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Abstract

The essential issue in this article is the relevance of the output of governance networks and the impact this relevance has on the democratic qualities of the network. The indifference for political participation is an urgent problem in contemporary societies, and as a consequence new forms of participation have been advocated by researchers and politicians. Examples can be found in the model for regional development of the European Union, which presupposes involvement of local actors, and in the research field of deliberative democracy, through which the practice of citizen juries has become increasingly frequent in political decision making. By investigating a specific governance network for regional planning in the region of Ostrobothnia in Finland, the article wants to draw attention to the relevance of the output of such networks and the impact this relevance has on its possibilities for positive democratic contribution. The study compares the network operations with democratic ideals found in governance network theory and deliberative democracy theory. The contrast between casual conversation and discussions for deciding crucial issues becomes a central point for understanding the impact of relevance. The article suggests that a policy network cannot be democratic until its output is relevant, and this may be done through increasing publicity.

Introduction

Governance network theory has during recent years focused on the democratic quality of governance networks. The impact of such networks is apparent and unavoidable also when discussing contemporary democratic theories. By looking at the formation process of a specific policy programme, the Regional Development Programme in the region of Ostrobothnia in Finland, this article wishes to draw attention to the relevance of the output of a governance network on such democratic qualities. The thesis is that when the output becomes relevant, the democratic qualities are challenged. The distinction between deliberative discussions and actual planning practices, in other words, the contrast between casual conversation and discussions for deciding important issues, is a central point in this article.

The indifference for political participation in the representative democratic system is well known. Governance network theory describes contemporary policy making as a product of governing processes (Sørensen & Torfing 2007, 4). This is often interpreted as a move from liberal towards post-liberal democracy (see e.g. Sørensen & Torfing 2005), which brings an interactive perspective to democracy, where the public, semi-public and private actors meet in joint action. The common conclusion is that the inclusion of key actors in the process of planning and implementing development policies improves the basis for decisions and ideally also the possibility to counteract societal fragmentation and resistance to policy change.

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(see eg. Rhodes 1997; Kickert et al. 1997; Fung & Wright, 2001; Hirst, 2000; Hiironniemi, 2005). At the same time, concern has been raised about democratic accountability, equality and inclusiveness of governance networks (Sørensen 2010). Another issue visible in governance network theory is a frustration amongst actors over the lack of clear and visible results (Sørensen & Torfing 2007, 13). During the study of the governance network in question, the impact of the relevance of the network output on democratic indicators became impossible to overlook. The relevance of the policy programme studied is unambiguous in legislation. The relevance in practice is a different story. As I will demonstrate, the relevance especially affects the democratic quality regarding deliberative democracy, a theory broadly incorporated by governance network theory. To some extent, the impact of relevance has been dealt with also in planning theory, where the use of deliberation has been criticised for not respecting the difficulties of resolving actual political conflicts (Bäcklund & Mäntysalo 2010).

In the next section, I highlight some preconditions setting up the environment in which the development programme was composed. The third chapter deals with governance network and deliberative democracy theory with the aim of compiling an ideal model of a governance network. The emphasis here is on “ideal”, since when looking at the empirical reality in section 5, the expectation is to be able to not only evaluate the case study, but also to draw attention to the impact of the relevance of the network output on the ideal democratic indicators.

Preconditions

The regional administration in Finland is a very recent construction, formed during the last two decades through a series of administrative reforms. Previous to these reforms, the regional level consisted mainly of state districts, and the state control is still strong. Today, the regional level mainly consist of the Regional Councils, which are joint municipal bodies, the Regional State Administrative Agency (AVI) and the Centre for Economic Development, Transport and the Environment (ELY), which are state regional organisations. The responsibility for development is divided between ELY and the Regional Councils. Networks and cooperation groups have emerged as a result of this development, where state, municipal and business participants are represented.

The Regional Development Programme

The Regional Council is, according to the Regional Development Act, obliged to prepare a *Regional Scheme*, a long-term strategic plan, which indicates the desired regional development in the region as well as the necessary strategic choices. In 2010, a scheme stretching to the year 2040 was published. Simultaneously, a *Regional Development Programme* was written, that will implement the Regional Scheme for 2010-2014. The planning process investigated here concerns the Regional Scheme and the Regional Development Programme in the region of Ostrobothnia.

The Regional Development Legislation of 2009 states that the Regional Development Programme should be the one programme that coordinates all other development programmes and acts as the leading vision of the region. Authorities must take the programme into consideration in its actions. Regarding inclusivity, the legislation states that the Regional Council should prepare the programme in cooperation with state institutions, municipalities and other associations and organisations that takes part in regional development. Preparation targets include “development strategies based on the region’s potential and needs, the most important projects in terms of regional development, and other essential measures to achieve the targets and finance the planned programme” (Regional Development Act, 1651/2009).

The system used for the preparation is very much designed by each Regional Council. The Council decide around which themes they construct expert groups, but there are some directives for the content of the programme, which are summarized in The Finnish Governments Decree on the Development of Regions (1224/2002, new version 1837/2009). Among other things, the programme must include priorities and objectives for the development of the region, a description of the coordination between the Structural Funds programmes and other programmes and certain indicators for monitoring development programmes and projects.

The programme in Ostrobothnia is prepared by ten expert groups and five subordinated groups¹. The manner in which the Regional Council choose to conduct the planning process is not officially stated, but has been recited in the conducted interviews with Regional Council officials. The network is constructed by the Regional Council sending out invitations to selected individuals in the region. An invitation to participate in working groups is not publicly announced, but at the same time no-one is prevented from taking part. Practicality is the most important principle for selecting participants to invite, depending on what knowledge is needed and assessing who in the region possesses this knowledge. The second principle is to include all society sectors, also marginalised groups, immigrants being the most obvious example. In other words, the preparation of the programme is very ad hoc – there are no official rules relegating e.g. inclusion or the possibilities for participation.

The structure of the work process in the expert groups is to some extent decided by the group itself and the officials of the Regional Council participating in the group. The expert groups receive background material consisting of regional and national strategies, previous regional programmes and population and regional statistics.

The ambition of the Regional Council is to consider available strategies and programmes at EU, national, regional and sub-regional level and collect them in accordance with the view of the expert groups. The practical writing of the programme is then carried out by the Regional Council, compiling what is considered the most important ideas of the expert groups. The programme proposal then is available for review, after which it is prepared by the Board of the Re-

gional Council. Later, the programme is approved by the Assembly of the Regional Council (see Figure 1 on page 32 for timeline of the planning process).

Planning practice in Finland

To contextualize the planning process dealt with here, I will shortly depict the common practice of planning in Finland. Bäcklund & Mäntysalo (2010) identify four planning theory paradigms relevant in the Finnish context: Comprehensive-rationalist, incrementalist, communicative and agonistic planning theory.

The *Comprehensive-rationalist planning theory* has been influential in planning practices in Finland since after the Second World War and imply a clear division of roles between elected politicians and public administrators, with the former contributing with values and goals and the latter with value-free knowledge. Public interest is in this view definable through the gathering and careful analysis of data, at the same time as knowledge is seen as objective and apolitical. *Incrementalism*, adopted in Finnish planning practices during the 1970s, questioned the ability of the planners to gain full knowledge and maintain a value-free status. Instead, decision-makers should contribute with his or her set of values and opinions on the matter at hand, which in turn gives a political debate between conflicting demands (Bäcklund & Mäntysalo 2010:338-339). These two theories are considered as belonging to the aggregative tradition of democracy, which represents the reconciliation of different interests through a hierarchical governance logic (see March & Olsen 1989). *Communicative planning theory* implied the introduction of an integrative democratic tradition, where citizens are viewed as actors contributing to planning argumentation. This theory is based on the theory of communicative action and deliberative democracy theory, which are discussed later on. Every person with a stake should be involved in all stages of planning, and decisions should be made through rational argumentation in the search of consensus. While supporting the integrative aspect of communicative action, Chantal Mouffe (2000) sharply criticize the Habermasian ideal of consensus through rational argumentation, implying that striving for consensus pushes genuine political conflicts out of the political arena (Mouffe 2000:93). Politics can by definition never be free of a pluralism of values, and therefore a formation of an us/them configuration is unavoidable. However, instead of participants being enemies, Mouffe proposes the use of the concept of adversaries, i.e. opponents having different values without contesting the right of the opponent to defend these values. Following Mouffe, Bäcklund & Mäntysalo (2010:342-344) define *agonistic planning theory* as the latest paradigm shift in planning theory. This theory imply a culture of planning more tolerant to conflicts of meaning systems, acknowledging that participants have different cultural, societal and personal experiences, and consequently openly recognizing the limits of achieving consensus. In this view, democratic decisions can be partially consensual, but “with the respectful acknowledgement of differences that remain unresolved” (Bäcklund & Mäntysalo 2010:343).

By investigating planning practices in four urban areas in Finland, Bäcklund & Mäntysalo conclude that integrative forms of democracy are used, but actual

paradigm shifts are not visible. Instead, citizen participation has been inserted on top of the comprehensive-rationalist model of planning, resulting in an institutional ambiguity. The authors suspect that the cities have given little thought to the actual purpose of citizen participation, and the procedure for the handling and evaluation of the gathered information is unresolved, even possibly leaving a single civil servant defining its relevance. For getting the integrative forms of democracy to work, the authors suggest that a complete institutional restructuring is necessary (Bäcklund & Mäntysalo 2010:347-348).

In the light of common planning practices in Finland, the planning process investigated here has moved on from a distinct aggregative interpretation of democracy to involving integrative elements in the form of the so called expert groups.

The democratic value of governance networks in policy planning

The preparation of the development programme is identifiable as a governance network acting according to deliberative ideals of inclusiveness and broad, active participation. According to Mäntysalo, Saglie & Cars (2011), the use of deliberative ideals are commonplace in planning legislation in Nordic countries. Governance network theory has during recent years incorporated deliberative ideals and will be used for investigating the planning process at hand.

Governance network theory

The impact of governance networks in policy formation is largely an answer to increased policy and societal complexity. Decisions and development policy is expected to become more efficient when local experts and stakeholders are engaged in the matter at hand, an opinion supported by many governance network theorists and the European Union in its model for regional development. Some theorists have tried to conceptualize this as a “democracy of the affected” (Eckersley 2000; Dryzek 2007). Hiironniemi (2005), discussing Finnish conditions, states that “traditional administration gradually transform into the control of external and internal networks. This development has taken place gradually and partly unconsciously or at least without clear strategic control.” Although the idea about management administration has been initiated from above, the continuing development is very difficult to control as it is dependent on the actions of the regional actors and their will for cooperation. The universal responsibility of the state has therefore been weakened and their interference has had to become more selective (Salminen, 2008: 1251). Sørensen & Torfing (2007, 12-13) summarizes four advantages common in governance network research:

1. Governance networks enable *proactive governance*, since opportunities and problems can be identified in an early stage and solutions can be more flexible.

2. Governance networks are instruments for *aggregation of information*. The actors in the network often have deep relevant knowledge which helps qualifying political decisions.
3. Governance networks are arenas for *consensus building*. Consensus is not always possible, but the networks can at least civilize conflicts.
4. Governance networks *prevent implementation resistance*, if relevant and affected actors are able to participate and develop a sense of joint responsibility for the decisions taken.

On the other hand, governance networks complicate the neat picture of representative democracy, where citizens have equal opportunity to participate and elected representatives are held accountable through periodical elections. Five main deficiencies are visible in governance network research (Sørensen & Torfing 2007, Sørensen 2010; Nyseth 2008; Hendriks 2008; Dryzek 2000):

1. There are no commonly accepted democratic norms for governance networks. Consequently, the ground rules can be at the hand of the most resourceful actors. The governance networks thereby are at risk of becoming *closed, elitist and narrow*.
2. Actors in governance networks *are not accountable* for the decisions the network makes. Policy programmes may be approved by politicians who have not participated in the formation of the policy or even know the subject area.
3. *Lack of transparency* potentially adds to legitimacy problems of the governance networks.
4. Governance networks often *score low on inclusivity*.
5. Actors display frustration over a *lack of clear and visible results*.

Achieving the democratic ideals of representative democracy in governance networks is a huge challenge for governance theorists (see eg. Dryzek 2007). Here, it is important to emphasize that governance networks are not intended as a substitute to representative democracy, since they cannot fully achieve the democratic ideals, but should rather be seen as an important and even critical contribution to the continued legitimacy of representative democracy. Governance networks can influence government actions with local expertise, involving different actors for every issue handled. Doing this, a democratic model for governance networks considering factors such as *inclusivity, accountability, deliberation* and *meta-governance* is of the essence (Sørensen & Torfing 2007; Nyseth 2008; Hendriks 2008; Dryzek 2000).

Self-governance is a constitutive feature of governance networks. **Meta-governance** refers to governors' possibility to the "regulation of self-regulation" (Sørensen & Torfing, 2007:233). Meta-governance is "an array of tools consciously designed and deliberately applied to influence the way in which a governance network contributes to the governing of society" (Damgaard & Torfing 2011: 295). Well working meta-governance is seen as an important factor for offering a connection to the legitimacy of elected representatives. The govern-

ment must keep the participants from feeling constrained and inhibited instead of enabled and supported, and because of this, meta-governance tools are often more subtle and frame setting than standard regulating tools. Some tools can be employed at a distance, such as rules stipulating composition of participants, objectives, institutional procedures and funding. Other more demanding tools comprise of direct support, such as expert advice, consultancy and tailor-made interventions and solutions (Damgaard & Torfing, 2011).

Since governance networks should constitute a ‘democracy of the affected’, democratic legitimacy becomes a matter of whether those who are affected by a decision have had the right, possibility and capacity to participate in or otherwise influence the policy process. This principle of **inclusivity** implies a varying degree of inclusion in different networks. The demos should not be all-purpose, but a plurality of issue-specific demoi (Drysek, 2007: 268). Finding stakeholders from organised groups is simple – the challenging part is to find representatives from unorganised stakeholders. Governance networks often score low on inclusivity, due to technocracy or elitism. Hendriks (2008:1026), investigating Dutch governance networks, conclude that

“the Dutch administration’s attempt to steer networks has been more concerned with fulfilling entrepreneurial and epistemic goals than democratic ones. To date, network arrangements have predominantly involved those with expertise, status or connections. Many of those potentially affected by decisions such as small-to-medium enterprises, diverse societal groups and the broader public have not (yet) been included.”

Defining the affected is another problematic issue or, in other words, to assess the degree of affectedness and deciding the inclusivity accordingly. The participants should as a consequence engage in continuous deliberation with the affected (Drysek 2007). I return to the matter of inclusivity in the discussion on deliberation below.

Accountability is a norm originating from representative democracy. Since participants cannot be held accountable in forthcoming elections, governance networks cannot attain the standard of accountability set by representative democracy. It is also difficult to trace responsibility for a policy emerging from complex networks and consequently governance networks need to find another way to achieve accountability. Esmark (2007) identify three factors influencing accountability in governance networks. First, *inclusion*, which is discussed elsewhere in this article. Second, *publicity* (or transparency) means that the discussions should be public, with participants prepared to assume responsibility for their expressed views. The process is transparent and meetings documented. Public debate around issues favours accountability. Third, *responsiveness* involves an interaction between the participant and his or her own set of stakeholders. Every participant receives a mandate to take decisions, and this mandate must continuously be renewed, through deliberation, hearings and meetings. The punishment, the equivalent of regular elections, consequently is replacement or “silencing” in the public sphere. The mandate can be adjusted according to issue,

and in this way accountability can potentially even be more flexible than in representative democracy (Esmark, 2007:290-295).

The core of **deliberative democracy theory** is that a legitimate decision process can only take place through deliberation by citizens. Decision making in a group of people should occur by means of arguments offered by and to participants who are committed to the values of rationality and impartiality. Deliberative democracy theory is closely tied to the theory of communicative action by Habermas, who argue that emancipation is to be found in communication free from moral discourses between individuals and deliberative discourses amongst equal citizens (Habermas 1984; 1999). The deliberative democracy theory marks a shift in democratic theory from traditional voting models towards “a discourse-centred theory which emphasises the transformative effect of reason” (Doheny&O’Neill, 2010). In their article *Citizens’ Juries and Deliberative Democracy*, Graham Smith and Corinne Wales have constructed three deliberative democratic criteria (Smith & Wales, 2000):

Inclusivity: Ideally, deliberative democracy should entitle every citizen to participate. At the very least, all actors concerned by the issue must be given the opportunity to take part. Special efforts should be made to include marginalised groups. Inclusion instead of representation is considered to improve democracy and reduce political alienation.

Deliberation: The dialogue should be unconstrained, open and reasoned. All participants must respect and reflect over other’s opinions. The discussions must be around key issues with the aim of solving problems. The selection of information, experts participating and the setting of the agenda are all crucial elements for good deliberation.

Citizenship: At the core of deliberative democracy theory is the notion that deliberation activates citizens. Involvement amplifies political interest and activates citizens. Commonly the degree of involvement is measured by looking at the rate of participants who have changed opinion. Important for attitudinal change is to what extent citizens feel confident in their capability to influence the process. Learning is also important in this context; the notion that participants receive new concepts and perspectives and thereby can re-evaluate their norms (Doheny & O’Neill, 2010).

Constructing indicators for the democratic quality of governance networks
On the basis of *inclusivity*, *accountability*, *deliberation* and *meta-governance* which were handled in the theoretical discussion, I will construct an ideal model of good governance networks for investigating the quality of democracy in the network studied. As I have referred to earlier, some of these ideals have been criticized, especially in planning theory, for not being realistic or applicable to actual planning practices. There are of course differences between policy networks, as the one studied here, and planning practices, but the process studied does however display characteristics of actual planning practices. In any case, I imply that these ideals are functional for examining and reflecting upon the democratic qualities of the process studied. The meta-governance indicators

determine the level of self-government of the network. The output indicator is important here to hint on the actual influence of the network. Inclusivity and accountability are fundamental indicators for the quality of democracy of the network, as is deliberation, revealing the quality of discussion.

1. Meta-governance (Damgaard & Torfing 2011; Hiironniemi 2005)

- The government administration has a unique but not higher position than other members
- Self-government of the network vis-à-vis the state, regulation of self-regulation
- Output: How is the dialogue in the expert groups treated when the Regional Programme is written

2. Inclusivity (Drysek, 2007; Smith & Wales, 2000; Hiironniemi, 2005)

- Participation is open for all citizens in the region
- Attempts are made to include different interests and all society sectors
- Special efforts are made to include marginalized groups
- Issue-specific participation, participation according to affectedness

3. Deliberation (Smith & Wales, 2000)

- What information is given and how is this selected
- Independence of and trust between the members. Respect for each other and each other's opinion
- Unconstrained, open and reasoned dialogue with the aim to solve problems. Dialogue where the only authority is "the best argument"
- Decision making by dialogue. Problem-solving through mutual understanding.
- Participants experience participation as beneficial
- Participation is a learning process for participants and thereby create more active citizens

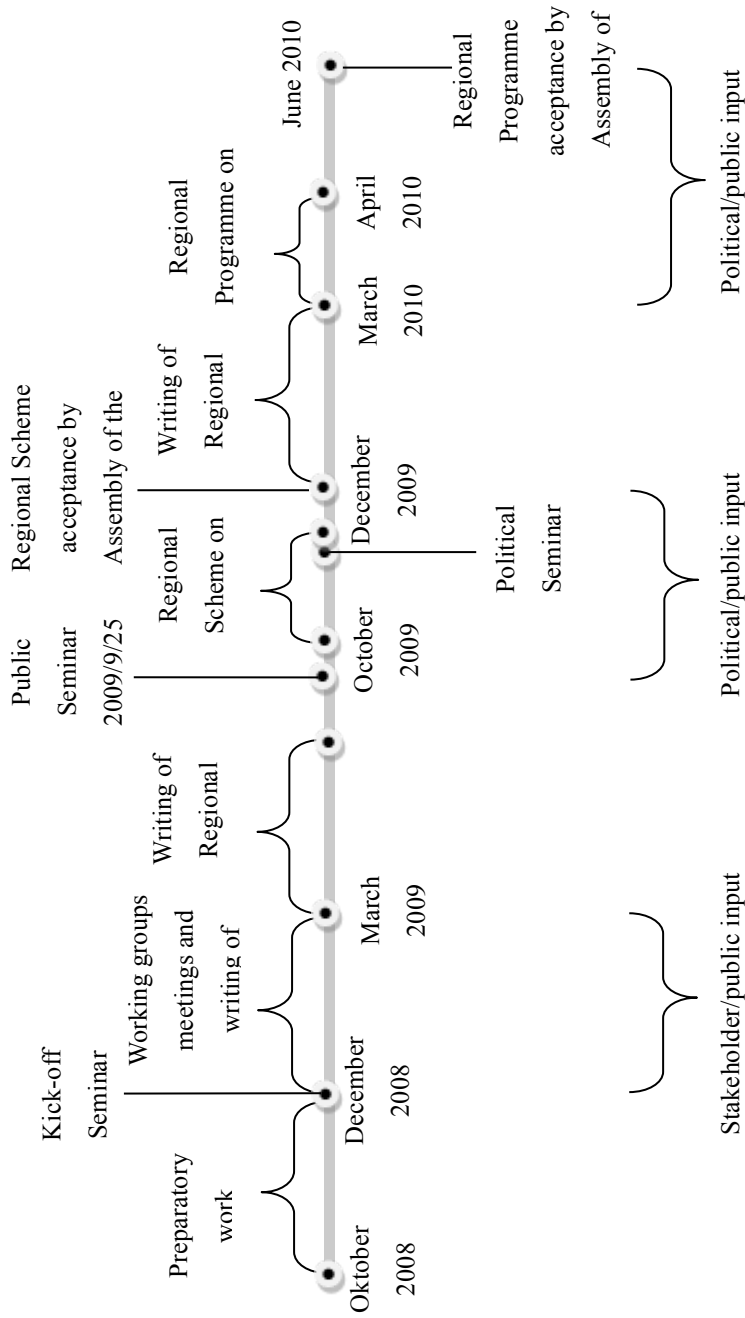
4. Accountability (Esmark, 2007:290-295)

- Transparency: the network operation is transparent and participants assume responsibility for their opinions publicly
- Responsiveness: participants receive and maintain a mandate through interaction with their constituency/their set of stakeholders

Materials and methods

Ostrobothnia is a medium-sized region in Finland, and by avoiding regions with too large urban centres, a single city administration does not override the regional activity, which is the case especially in the south of the country. Ostrobothnia is characterized by large rural areas, a few urban centres, and both Swedish and Finnish speaking areas, circumstances showing potential for political conflicts. As mentioned, the practice of planning is constructed separately by every Regional Council, but yet the process described here is largely commonplace in regions in Finland.

Figure 1. Timeline of the entire planning process



The examination of the planning process is done by inspecting work documents and interviews with participants. The documents inspected are minutes of

meetings and reports from the participants. Interviews with 16 participants have been carried through, five of them 3rd June 2009 to 30th June 2009, eleven of them 25th January 2011 to 11th February 2011. In the first round of interviewing, the group meetings had just been accomplished, while the second round of interviews was carried through when the programme was written and approved, giving the participants the possibility to comment on the output of the group meetings. The interviews were semi structured, covering deliberative democracy, good governance network characteristics and opinions on the planning process, the programme and the role of the Regional Council. The interviewees were chosen to cover all expert groups with the ambition of addressing a diversity of actors, covering all society sectors and both experienced and less experienced participants. The interview schema and a list of interviewees can be viewed in Appendix 2 and 3. Figure 1 display the timeline of the entire planning process. The meetings of the working groups early on in the process is the investigated timeslot.

It is important to point out that the differences in the nature of the work process between the different expert groups are substantial. The equality of the process and the decision making methods depend on the subject of the group, the composition of the group members, the personalities of the participants and previous work conducted on the issue in Ostrobothnia. Therefore, the statements described below do not apply to all groups, but for the planning process as a whole. In the following chapter, the results of the investigation are presented.

The planning process compared to ideals

Meta-governance

Self-government of the network vis-à-vis the state, regulation of self-regulation: The planning process is governed through loose frame setting directives and the discussions are free and uncontrolled. The Council is free to decide how the planning process should be carried through, and one official explain that the Council take account of development programmes written at EU, national and regional level, and thereby fulfil the main intention of the programme, to act as a unifying plan on the regional level. Of course, the council cooperate closely on this issue with the state regional institution ELY, which possess the financial means on the regional level. The Council also listen to ministry requests, as in the case of constructing an expert group for internationalisation issues. All interviewed participants agree that the representatives from state regional units did not dominate or control the discussions in any way. However, the output side of the process is somewhat troublesome, since the Council solely select what issues end up in the final programme. The planning process is realized during a short time period without any clarity of how the dialogue should be implemented in practical decisions. There are problems with the visibility and validity of the programme, since it has only a visionary character and the implementation is at hand of other actors, such as the ELY-centre.

The government administration has a unique but not higher position: officials at the Regional Council describe the planning process as a way of “picking up new ideas”. Especially in the writing of the programme, the Council’s dominance is absolute. Still, participants have the possibility to give feedback at any time. In the group meetings the council representatives have in most cases had an unobtrusive position, kicking off and guiding the dialogue, but still not in a dominating way. “Everyone got to express their opinion and was respected equally” was a common assessment in the interviews. Only one interviewee has indicated that the Regional Council official was too dominant. Another participant described the planning process by comparing it to open-source computer software, where all information is available and it is possible for anyone to give input and improvement suggestions, and the Council acting as a moderator.

Group dialogue in comparison with programme text: there is a wide consent among the participants that the Regional Programme consider the opinion of their own expert groups too briefly, and that the programme is too imprecise and show a lack of concretizations. One participant suggests that the report of every expert group should be included directly in the programme, and that it is problematic that the final text is written by someone that hasn’t got the expert knowledge as the experts in the expert groups. At the same time, most participants understand that the programme cannot be specific on all subjects and that it in its current form has a visionary character.

Inclusivity

Open participation: Regional Council officials indicate that all citizens have the opportunity to participate in the planning process. However, this possibility is not communicated openly, and only chosen experts and stakeholders get a direct invitation. The nature of the selection can consequently be considered a bit arbitrary. Only one participant has been reported to request participation without an invite. Marginalized groups taking part by their own engagement is of course not probable.

Efforts to include all society sectors: the common division of society sectors in public, private and civil society is expanded to five sectors, in order to classify the participants as either regional or state representatives, and science additionally separated since the inclusion of scientific opinion is an important factor in deliberative democracy theory. The classifications are state organisations, regional organisations, business organisations, science/education organisations and civic society. The actual affiliation of participants is difficult to judge in some cases, and this classification must thereby be seen as indicative. Representatives of state regional organisations are classified as state representatives, while public participants of municipal or regional origin are interpreted as regional representatives. Business organisations represent the private sector, where private enterprise representatives, such as regional development centres and farming industry organisations, are also included. Civic Society represents non-government organizations, which also includes (but only to a small extent)

marginalized, less established groups (see Appendix 3 for examples on this classification).

The examination of participation activity has a quantitative approach, but no exact numbers can be achieved. This estimation is based on actual participation, i.e. who have participated in meetings and/or written reports, with ‘high’ indicating a high number of participants and written statements, and ‘low’ indicating only a few participants. Of circa 280 invited, about half have participated in practice.

Table 1. Active participants in Expert Groups by society sector

High			X		
Medium	X	X		X	X
Low					
	Business Organi- zations	Civic Society	Regional	Science/ education	State

Each expert group is dominated by one society sector or interest, but for the complete network, it is possible to conclude that the range of participating parties is broad and represents all society sectors. In Figure 2, no sector is evaluated to have ‘Low’ participation, a judgement based on the fact that the representation is strikingly evenly spread between the sectors. Merely the fact that about 140 people have been active in the process is impressive. Private entrepreneurs very seldom participate, but they are still represented through trade associations. According to interviewees, when private entrepreneurs participate, they often have a prominent position.

Locally based organisations constitute the foundation of every expert group. As seen in the diagram, the regionally based organisations dominate the planning process. This is in part caused by the fact that the Regional Council arranges the process and naturally has participants in every group. About half of the participants in this group represent the Regional Council. The state organisations, mainly represented by the ELY-centre, participate in almost every group, as do science and educational organisations. These three categories are those expected to have good prerequisites for a high participation rate.

Special efforts to include marginalized (less established) groups: the Regional Council especially mention the ambition to include marginalized groups. Looking at the actual participation, they have very low representation, which is also recognised by officials at the Regional Council, who state that “immigrants should be placed in groups according to what they do, just like other citizens”. It takes more than a plain invitation to motivate these groups to take part. The inclusion of sport representatives for this round of planning does however serve

as an example of successful inclusion of an actor previously not considered as a stakeholder (although sport cannot be considered a marginalized group per se).

Issue-specific participation, participation according to affectedness: the composition of the expert groups very much builds on the idea of collecting participants with the right kind of knowledge for the issues handled, and can accordingly be described as issue-specific. For example, the Culture group is dominated by Civic societies, such as art and culture representatives. On the other hand, the level of inclusion of affected actors is difficult to judge, but since the planning process was a closed process, not engaging public debate, deficiencies are probable.

Deliberation

Information: the ambition of the Regional Council has been to collect relevant programmes from all levels of government and society sectors. Respondents in the interviews agree that the amount of information given has been sufficient. The planning process started with a kick-off seminar where background material and the intention of the process and the programme were presented. Regional Council representatives chairing the expert groups presented additional information as a foundation for the discussion. Central for the process has been the production of expert opinions and reports by the participants.

Independence of, trust and respect between participants: the trust and respect between members and members' opinions is unequivocally excellent. No participant has expressed complaint on this matter. All parties were treated in the same way and all had an opportunity to state their opinion. However, a core group always form in the groups, with resourceful participants: "the participants regarded as prophets on the subject are always dominant", as one participant put it. Authorities often have more resources to participate, but many participants especially pointed out that they did not dominate the meetings: "many participants were pretty quiet, but the authorities did not dominate. It was a question of personal qualities, not status". When participants recited dominating parties, all types of organisations were mentioned, with private enterprise representatives and researchers in important positions.

Unconstrained, open and reasoned dialogue with the aim to solve problems: All interviewed participants describe an open, unconstrained dialogue. Some complain that sometimes the discussion has drifted away to irrelevant issues, but in general the discussions have been substantive and with a clear objective.

Decision making by dialogue, problem-solving through mutual understanding: The Internationalization group, which was new for this round of planning, used the Logic Framework Approach², which allows each participant to highlight problem areas within the discussed field, and the structure of the subsequent discussion are then based on these assessments. This method was described by one participant as "brainstorming", and another participant experienced this process as "very democratic". The discussion were steered to relevant issues and allowed all participants to have their say. In other groups, the work

built upon existing material, mainly the previous programme work. As the core of people of the groups has not been altered, not many new ideas surfaced. Therefore, few meetings were needed before the call for papers. The group's statement was written on the basis of these papers and later accepted by the participants in the group. It is near at hand to suspect that the rapidness of the process question whether for example new participants were regarded equivalently to those who have reached an agreement in the past. The ambition of the Council is good, but participants complain that too few meetings are arranged, and that some issues have not been sufficiently discussed. Many groups indicate that they have reached consensus, but as a consequence of the abstract, visionary character of the programme, in some cases there was no need to agree on particular details. Some groups did contain antagonistic elements, but in these, the conflicts were avoided, as in the case of the location of health care services.

Participants experience participation as beneficial, as a learning process and activating citizens: unquestionably, the participating actors all experience the work process as rewarding, both for expanding their cooperation networks and for the understanding of other parties point of views. Participants are also satisfied with getting the opportunity to express their point of view, their organisation's preferences or the wishes of their sub region. The understanding of the region as a common enterprise improved, as one participant representing an NGO pointed out: "through this work, I recognized how important the region is to our activities. This kind of programme must be done. It reinforces the sense of belonging together". The uncertainty of the status of the programme, its abstract character and the risk of doing work without result make some participants wonder about if the Regional Council can motivate people to take part in the future.

Accountability

Transparency: the planning process is transparent, meeting protocols are available and it is possible to trace back the source of the programme text to individual expert groups. As Figure 1 shows, there are opportunities for the public to participate, through the public seminar for instance, but since the planning process mainly consist of a closed discussion within the expert groups rather than a public debate where the participants assume a mandate for his or her views, the level of publicity can be put into question. Later on in the article, two cases will be presented where media is used to engage a public debate, to contrast the process studied here.

Responsiveness: participants are for the most part representatives of organisations and affected interests and in that way constitute responsiveness to a constituency. However, the accountability and adjustability of mandates can be put into question in a rapid process like this one.

Evaluating the planning process

Figure 3 summarises the indicators of the democratic ideals presented in this article. These are only suggestive, estimating whether there is a high, medium or

low compliance with the ideals. The indicators are judged as having high compliance when the ideals are largely fulfilled, medium compliance when the ideals are partly fulfilled, and low compliance when the ideals are not fulfilled at all.

Table 2. The planning processes compliance with theory ideal

	Theory indicators	Results	Compliance with ideal		
			High	Medium	Low
<i>Meta-governance</i>	Self-government vis-à-vis the state	Frame setting, but free. Implementation unclear.		x	
	Government unique but not higher position	Not higher position, absolute authority in compiling programme.		x	
	Dialogue in comparison with programme text	Brief and imprecise, yet most participants satisfied.		x	
<i>Inclusivity</i>	Open participation	Open in principle, not openly communicated.		x	
	Attempts to include all society sectors	All sectors represented, unsuccessful efforts to include private sector.		x	
	Marginalized groups	Good ambition but insufficient result.			x
	Issue-specific participation, according to affectedness.	Participation issue-specific, but affectedness questionable.		x	
<i>Deliberation</i>	Information	Information central in the process.	x		
	Independence, trust, respect	No complaints from participants.	x		
	Unconstrained, open, reasoned dialogue	No complaints from participants.	x		
	Mutual understanding	Overall good, but process too rapid.		x	
	Learning experience, activate citizens	Increased interest and beneficial for reaching new understandings.	x		
<i>Accountability</i>	Transparency	Transparent, but in practice secluded process.		x	
	Responsiveness	Constituency involvement, but accountability questionable.		x	

The figure indicate that the level of compliance with democratic ideals is a bit above medium, with only one indicator showing low compliance. Especially the deliberative ideals score high, with evidence of an open and democratic dialogue, respect between participants and the planning process appreciated as beneficial and as a learning process. The provision of information is also central to the process. On the negative side, private entrepreneurs and marginalized groups are seldom directly represented. Inevitably, some parties will be dominant, because of superior knowledge and experience and the possibility to dedicate oneself to the task. The planning process is very much a regional affair and the dialogue in the expert groups is free from control, but there are complaints on how the programme is written. Specific issues are discussed in the expert groups while the programme has a visionary character and the issues are selected solely by the Regional Council. The participants agree that the planning process acts as an important venue for regional actors to discuss the development of the region and improves consensus on the regional level.

Discussion: the impact of relevance on democratic ideals

Neglecting output relevance

The case study presented above seems to satisfy most of the criteria for the democratic performance of governance networks (Sørensen & Torfing 2007; Damgaard & Torfing 2011; Sørensen 2010; Nyseth 2008; Hendriks 2008; Dryzek 2000; Esmark 2007). However, the ideals presented have been contested, one instance being the critique of Mouffe (2000) on deliberation neglecting the nature of political conflicts. Governance network research has been highly interested in the democratic performance of governance networks (Pierre, 2000; Hajer & Wagenaar, 2003; Sørensen & Torfing, 2005; Sager & Ravlum, 2005), but has to some part been neglecting the importance of the pronounced relevance of the output of the networks, an issue certainly decisive for the specific networks ending up being the arena for resolving such political conflicts. During the field work for this article, in discussions with regional actors, the definite relevance of the output of the studied network became the key point when trying to understand its democratic qualities.

The relevance of the governance network at hand is in practice highly ambiguous. The programme should according to legislation be the leading programme at the regional level, but since the Regional Council has no financial means to implement strategies – they are only able to write the programme – the gravity the programme finally receives is a matter of how key actors perceive its status. One Regional Council official has, since the programme was written, started working for AVI, the second state regional organisation along with ELY. The official found that the programme had little significance for officials working at AVI, even being described as a “sidetrack”. Apparently, the top-down way of thinking persists among many government officials. The ambiguity of relevance is evident throughout the conducted interviews and this raise suspicion that the indicators used in this article would score differently if the programme

had distinct relevance. The difference between the group discussions and the programme text is one example: participants search for specifications and details, although the programme is not intended to have more than a visionary, unspecific character. The structural character of budget legislation ties up resources which are difficult to take account of in a visionary programme. A Regional Council official stated that “the programme is an important contribution to the development direction of the region, but it is not the big process – to correspond to this ideal would require a much more rigorous process”. Some groups apparently did not even have the ambition to reach consensus on all matters. The Expert Group for Welfare, for instance, did not want to reach a decision on how, or if, healthcare should be arranged on a regional level. “It (the programme) is written in general terms, the conflicts aren’t dealt with”, one participant in the group pointed out. If the programme would be the relevant arena for political decisions, the struggles for e.g. the placement of healthcare services would have been decided there, in which case the deliberative ideals would certainly have been more contested.

Looking again at Figure 1, the “democratic windows”, the opportunities for stakeholders, the public and politicians to give input, are delimited to the planning process of the expert groups and the period when the programme is put on public display. At the end, public administrators write the programme and elected politicians approve it. Assuredly, the Assembly of the Regional Council can hardly familiarize themselves with all of the wide range of topics discussed in the same way as the participants in the expert groups are able to. Because of this, it is essential that the planning process is democratic in itself, e.g. by including politicians and answering to demands of accountability. The Regional Council see the governance network in the planning process as a way of picking up new ideas, not as a system to achieve effectual decisions with clear accountability. This is in line with the findings of Bäcklund & Mäntysalo (2010), who describe Finnish planning practice as citizen participation being inserted on top of the comprehensive-rationalist model of planning. In other words, there are integrative forms of democracy, but at the same time, there are also elements of the comprehensive-rationalist model regarding the roles of elected politicians and public administrators. This approach can be troublesome for the legitimacy of the program in the long run. One participant, representing business interests, pointed out that “it is crucial for the legitimacy of the programme that organisations and businesses working in the field of action participate and give their point of view”. If the participants see no effect of their participation, they can certainly hesitate to participate in the future. If the programme is to become the leading development plan on the regional level, it is fundamental that the participants represent not only the expertise in the particular field, but also the stakeholders and the people affected by the decisions. For this kind of inclusivity, it is obvious that a clear relevance is decisive.

The relevance is influential on most indicators:

- The influence on the *meta-governance* indicators is substantial, but in what direction these indicators would be pushed is a matter of how the governing body respond to the altered circumstances.
- Concerning *transparency*, when decisions become increasingly relevant, the planning process is expected to become more interesting for both mass media and the general public, which in turn incite public debate about the issues discussed. As to *responsiveness*, it is close at hand to assume that when the relevance is definite, affected actors become aware of the network and consequently want their opinion to be heard. By this, the mandate of the participating actors is challenged and will more likely be adjusted.
- A heightened relevance incites participation and in that way *inclusivity* is improved. When a collective regional development plan becomes a part of the public mind, the inclusion of affected actors is certainly raised.
- As mentioned, the *deliberative ideals* are very well satisfied in the studied process. When the planning process is clearly linked to the phase of implementation, and tender, urgent issues must be decided, the discussion quality and the respect between the actors will certainly be challenged. This is the point where the relevance has the most apparent influence, and this fact contests the use of the deliberative target of consensus in policy planning.

Compatibility of governance theory and deliberative democracy theory

While deliberative democracy is commonly used in planning practices, and also in governance network theory, the compatibility of these ideals is essential. The two theories have quite different origins, with deliberative democracy finding its source in Habermasian idealism and governance theory representing realism, with roots in corporatism. Governance network theory is in a sense the democratisation of the ruling of expertise, and one instance of this is the incorporation of deliberative ideals. In planning processes however, deliberative ideals of equality and liberal democratic ideals (individual rights, land-ownership, free enterprise etc.) are fundamentally contradictory (Mäntysalo, Saglie & Cars 2011:2121).

As discussed in the previous chapter, the deliberative ideals are not challenged until the output of the governance networks receives definite relevance. Stakeholder groups for policy planning are according to the deliberative ideal considered as platforms for reasoned deliberation that aim to reach the most rational and “good” solution. This ignores the political aspect of the process. The discussions in governance arenas, such as the expert groups dealt with here, should instead be viewed as “a political battleground in which different political forces struggle to convince others of their particular versions of what is to be perceived as reasonable and rational” (Sørensen, 2010: 7). Citizens debating real issues concerning themselves are expected to bring with them an amount of

emotion, passion and conviction, along with some personal qualities, such as authority and rhetorical skills. Consequently, the democratic value must be reached by respect between the participants, and their willingness to persuade and being persuaded. The deliberative ideal of consensus seem somewhat maladjusted in this context, while the agonistic ideals of allowing disagreements and the concept of adversaries seem to make a closer fit to the reality of planning practices, as Mäntysalo, Saglie & Cars (2011) have pointed out.

Advantages of facilitating public debate

Giving the output of governance networks definite and pronounced relevance enhances the importance of the democratic difficulties of accountability and inclusivity dealt with earlier. At the same time, absolute relevance may fuel a public debate which could improve both accountability (especially transparency) and inclusivity. Especially the low level of participation of marginalized groups (Figure 3) indicates that there is a need for improved inclusivity and transparency. Of course, in a globalized competitive economy, the balance between input legitimacy and output efficiency must be considered. To instantiate how this could be carried through, I would like to draw attention to two Nordic cases, in Sweden and Norway.

The first example is the region of Västra Götaland, Sweden. Instead of just preparing a development programme, a permanent regional development planning organisation was introduced, putting special emphasis on the implementation phase of the regional vision. Annual surveys on opinions on regional development were carried through to reconcile the views of citizens with the regional vision. Different indicators on the development of the region and the placement of development funding were also gathered (Elmkvist, 2011; Ernstson et al, 2011). Annual regional seminars for regional actors as well as learning seminars for politicians were arranged, where these data were presented and discussed. To engage the public, advertising the regional vision in media was important, for instance by producing a special appendix for the regional newspaper. An independent panel of seven representatives of industry and universities were elected to monitor the implementation of the vision. A Vision-secretariat was established to institutionalize the implementation work of the vision, by continuously providing politicians with relevant information for realizing the vision (Västra Götalandsregionen 2005, 2008).

The second example comes from the city of Tromsø, Norway (see Nyseth 2008). In this town, public opposition against a new area plan resulted in the decision to halt the formal planning process to launch a "City development year". During this year, regional actors and different experts not commonly engaged in regional planning had the opportunity to contribute with new ideas. The assembled network had the ambition to reinforce the public debate on urban planning by presenting development alternatives in a comprehensible way. Every Saturday, the network published an article on urban planning in the local newspaper. Public seminars, workshops and conferences were arranged, as well as city walks, where different development strategies were featured on site. A

city exhibition drew special attention, where models of various development alternatives were presented visually. The exhibition was well attended and easy accessible to the public. The “City development year” succeeded in engaging the public in the development of the urban environment, raising awareness, bringing forward new ideas and thereby improving the legitimacy of the forthcoming area plan.

Final reflections

The integrative element of planning practices in Finland is all about mobilization, to make use of regional expertise and stakeholders, as well as to legitimize planning documents. In line with the findings of Bäcklund & Mäntysalo (2010), the planning process studied here display an undeveloped system of taking advantage of the acquired knowledge, which to a large degree is in the hand of a few public administrators. The ideals of deliberative democracy do illuminate the important setbacks of governance networks (elitism, deficient inclusion), and the emphasis on rational argumentation and enlightenment are valuable for discussion quality, but the lack of relevance in the studied case demonstrate that the ideal of consensus is not useful in policy planning if sensitive issues are to be decided. The agonistic ideal, which also supports participatory democracy, acknowledges that participants have different origins, that they both figuratively and literally come from different places, and that consensus should accordingly not be the ultimate objective.

The advantages of governance networks discussed earlier in this article are desirable, and display potential for addressing the setbacks known to representative democracy. The planning process studied is well appreciated by the participants, as a meeting place, a forum for enhancing the understanding of each other's wills and as a way of raising the awareness of the region as a common enterprise. At the same time, the network also demonstrates the weaknesses that governance theory highlights. The timeline displayed in Figure 1 demonstrate that the opportunities for citizens to influence the programme are sufficient, but in practice, since the planning process is not publicly debated, not many citizens make use of this opportunity. Inclusivity in the studied process starts from the arbitrary selection of the Regional Council, a practice which may enforce corporatist characteristics. In a society structure similar to the Finnish one, where interactive elements are inserted on top of an aggregative democratic structure, I suggest that the relevance of the generated information may be developed by making use of publicity. Trough public monitoring, inclusivity and accountability may improve, as well as the continual adjustment and legitimacy of the phase of implementation.

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Appendix 1. Interview Questions.

Participating partners:

- What differences are visible between society sector interests and agendas?
- How do different society sector interests come together? Does any sector take precedence?

Level of participation:

- Does everyone participate on equal terms? Are all opinions heard and respected?
- Does any actor have higher status and "lead" the work? How influential are state and local authorities (regional councils, TE Centres) in comparison to other parties?
- Do all actors have equal resources to participate?
- Does everyone participate in the coordination activities, in governing the planning process? Or are there special people who do this?
- Are marginalized groups included in decision making? Heard and respected in decision-making?

Decision-making:

- How are decisions taken? How many decisions reach a consensus? Is consensus a goal? How often are decisions voted?
- Can decisions be taken and goals achieved without the participation of all parties?
- A characteristic of deliberative democracy is that research has a high status in the work process. Is this the case?
- How do new objectives and strategies come about? Who takes the initiative to this and come up with initial ideas?
- Was the line of discussion clear from the beginning? Did the work follow a structure that was already in place?

Own experience in participating:

- How is participation experienced?
 - Has it been helpful to the own organization? Have you learned anything?
 - Has the network /the cooperation with other regional actors increased?
- What do you think you / your organization could bring to the process?

Conflicts:

- What questions have brought about conflicts? How have they been resolved?

Planning Process results:

- How have your views been taken into account in the expert group's report / the finished program?

- What is your opinion on the planning and landscape program now? How do you find the programme?
- How do you see the benefits of participating in the planning process now?
- How do you see the benefits of the programme now?

Visibility of the region

- How aware are you of the region? Do you act on the basis of the regional borders? Are the sub-regions more important?
- Has your sense of a common Ostrobothnia been strengthened by participating in the programme work?
- Can the Regional Council be seen as the leader of the region?
- Does the programme function as a leading programme for the region?
- Who are "Österbottens ombudsmän"?

Process structure (for the Council officials)

- What instructions are given from state level? How unique is the structure of the planning process in Ostrobothnia?
- Was there more problematic to receive opinions from the below or to manage steering from above?
- How important was the energy cluster when the program was conceived and written? How has the cluster been highlighted through the process?
- How was the selection process carried through when writing the programme?
- Feedback, comments on the program?
- What type of questions raised conflicts?
- Which government or EU programmes/directives have been most important to follow?

Appendix 2. Affiliation of interviewees

Regional

Municipal Social Director

Municipal Director

Regional Council of Ostrobothnia

Regional Council of Ostrobothnia

Regional Council of Ostrobothnia

Business Organizations

Jakobstad Region Development Company Concordia

Vaasa Region Development Company (VASEK)

Ostrobothnian Swedish farmers Association

Ostrobothnian Swedish farmers Association

Civic Society

Sports Academy of the Vasa region

State

Centre for Economic Development, Transport and the Environment in Ostrobothnia

Science/education

Åbo Akademi University

University of Vaasa

Hanken School of Economics

MUOVA research and product development centre

Notes

¹ The topics of the expert groups included culture, competitiveness, rural development, logistics, information society, welfare, prognostication of education, environment, internationalization, regional structure and rural living.

² Logic Framework Approach (LFA) is a management tool mainly used in the design, monitoring and evaluation of international development projects. The method allows each participant to define problems in the discussed theme. A selection process follows, where the issues are chosen and collected into groups. Finally the group try to find solutions and development paths for the selected issues.