbances that destabilize sedimented world views and practices. Politicians might see problems in a new light when they are confronted with the way citizens, street level bureaucrats or private business firms or voluntary organizations experience a certain topic. In addition, collaboration can

create the kind of common understanding and shared ownership to new innovative policy programs among relevant stakeholders that are crucial for ensuring a smooth and effective implementation of new policies indifferent contexts. When a group of school teachers and parents have been involved in the formulation of a new municipal school policy they are likely to have a better understanding of the policy objective, be better equipped to apply it in a meaningful way in different local settings, and do more to make it a success than if they have not been involved in the policy process.

Collaboration also holds potential barriers to policy innovation. The involvement of a plurality of stakeholders in developing new policy ideas might activate a battle between different interest groups that results in stalemate or a decision to go for the lowest common denominator, or lead to the establishment of a broad coalition aiming to protect status quo. This innovation barrier is most outspoken in situations where the collaboration only involves elites and sub-elites who have an interest in keeping things as they are in order to avoid ending up in a less favorable position. The implementation of new policy ideas developed in collaborative policy processes can also be hampered by competing policy arenas, which experience a loss of political power. Political councils and other formal or informal policy makers might chose to question the democratic legitimacy of collaborative governance processes if they find themselves marginalized in the process. Moreover, it might prove difficult to implement ideas developed in a collaborative policy arena in other settings as innovations often demand for a departure from routinized day-to-day practices and sedimented role positions (Mintrom and Vergari, 1998). We cling on to routines and roles because they signal order and normality, and the disruption of such orders creates uncertainty and fear. Hence, new political visions, goals and strategies might call for new patterns of political action and recast friend-and enemy relations in a way that produce disorientation, distrust and uncertainly regarding how to act and what to expect from others among the involved actors.

Skilful innovation management is needed to avoid the above mentioned barriers to collaborative policy innovation. Governance theory and theories of innovation management suggest ways in which public authorities, or others who desire to do so, can promote collaborative innovation (Damanpour, 1991; Jessop, 1998, 2002; Kooiman, 1993, 2003; Klijn and Koppenjan, 2004; Nambisan, 2008; Meuleman, 2009; Eggers and Singh, 2009; Kolind and Sørensen, 2011). Taking departure from this literature, collaborative innovation processes can be defined as actions aiming to initiate, frame and accommodate collaborative innovation between public authorities and other relevant stakeholders. Three management roles stand out as particularly relevant in this respect: The *convenor* brings together relevant stakeholders with different mind sets and experiences together, set the agenda and design the collaborative arena; the *facilitator* support the collaboration process in order to avoid stalemate etc, and the *catalyst* organize disturbances that trigger the participants' desire and capacity to innovate (Ansell and Gash, 2012). In this context we will analyse how the collaborative innovation process in Albertslund is managed: who serves as innovation managers in the different phases of the innovation processes? What roles do the innovation managers play? And to what extent the management aims to reduce some of the barriers to collaborative policy innovation outlined above? A special focus will be directed towards analyzing how innovation management can enhance the willingness and capacity of the

participating politicians, citizens and administrators to develop new role perceptions and patterns of action that enforce their participation in collaborative processes of policy formulation and policy implementation. Collaborative policy innovation can be blocked if politicians view policy making as an intra-party or intra city-hall phenomenon, if citizens refuse to take on the role as policy makers, or if public administrators refuse to discuss policy in contexts where politicians are present (Sørensen 2006). Such role perceptions are not only persistent because they are ingrained in the participants' identities, but also because they link to specific institutionalised practises and routines. Even if the participating actors develop new points of identification as a consequence of a given collaborative innovation process they might still cling to the deeply engrained, situated patterns of behaviour that the traditional roles have installed (March and Olsen, 1995). It is decisive that innovation managers seek to reduce these barriers to collaborative policy innovation through interventions that transform the participants' role perceptions as well as their traditional patterns of action.

Case selection, method and analytical framework

As described above the empirical analysis of collaborative policy innovation presented in this paper draws on a case study of collaborative policy innovation in the Danish Municipality, Albertslund. Danish municipalities have a rather large political autonomy compared to municipalities in other Western countries. Local divisions of national parties compete for representation in the municipal and regional councils. Local lists or independent candidates of more local character may also join the election. The political parties and independents join alliances after the elections and the largest groups appoint the mayor. Apart from being head of the municipal council, he/she also functions as head of the municipal administration (Bogason 1996; Local Government Denmark, 2009). Moreover, there is a strong tradition for extended citizen involvement in service delivery. In recent years, however, efforts have been made to develop new ways of involving citizens in policy making. These endeavours have been encouraged by the national government that has passed a law that call upon the municipalities to establish citizen involvement committees the so called § 17.4 committees. The freedom to decide how these tasks and composition of the individual committees is considerable. In some municipalities they only involve politicians.

The § 17.4 committee in Albertslund municipality is particularly relevant in this context because it brings together politicians with citizens and administrators in what can be seen as an attempt to promote collaborative policy innovation. The committee is composed of 6 politicians from the municipal county, 6 citizens and 3 public administrators, and it is mandated by the municipality council to develop a new citizen involvement policy although the final decision making competence remains in the municipal council. The decision to involve citizens directly in policy making fits well with the political tradition in Albertslund. The municipality, a suburb to Copenhagen with approximately 29,000 residents, is known for its tradition for a strong local democracy. This tradition grows out of the political climate in the 70s when the municipality was formed. Today, Albertslund is known as one of the municipalities in Denmark that does most

support active citizenship. As such, a study the §17.4 council in Albertslund can be seen as a radical case of collaborative policy innovation. Hence, both the formal set up and the political tradition indicates that collaborative policy innovation is likely to take place.

The case study took the form of a policy process analysis. We followed the committee from the summer of 2010 when it was first formed and through the whole policy process up until December 2011 where it concluded its job. The study will continue in order to get data about the impact that the policy has on decisions made in the municipal council and on citizen involvement in policy making in 2012. The latter will be evaluated by the municipality in January 2013. The case study draw on a mix of data types: document studies; observations of all the meetings and other activities in the committee; and interviews with the involved actors at different stages in the policy process.

The analytical framework for analysing the data consists of a division of the policy process into three stages: a first phase in which *the scene is set* for the collaborative process, a second phase we call *collaboration in action*, and a final *implementation* phase in which the produced policy is disseminated to external actors e.g. the municipal council and the different administrations. In each of these phases we focus on what the participating actors view as the *policy objective* in order to study to what extent this view is changing as a result of the collaborative policy process. We also analyse how the *actor composition and role perceptions change* along the way, and how the work forms change at different stages in the collaboration process. The analytical framework and main findings are presented in table 2.

Table 2: Analytical framework

	Setting the scene	Collaboration in action	Implementation/ dissemination
Policy objective	Enhancing democracy through citizen participation	Enhancing democracy and innovation through citizen participation	The innovation perspective gains wider acceptance Methods in focus
Actors and roles	Politicians and citizens Traditional role images dominate	Politicians, citizens, administrators, researchers, and relevant stakeholders Traditional role images are questioned and a search for new roles begin	Citizens and researchers play a core role as spokes persons
Work forms	Traditional meetings	Rotating chair Mind maps Invitation of guests Theatre workshop Stakeholder workshop Innovation camp	Meetings with municipal council Video Short essayistic policy

In the following presentation of the results of the case study we will first analyse how the scene was set, and then move on to analysing collaboration in action and the implementation phase

Setting the scene

As mentioned above Albertslund has a strong tradition for involving citizens. The official municipal policy is that: “*We want to support the democratic culture*” (Albertslund, 2009a) and has been so for many years. As politicians and public administrators experienced a decline in citizen participation, they decided to do something about it. It is difficult, however, to determine where the call for a new citizen involvement policy initially came from. Minutes from the initial meetings indicates that the idea came from the administration but interviews indicate that it might have come from the politicians. The fact that many claim ownership to the idea is interesting as it indicates that it is a popular initiative. Furthermore, it bears witness to the fact that the project finds support among politicians as well as among the leading administrators.

The policy objective

The committee was commissioned to develop a citizen involvement policy that could strengthen a participatory political culture and thus revitalize local democracy, and it was asked to specifically consider how information technologies could contribute to secure a broad inclusion of a variety of stakeholders in municipal affairs. The question asked to the committee was: *How can the municipality improve the influence of citizens in Albertslund?* (Albertslund 2010) The committee was asked to map patterns of participation in different policy areas, as well as to document drivers for and barriers to citizen participation in the legislation and governance practices. Moreover, they were asked to produce facts about how other municipalities seek to enhance citizen involvement. The output of the committee’s work was to be a catalogue of policy ideas that could inspire the formulation of a new municipal policy on citizen involvement and information technology. The committee which was decided in November 2009 was called *Taskforce for Citizen Participation and Information Technology*, and was formally organized as a §17.4 committee, which are temporary political committees assigned to give advice to the municipal council on certain issues¹ (Albertslund 2011a).

Actors and roles: politicians and citizens collaborating

The specificity of a §17,4 committee is that it can include others actors than politicians: They often include citizens and other stakeholders relevant to a particular topic area. The idea is to unfold certain aspect that can contribute the political debates. In the case of Albertslund the committee was formally composed of 6 politicians from the municipal council and 6 citizens. In the interviews performed with the participating politicians early in the process were pleased to get a seat in the taskforce. In one of the parties there had apparently been tough competition to attain the post (Local councillor F, 2010, 74-75). A politician explains: *I am happy that I got the seat because the taskforce is about citizen involvement and that is exactly how I got in to politics....I find it important to think about how we can secure citizens with opportunities to get influence and possibilities and to have an impact!* (Local councillor F, 2010, 79-82)

In the initial documents describing the formal constitution of the taskforce it was suggested that it should consist of 3 representatives from the citizens, 6 representatives from the local parties, and

¹ A “Section 17, (4)” is a part of the municipal act. It refers to a committee with the purpose to advise the economic council and the mayor, in certain issues. In contrast to other more permanent committees under the municipal council, this type of committee can consists of persons outside the municipal council, and they can be temporary. In the following we will refer to the committee as the taskforce.

the mayor taking on the position as the chair (Albertslund 2009a). However, at a meeting in the municipal council in December 2009 it was decided that the composition of the taskforce should be 5 local politicians plus the mayor and 6 citizen representatives. Moreover, 2 public administrators were appointed as facilitator and project manager for the taskforce, respectively (Albertslund 2009b). The mayor gives his reason for including citizens in the taskforce in the following way: *Politicians are people with attitudes – and principles. I have called for – that we [the politicians] should be more open and listen more to other participants. When you have non-politicians in the taskforce – it opens up to a completely other process* (Mayor, 2010, 92-96)

The ambition to get a broad scope of different types of interests and inputs included in the taskforce were mirrored in the recruitment of the citizens (Albertslund 2010). Here, three criteria were listed in order to secure a variety of different stakeholders: First, there was a criterion labelled as *democratic representation*. This led the attention towards recruitment of both representatives from the ‘well-known’ active participants, as well as from ‘newcomers’ in participating in local activities. Second, a criterion referring to *location of living* was applied. Albertslund consist of different neighbourhoods, some with more traditions for local participation than others. This criterion should secure a geographical representation of the diverse settlements in the municipality. Third, a criterion relating to *diversity* was used. As Albertslund is populated by a plurality of nationalities it was also an ambition to include demographic criteria’s such as, national background, age, gender, status of jobs.

Citizens were encouraged to participate through the advertisements in the local newspaper (*Albertslunderen*) as well as a general call on the municipal homepage. The interested citizens were asked to give reasons of why they wanted to participate, as well as describing their location of residence, age, and experience with participation (Public Administrator A, 2010, 81-84). Twelve citizens responded the call and six out of these were selected. The citizens were thus represented by: a young male student of 16 years; a male representative from the ethnic minorities; two young women one with and without experience in participation and finally two older male activists residing in the north and in the south of the municipality.

Work forms – the creation of open ended processes

At the first glance on the written material describing the project organisation and procedures of the whole processes there is no innovative modes of collaboration or designing the processes. But if we go through our qualitative data, we get another story. The main project leader describes the “newness” of the way of collaborating in the following quote:

We had planned a very open-ended process. Four meetings were transformed to ‘reflexion - meetings’ where we unfolded the concept of citizen participation – with different themes and approaches..... The novelty is, that it is a rather new approach to invite [citizens] in this early stage of the process. When there still is so much uncertainty, and no one from the administration, have thought in three scenarios! (Public Administrator A, 2011, 223-26, 254-255)

Considerations about collaboration have in the initial phase mainly addressed how the internal organisation should take form. The taskforce is formally organised so it is the city manager that is the ‘project owner’. In practice this means that the taskforce is responsible for the content of the project. Whereas, it is a reference group of Directors from different municipal departments, that act

as being the responsible for the internal ‘organisational side’ of the project. In order to facilitate and support the taskforce a project manager and a project secretary were appointed. Their role can be described as the typical convenor – that is expected to support and sustain the taskforce, taking minutes from the meetings and guiding the process through the municipal decision making procedures (Projektkontrakt 2009). The main professional project manager was located at the *Center for Management and Staff*², that is referring directly to the City Manager. The project secretary is coming from the *Department of Technical and Environmental management*³. Furthermore, a project group with representatives from different institutions in the municipal organisation e.g. day care; The Centre of Volunteers; Social department, Children and Youth department and finally the Cultural department.

The design of the process was planned as being 6 meetings, with the first meeting in June 2010 and the last meeting planned to be in August 2011. After each meeting in the taskforce a follow up meeting was planned for the group of Directors. The purpose was that they should reflect on the deliberations in the taskforce and the challenges and consequences of these for the municipal organization. The resources put in to the project were outlined as 60 working days for the main project leader, including 10 days of preparation for each of the six planned meetings. Furthermore, the administrative facilitator, were granted 30 days to her work in the taskforce (Projektkontrakt 2009, s. 1). All in all, it is estimated that the project would comprise 132 working days in total for the different municipal participants (Projektkontrakten, s. 3).

Summing up what has been said about the setting of the scene, we find that there is a strong political agenda, to revitalize the local democracy. As a consequence, the design of the taskforce seems well established both internally within the municipal organisation as well as externally within the intent of recruiting a diverse group of citizens. With regards to innovation – and new forms of collaboration our data reveals that the design and ‘setting the scene’ of the process is conventional in many ways. However, the recruitment of the citizens stands out – and is rarely seen such a strong emphasis to get different demographic factors included in selection of citizens to the Section 17, (4) taskforces. The roles that are at play in this stage is mainly convenor role characterised by bringing the relevant stakeholders with different mind sets and experiences together, and setting the agenda and design the collaborative arena; This role is in this stage mainly performed by the public administrators. The politicians are meta-governors at distance in the sense that they contribute to frame the agenda and commission for the taskforce.

² In Danish: "*Center for Ledelse og Personale*"

³ In Danish: "*Teknik & Miljøforvaltningen*"

Collaboration in action

The operation of the taskforce was planned in form of six meetings in weekdays from 17-21 o'clock. Moreover, there were some single activities that took place in weekends. The first meeting took place in May 2010 and the last meeting occurred in November 2011. As mentioned above, the commission was to develop a new policy for citizen involvement – and information technology. Each of the six meetings had a theme, but as we shall see the content and the roles and identities of the participants altered during the process.

Policy Objectives – a innovation perspective is added

The agenda of the first meeting was a presentation and clarification of the objective of the taskforce, as well as the expectations of the citizens. Furthermore, one of the authors of this paper (Eva Sørensen) was invited as an external expert to talk on the topic: *What is citizen participation – and why citizen participation?* The result of this first meeting was subsequently that a *innovation theme* was added to the discussions. The project manager explains the reason in the next quote:

After the first meeting – it became clear to us – that it was not only about 'fine-tuning' the local democracy. But it was about doing it or thinking about it in a new way. (Public Administrator A, Meeting with the municipal council 23.08.2011)

The discussions at the first meeting evolved around how processes of citizen participation should not only focus on improving the forms and channels of participation, but also should entail more dialogues about content. Consequently, the policy content was reframed as containing two tracks, one of *democratisation* and one on *innovation*. By adding the innovation track the taskforce wanted to direct attention towards the fact that the municipality in many incidents are no longer able to 'work harder' but rather must 'work smarter'. In the minutes from the first meeting the "innovation track" is described by the following characteristics: a) it is when different perspectives meet – that the potential for something new can occur; b) involvement shall happen early in the process when the articulation of policy visions take place, and in later stages when the policy has to be adjusted. c) Finally, participation processes should be selective depending on the context and with relative active of particular concerned stakeholders (Albertslund, 2011c).

The innovation aspect caused different considerations in the taskforce about both definitions as well as way of working. Our interviews with both local councillors; public administrators as well as citizens reveal that they have difficulty defining 'public innovation'. Nevertheless, there is an agreement about the necessity of innovation of public services. Typical statements to the question of why – innovation was needed were:

Innovation is needed, because we – as well as the world are constantly changing. Therefore, it is important that we think in new ways about the way we work and the way we provide service. (Public Administrator B, 2010, 58-60)

It is noteworthy that the innovation perspective in several of our interviews made after the first meeting in the task force are articulated as *user driven innovation*. One of the public administrators describes her version of how the innovation perspective is about:

I think that user driven innovation – is something totally new. I believe it is there, where we dare to leave the conventional roles and settings – and say and reflect something new. Presently, we do not do that in particular. (Public Administrator A, 2010, 16-20)

The innovation aspect is taken up by the taskforce in different ways as we shall see in the two sections below. What is worth noticing here is however that innovation and democracy as two aspects of citizen participation is connected. This collocation was new to almost all the members, and resulted in new perspectives on how deliberations among politicians, public administrators and citizens can be carried out.

Actors and roles – a transformation journey

Early, in the process the participants agreed to transform the meetings to “rooms for reflexion” where everybody could speak freely. In practice, this meant that the local politicians decided to leave party politics aside; the citizens to leave the role as the “outsiders that complain” and the public administrators as being restricted to their professional knowledge. Our observations, during the whole process show that the role and identities of the three participating groups changes over time. Some of the uncertainties about the roles are expressed in the following three quotes from one of the public administrators, the city manager and a local councillor:

The politicians are preoccupied by their mandate to take the decisions – why should they give that up? They can think -why are somebody invited in – that are not elected? (Public Administrator A, 2010, 277-279)

I know from my own position [as city manager] – that my role can suddenly become substantial because as the city manager you are positioned in top of a huge system. This can lead to that people tend to silent completely and prevent them being creative. That doesn't work either. Yet I can't just sit and pretend that 'this is indeed reasonable' knowing that it can't work in practice. (City Manager, 2011, 125-128)

The role of the public administrators is to guide us through the decision making process. But it is not part of the agenda- that they should participate more than in the normal procedures. (Councillor F, 2010, 492-494)

From our observations of the taskforce and interviews we can identify a gradual change in the roles of the public administrators. The two local administrators and the city manager that as such do not have a formal seat in the taskforce are in the initial meetings performing a traditional convenor role. This role is associated with many of the ideals from the Weberian bureaucrat, as the neutral

professional and keeping a low profile at the meetings. This was reflected in our observations of the first four the meetings, where we could observe that they were somehow hesitant toward how much they should contribute to the dialogues. Later, we could note that the roles changed gradually towards a more both active, intervening and facilitating role. They contributed more as equal partners in the debates, as well as the formulation of potential visions for the policy.

We could also identify a somewhat gradual change in the role and identity perceptions if the councillors during the process. Our data reveals that all the politicians welcomed the new ways of collaborating in the taskforce. Whereas, they in the initial phases of the process tended to supplement the public administrators in their roles as convenors by contributing to frame the commission for the taskforce, we could observe a tendency towards a more hands on – mode of participating in the process. Two of the councillors reflect on the participation in the taskforce in the following way:

The taskforce has functioned as a laboratory for testing [New forms and methods of interaction and deliberations] and it has been together with people that we have become acquainted to. This contributes to that you dare and are more trustful in testing new things without a fear of saying something stupid, because we are all on the same level. (Councillor P, 2011 48-51)

When you have your 'party hat' on - you are obliged to think in processes and the policy you have announced – there are many considerations that you have to take. This has in my view not been the purpose of the taskforce. On the contrary, it has more been to throw several balls up in the air, and see what comes out of it. (Councillor D, 2011, 131-134)

During interviews, leaders repeatedly stressed that they found these more interactive modes of interaction very rewarding. However, as we shall see in the final stage there was also some uncertainty about the potential translation and dissemination to the rest of the organisation and municipal council.

If we turn to the citizens, we can recognize some of the same developments. What was common among the different citizens was an appreciation of the seat in the taskforce. For some it was important to launch some particular perspectives, others stated that they in general were interest in issues of democracy. Although, we could spot some doubts about the outcome and purpose of the taskforce in the beginning, the general sentiment was positive. There was however a single somehow negative utterance directed towards the intentions of involving citizens in the policy making. The youngest citizen representative of the taskforce explains why he think the politicians are part of the taskforce:

It is technically the politicians that represent the citizens. The politicians are a sample of the population. So it could likewise be citizens sitting there [in the taskforce] instead of politicians. I guess they participate to keep the control and power. (Citizen A, 2010)

In general, there was however a high level of satisfaction of being part of the taskforce. As stated by one of the citizens – when she presented her experience of having participated in the taskforce – at

the municipal council meeting: *"The fact that one is called upon to participate – make you feel seen and heard – and acknowledged. It contribute to that I now feel like being a "Albertslunder" [person that lives in Albertslund] and it influences me in a way that I want to join in – and participate!"* (Citizen C, Observations at a meeting with the municipal council, October 2011) This perspective was also reflected by other of the citizen interviewees. One adjoined this perspective, by stating that it was the first time in the 20 years he had been living in the municipality, that he really felt that he belonged to - and was proud of the municipality.

Based on our observations we saw that the tensions between the different groups that were present in the first couple of meetings gradually disappeared over time. This is expressed by the city manager in the following way: *"I experienced over time that some of the contradictions – that are natural existing between citizens, politicians and the public administration, vanished when we got more in to the different topics and we began to be more enthusiastic"* (City Manager 2011)

We find that the creation of what we would label as a pleasant atmosphere for deliberation was created as a result of the many and new forms of collaboration as we shall look more on in the next section.

Work forms – testing new approaches

The contribution of the innovation theme after the first meeting resulted in that the understanding of innovation expands from mainly related to user driven innovation towards a more broad understanding of innovation. The debates were oriented about both trying to develop a novel policy for citizen participation including an innovation perspective, but also to test **new ways of collaboration**. Under the motto *"We are doing it – while we talk about it"* (Albertslund 2011b) new methods of performing the meeting activities were tested. Among these were:

1. Letting the "chair" role of the meetings circulate. Normally, it would be the mayor that would approve the agenda, and lead the meetings. Now, it was the citizen representatives that shifted in planning the agenda of the meetings and performing the chair role.
2. The first four meetings were defined as *"Room of free reflexion – and free roles"*. The intention was in particular to make the politicians leave party politics and the public administrators to leave their professional perspectives.
3. The minutes taken – were in form of mind maps. Moreover, using SWOT⁴ - analysis
4. Testing new forms of citizen involvement, in form of a Theatre workshop and an Innovation camp.
5. To let the process be supervised – and followed by Roskilde University, referring to the authors of this paper.

Although, the new ways of collaborating gave rise to more vivid interactive meetings, it appeared not to be without challenges. One obstacle in particular in the beginning was that the participants

⁴ SWOT stands is a analytical framework to identify Stength, Weakness, Opportunities and Threats of a issue.

were very uncertain about how their roles and the division of labour were expected to be. The interviews after the first meeting in the taskforce – demonstrate that the citizens were somewhat hesitant about what the outcome of the deliberations will be. The professionals were challenged by the fact that the deliberations in the task force, did not as they were used to, led to a concrete result or product. The politicians expressed uncertainty about their role, and how party politics should be unfolded in the process.

The experiences from the process in the taskforce demonstrate that despite the challenges in the beginning of the process, there was great satisfaction with the novel forms of both leading the meetings in the taskforce and also with the theatre workshop and innovation camp. This way of collaborating has been new for all the participants. One of the participating citizens expresses his experience of the process in the next quote as: *”My experience is that we across boundaries such as age, profession, colour and titles have been able to be engaged 100 %. Partly because no one had the answers and partly since we were only able to have progress with common means”*. Although not all the events progressed equally well, they created never the less some “disturbance”, which meant that the taskforce got inspired to think about public involvement in new ways. The mayor summarizes his experience in this way: *”The most rewarding and where there have been most energy- has been the process- and the way different way of collaborating and leading the meetings. This has been enormously positive and satisfying”* The experiences from the municipality of Albertslund suggests that experiments with new institutional designs can become important sources of inspiration in the development of creating new policies at a local level.

Summing up, in this stage of the process it is in particular the facilitator role and the catalyst role that are at play. This facilitator role is mainly performed by the public administrators but also by the citizens when they chair the meetings. The public administrators are playing a more supportive and coaching role in relation to the citizens, in order to empower their role as chairs and agenda setters for the meetings. The catalyst role is carried out by both the public administrators sometimes citizens. This role is performed by the arrangement of testing different methods and the invitation of different experts in order to create some “disturbance” and support the development of new perspectives.

Implementation

It is going to be interesting to follow in the next couple of months to what a degree the innovative forms of collaborating is being expressed or implemented in the formulated policies of the municipality and the degree to which the policies is converted in practice in the institutions and policies of the municipalities.

The policy will be presented in the municipal council in December 2011. The policy is presented as a catalogue over different methods of citizen engagement. Moreover, there are some articulated intentions – of when and why citizens should be involved. It is still open how the rest of the organisation shall work with the policy, but we could trace a high level of commitment to the policy by the Mayor and the City Manager. It is also intended to make three you tube videos – telling the story of the visions of supporting local democracy.

We intent to follow the process in the implementation stage – and see how the knowledge an perspectives from the deliberations in the taskforce is translated in to municipal organisation and the articulation of new policies.

Conclusion

The pressures on public resources have lead to a call of innovative and more efficient public services. As such, we are welcoming new forms of establishing dialogues and deliberations between citizens and other affected stakeholders, professionals and decision makers. Therefore, we found the taskforce in the municipality of Albertslund in Denmark as both interesting in the sense that it brought representatives from all three groups together. Moreover, it addressed not only questions of service innovation but also policy innovation. But as our data reveals this kind of new democratic institutional design and processes cause certain challenges.

The experiences from the municipality of Albertslund suggests that experiments with new institutional designs can become important sources of inspiration in the development of creating new policies at a local level. Does it then create improved input-legitimacy and more efficient policies? We are not yet able to answer that question yet – since the policy proposal from the taskforce is not yet being decided upon in the municipal council. This will happen in December 2011. Nonetheless, there are some indications on that the process has led to some degree of improved input- legitimacy.

It is going to be interesting to follow in the next couple of months to what a degree the innovative forms of collaborating is being expressed or implemented in the formulated policies of the municipality and the degree to which the policies is converted in practice in the institutions and policies of the municipalities.

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Links

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