

Evaluating the Democratic Quality of Local Democratic Practices – Sampling Seven Frameworks

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Abstract

There has been an upsurge in more participatory, interactive and citizen-oriented governance practices all around the world since the 1990s. What they all have in common is an emphasis on mobilising citizens and stakeholders affected, strengthening local communities, ensuring efficient planning solutions, and securing enhanced legitimacy for existing governing institutions. Conversely, we have witnessed a growing interest in designing frameworks for evaluating the democratic quality of these innovations, asking questions such as the extent to which they actually are enhancing the quality of democracy? This article juxtaposes seven recent evaluative frameworks developed by academics, which address the question of the democratic quality of these new democratic innovations. The article concludes that there are many overlaps between the different frameworks in terms of criteria with a mix of traditional and more participatory democratic norms at play. Furthermore, it also concludes these evaluative practices in many ways reflect the managerial search for accountability mechanisms in the public sector.

Introduction

Since the 1990s, the world has witnessed a proliferation of public initiatives that have sought to involve citizens in the design, implementation and delivery of public services (OECD 2009, 2011, 2020). “New Public Governance” (2009), “co-production” or “co-creation” (Osborne 2010; Voorberg et al. 2015, Brandsen, Steen & Verschuere 2018) have been proclaimed as the future of public policy-making, a future in which mobilisation enables citizens to become engaged in public service production and delivery, as well as exert active citizenship in their local communities (Alford 2009). This signals a shift in the role of citizens from passive recipients of public services to a more active and producing role, whereby public authorities merely facilitate and support production and delivery of public services (Agger & Hedensted Lund 2017; Boyle, Slay, & Stephens 2010).

The academic field of public administration/management has not simply endorsed this development; but in many ways generated the language through producing concepts, theories, and models. Furthermore, academics have also been proactive in empirically advising and recording the actual practices of these new democratic “innovations” (Geissel and Newton 2012, Escobar & Elstub 2017). While there is a multitude of different practices, platforms and

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techniques, the whole discussion can be perceived as two distinct areas covering different parts of the policy cycle. First, it is about practice towards enhancing public engagement in public service delivery through “co-production” (Ostrom 1996; Alford 1998; Pestoff, 2006) and “co-creation” (Pralhad & Ramaswamy 2004; Bason 2018). Second, there are practices and platforms pointing towards the input side of policymaking and addressed through concepts such as “collaborative governance” (Booher 2004; Emerson, Nabatchi and Balogh 2012), “empowered participatory governance” (Fung and Wright 2001) or “co-governance” (Smith 2005; Pestoff 2012), “deliberative mini-publics” (Fung 2007), “citizen summits” (Michels 2019), “citizens-juries” (Gastil & Levine 2005) and “citizen panels” (Brown 2006). The idea behind the different designs is to increase public deliberation in public decision-making and to revitalise procedures and institutions in order to place citizens in a more active role in setting the political agenda and give them a voice in the public service production that affects them. (Chwalisz 2017; Dryzek et al. 2019). Notwithstanding the different roles, rules and chains of accountabilities, they can both be apprehended by the term “democratic innovations”.

With an increasing number of these innovations being tried out and employed around the world, there has been a growing demand for evaluative tools to systematically assess not only the policy outcome of these innovations, but also to appraise their democratic quality (Elstub & Escobar 2017).

The practitioner-oriented grey literature within the field tends to focus very broadly on positive effects of “community empowerment” and “citizen engagement” (see, for example, Emery and Flora (2006); Rowe and Frewer (2004); Abelson and Gauvin (2006) including effects on “trust”, “quality of services” and “social cohesion” rather than on specific democratic qualities. Furthermore, democratic values are often modulated when new democratic innovations are used in areas such as urban planning and sustainability (not to mention digital practices) in exchange for community empowerment and other broad outcomes. In this paper, we wish to contrast a selection of frameworks on how to evaluate the “democratic quality” of local democratic innovations. Although derived from a range of academic contexts, they are all applicable to citizen-oriented forms of governance. Not only are these evaluative methods and tools of interest from an empirical point of view, but the phenomenon is also a critical case of the limits of evaluating public administration in late modernity.

Disregarding the large quantity of literature on democratic audits, a practice mainly concerned with traditional political institutions at the national level (cf. Beetham 2004), the field of democratic assessments and appraisals of collaborative arrangements at the local level is still embryonic. For our review, we have selected seven different criteria-based frameworks for assessing democratic merits at a local level (Sørensen & Torfing 2005; Lowndes, Pratchett and Stoker 2006(a); Agger & Löfgren 2008; Smith 2009(b); Skelcher, Sullivan and Jeaffers. 2013; Gastil, Knobloch and Kelly, 2012; Michels 2012). The aim of this review is to not only identify common themes and similarities between them, but also to reflect on how they conceive the applied performance measures.

The reasons for selecting these seven are that they are all: a) intended to be applied at a local level in particular geographical and physical locations,

b) crafted to encompass new democratic innovations/projects, and c) explicit in referring to the academic discourse around new public governance, collaborative governance, co-production etc. as mentioned above.

We will review each of these frameworks by asking the following questions:

- a) What criteria do these each of these frameworks apply (if any), and what is the unit of analysis?
- b) How are the criteria converted into actual analytical questions suitable for implementation in democratic assessments?
- c) Are there any instances of the framework being used to evaluate actual practice?
- d) What is the underlying conception of the evaluative aspects of the frameworks?

By reviewing and juxtaposing these frameworks in a comparative perspective, we hope to demonstrate the underlying evaluative and performance measures. As will become clear below, we are talking about evaluative frameworks developed independently of each other, and without any exchange of learning and experiences (and the wheel seems to have been reinvented several times). Moreover, we intend to contribute to the scholarly debate on the quality of interactive/participatory/collaborative processes that are often criticised for being “tokenistic” or used to “legitimise” decisions already made (Cooke and Kothari 2001; Woltjer 2002; Fernandez-Martinez, Garcia-Espin and Jimenez-Sanchez 2019). We hope to not only contribute to greater transparency around these activities by offering a “vocabulary” of different democratic impacts and values that are at play in these new democratic designs and more participatory modes of governance, but also wish to contribute to the scholarly debate on evaluation and performance measuring.

The article is organised as follows. We will in the following section, section two, present some of the underlying premises for assessments of new democratic innovations, and the rationale behind our questions. After that, in sections three, we will succinctly review the different frameworks based on the four questions above. In our final sections containing discussion and conclusions (four and five), we will discuss our reviews in light of terms of commonalities, and deviating angles.

Theoretical Frameworks for Assessing Collaborative Governance and Democracy

Appraising the quality of democracy is probably just as widespread around the globe as measuring transparency, integrity/corruption - not to mention human rights. Indices such as the “Democracy Barometer” (Social science centre, Berlin and University of Zurich), “Nations in transit” (Freedom House) and the “State of Democracy” (Institute for Electoral Assistance and Democracy (IDEA) in Stockholm) are examples of regular, systematic and comparative assessments of the quality and state of democracy. The benchmarks in these indices usually comprise the existence and function of certain formal institutions and/or the country’s compliance with universal democratic rights. By contrast, what we are discussing in this article are the local, and deliberative, practices in contexts set

to enhance, and expand, citizen participation and engagement beyond the realms of existing representative and formal democratic institutions and processes. Although often based on ideals embedded in theories of participatory/deliberative/discursive democracy (Barber 1984; Fishkin 1996; Dryzek 2000), and materialised through the practices of social innovation, planning as experimentation (Moulaert, MacCallum, Mehmood and Hamdouch, 2013), and co-creation (Brandsen, Steen and Verschure 2018), they are devised as a supplement to existing channels of representative democracy (Nyseth, Ringholm and Agger 2018). Furthermore, their location and scope are most of the time limited to local service delivery with limited demographics (e.g., a neighbourhood).

While there have been attempts to draft a full and comprehensive list of all the different forms of democratic evaluation (Beetham 2012), we feel it is sufficient for the purposes of this study to only include those that pertain to democratic projects/innovations on a local level. We have also chosen to exclude some older frameworks for local evaluations (such as e.g., Webler 1995; Rowe and Frewer 2004). The strategy for our review exercise has been to emphasise the selection of democratic criteria and unit of analysis, the attempts to convert them to actual empirical questions, and the actual uptake in empirical studies. Furthermore, we also ask the question to how these frameworks position themselves to different forms of performance measurement (Lewis 2015).

Democratic Criteria and Unit of Analysis

Without entering a theoretical debate on what constitutes democracy, many (albeit not all) democratic theorists acknowledge that democracy is more than just a prominence of institutions, and that it involves some kind of first principles, or transparent and universal criteria for “how the people should govern themselves”. Liberal principles around ideational representation, accountability, public access (to information/resources etc.), protection of minorities, and enlightened understanding seem to be universally acknowledged as hallmarks for “good” procedural democracy (cf. Dahl 1989). In the meantime, there has been a growing literature on participatory democracy which has expanded the whole domain to include criteria such as “undistorted deliberation” and “empowerment” (Mansbridge, Bohman, Chambers, Estlund, and Føllesdal 2010; Dryzek 2011).

With respect to our article, the indicators, i.e., the democratic criteria, are not given *a priori*. What constitutes democracy has always been subject to disagreement between different philosophical schools and scholars, contesting existing paradigms and practice based on failing to deliver equality, effectiveness, inclusion, or whatever value that is prioritised. Furthermore, we will not seek to classify the explicit and implicit criteria we identify into the broad theoretical democratic models, e.g., representative, participatory, or deliberative democracy. The actual practice of co-production, co-creation, and other citizen-oriented forms of governance is far more pragmatic than the rigid academic and theoretical models of democracy.

Another important aspect regarding the criteria is that the reviewed frameworks do not share a common emphasis in terms of the unit of analysis for evaluative purposes. As pointed out by Elstub and Escobar (2019), the current

literature is actually unclear on what the object of study really is when we talk about democratic innovations. Denominators such as “solutions”, “projects”, “practices”, “instruments”, and “implementation” are all exemplifying the vagueness of the body of literature on democratic innovations. However, according to Geissel (2012, p.167) the overall literature that examines the quality of democracy can be divided into three contributions. First, there are approaches examining the *procedural aspects*, or the *ex-ante* aspects. Second, approaches emphasising the achievement of desired outcomes, and to what extent democratic innovation *fulfils the collective goals of a constituency*. Finally, there is a third type that evaluates the basis of the attainment of generating democratic capabilities and *an informed, enlightened democratic citizenry*. Like Geissel, we find it valuable to distinguish between *ex ante* and *ex post*; or between the actual *outcome of the process* and the *design of the innovation* when we seek to discern the unit of observation. Although these two vantage points are closely connected, they are far from identical, and this is often the reason for confusion, according to Geissel. For example, that a specific participatory practice only becomes consultative (rather than conclusive), and thus may feel unsatisfactory for the participants, is not an outcome of the process, but a result of the design.

Converting Theoretical Criteria to Appropriate Analytical Questions

With all due deference to democratic thinking, at the end of the day, democratic theory’s real test is to what extent philosophical reasoning can be converted to questions suitable for empirical evaluation. As highlighted by Geissel (2012), several available frameworks for democratic evaluation are too academic to be deployed in empirical studies. This abstractness does not just refer to applying democratic first principles for assessment purposes, it also obfuscates that there is usually a trade-off between various democratic criteria (particularly when they are converted to actual empirical questions). For example, a high level of public participation can be conceived as a sign of inclusion and engagement, but it will inevitably have an effect on both the quality of the dialogue, as well as the individual sense of democratic efficiency. We will only appraise to what extent the authors themselves make a serious attempt to adapt their democratic principles to workable evaluative questions, suitable for actual implementation in empirical studies.

Examples of Empirical Studies

Democratic theory was for many years a vocation for a few academic theorists to debate either the historical models or the underpinning philosophical values of the concept of democracy. At the same time, democratic practice was synonymous with the design and work of formal institutions (and the core legal-constitutional statutes and conventions) of the democratic “State”. Although embodying certain theories of democracy, the modern (western) State is typically the product of different historical layers of polity, including pre-democratic idiosyncrasies. The frameworks we present in this article all have in common that they are generic frameworks, which should be applicable whenever evaluating any democratic practice/innovation, and ideally without taking much consideration of contextual circumstances (which we will demonstrate is

difficult). We have in our review of the empirical utilisation selected all those studies which are a) clearly building (fully or partially) on the framework, or b) clearly are democratic appraisals. Consequently, we have excluded single references to them in other academic publications.

This part of the review will discuss whether the frameworks presented here, in fairness all of which were products of academic theoretical thinking, and have been utilised in actual empirical evaluations in including citizens.

Reflecting on Performance Measurement

The final question we ask refers to the underlying assumptions of measuring performance in these frameworks. Throughout most industrialised democracies, the practice of performance measures intensified in the 1980s and 1990s caused by managerialism, new accountability regimes and fiscal challenges. While normally being conceived a cornerstone of New Public Management (NPM) and being perceived as an “objective” and “apolitical” way of measuring a variety of elements (outputs/outcomes, process, efficiency etc.) (Moynihan 2008), the idea of measuring all types of governance activities has (partly reflecting Mark Moore’s success with “public values” (Moore 2013) trickled down to the type of practices we are studying here (Guthrie and Russo 2014). We will not be able to present all the different aspects of performance measures here, but will focus on two distinctions in our appraisals of the frameworks. First, what part of the policy process the indicators are emphasising, and second, whether they are based on rationalist-scientific, or on realistic-political premises (Lewis 2015). While the former more underpins the original managerial assumption of political neutrality and objective/scientific measures, the latter acknowledges the ambiguous and highly politicised side of all kinds of performance measures.

The Frameworks

CLEAR

The first approach is the CLEAR Framework, by Lowndes, Pratchett, and Stoker, and presented in a brief form in *Social Policy & Society* (Lowndes et al. 2006(a)), building on an empirical study of English local authorities (Lowndes et al. 2006(b)). Unlike the other frameworks, it takes a proactive and self-evaluative approach to evaluating new democratic innovations. They argue against existing “judgemental” forms of democratic audit (referring to Beetham and Weir 2009) as these do not provide a complete understanding of “the underlying causal connections between institutional devices and desired normative outcomes” (Lowndes et al. 2006 (a), p. 285). However, this does not prevent them from calling their framework an “audit”. The target group for this framework is the public authorities who should use it to “test their capacity to deliver participatory options to citizens that want to take them up” (ibid. p. 283). Apart from that, this approach aligns with both the modern theoretical discussion about democracy as something more than just representative institutions, and the increase in the UK of new forms of democratic innovations (“officially sponsored participation schemes”). The framework is abridged to a “diagnostic tool”, which relies on five key factors, based on both theoretical and empirical

insights, and where the initial letters make up the acronym CLEAR. The different letters stand for the following factors:

Can do – have the resources and knowledge to participate

Like to – have a sense of attachment that reinforces participation

Enabled to – provided with the opportunity for participation

Asked to – are mobilised by official bodies or voluntary groups

Responded to – see evidence that their views have been considered
(*Ibid*, p. 286).

If we for a moment ignore the proactive approach, it is possible to extrapolate the principal democratic criteria that shape the framework. First, there is a strong emphasis on widening access to democratic processes, mobilising individuals and communities, and improving the possibilities for public participation. The policy targets in their diagnostic tool are predominantly focused on building capabilities, creating several diversified channels for participation, and improving “infrastructure”. Second, there is an element of community building and citizenship with a clear reference to the social capital discussion (and Putnam’s work 1995, 2000). Finally, it refers to the importance of responsiveness of public authorities. That is, to what extent, and in what way, inputs to authorities are being dealt with. All in all, rather than acting as benchmarks, the criteria are reflective tools for decision-makers to both consider existing practice, and to further develop public engagement.

In terms of converting the framework to actual analytical questions, the authors do not present us with any detailed grading tools. Instead, they express that the tool needs to be adjusted to the contextual circumstances, to include other categories depending on the local setting, and to ascertain the specific priorities of the community. However, the authors produced a rather extensive methodological handbook for their European study in 2008 (reported to the European Committee on Local and Regional Democracy (CDLR, 2008)). This handbook contains a list of possible questions to implement in empirical research and suggests a number of methodological inquiries (both quantitative and qualitative). The most prominent example of applying the framework is a study of 23 European local governments in 2006 (briefly mentioned in Evans and Reid 2013).

Although not being explicit about which side of the policy process the framework is coined for, the emphasis is on the input side of the process. As to the politicised side of the evaluation, we believe it is safe to say that this framework acknowledges a more realistic-political approach.

Democratic Anchorage

The second framework in our review is developed by Sørensen & Torfing (2005) and was first presented in an article in *Scandinavian Political Studies*, and subsequently in two more publications (Torfing, Sørensen & Fotel 2009; Sørensen and Torfing 2014). Based on empirical studies of network governance in Danish local government (Sørensen and Torfing 2000), the authors develop a framework for both assessing, and furthering, the democratic performance of

local governance networks. Their focal point is to what extent the governance network is “anchored” within different political constituencies, with reference to a set of democratic rules and norms (ibid. 195). Consequently, their framework is designed to assess both the internal network interactions as well as the external relations of the network to its political environment. A governance network is considered to be democratic when the following criteria are fulfilled:

- a) it is controlled by democratically elected politicians.
- b) it represents the membership base of the participating groups and organisations.
- c) it is accountable to the territorially defined citizenry.
- d) it follows the democratic rules specified by a particular grammar of conduct (Sørensen & Torfing 2005, p. 201)

Without going into the details of these criteria, the underpinning rationale can be summarised in a few points. First, the “democratic innovation” in this case, i.e., the governance network, is in fact not democratic by default, but only comes to be democratic once it is bridled by existing democratic institutions and actors. So rather than designing an innovation, this framework is about harvesting positive outcomes from something not necessarily democratic in the first instance. Second, what is evaluated (the unit of observation) is the institutional design comprising both formal and informal institutional aspects. The process is only evaluated as an example of the effectiveness of the “institutions”. Thirdly, this framework takes a clear normative point of departure from traditional representative democratic criteria such as e.g., accountability, legitimacy, transparency, and equality, and comprehends the “institution” as something operating in the shadow of existing representative institutions. Finally, the actual questions of the democratic quality of the governance network operate at a high abstract system-level, and more resembles an observation of the overall “governance” context, than a detailed evaluation of processes and outcomes.

Empirically, this framework has been applied in a study of an infrastructural network (Torfing, Sørensen & Fotel 2009); in an extensive comparison of the state of network governance in four countries (Skelcher et al. (2011): and in a Dutch study on environmental projects (Edelenbos, Steijn and Klijn 2010)). These empirical applications exhibit a rather mixed outcome with some of the network governance practices considered democratic while others not.

Given the institutional nature of this framework (which is more about design), it is challenging to appraise its focal emphasis. However, it is probably safe to conclude that this framework is emphasising the input side through the institutional design. Furthermore, the rather vague norms are also encapsulating a more realistic-political approach to performance measures.

Democratic Performance

The next framework is the “The Democratic Performance Approach” developed by Chris Skelcher, Helen Sullivan, and Stephen Jeffars. It was first introduced in “Hybrid governance in European cities – neighbourhood, migration and democracy” (Skelcher, Sullivan and Jeffars 2013). Based on empirical studies of hybrid governance arrangements (i.e., joining multiple actors and agencies to

achieve public values) for urban policy in three European cities, they formulate some questions regarding the democratic quality of these arrangements, and more precisely: “what are the main requirements” for this kind of decision-making arrangements to be called “democratic”?

The authors identify some limitations with the framework reviewed above (“the democratic anchorage model”), and mainly that it is attached to representative democratic institutions (Ibid. p. 127). Consequently, it does not cater for emerging self-organising governance networks and practices outside the existing representative system. As an alternative, their “democratic performance” framework focuses on how claims of legitimacy, consent, and accountability are addressed through new hybrid forms of governance (Ibid. p. 129). They emphasise that the approach is predicated of some kind of bill of political rights, and that it does not operate outside this realm. They present three different criteria. First, there is legitimacy, defined as “the socially validated capacity to act” (ibid. p.130), to be conceived in both formal and informal ways depending on the fulfilment of the values of “authorisation to act in public interest”, representation and support. Empirically, legitimacy is analysed by looking at the degree to which the hybrid forms of governance have been bestowed democratic authority by the City Government and its electoral base. Second, consent refers to the processes through which citizens and other stakeholders are able to exercise voice on and judgement of the proposals, policies, and decisions of the institution; the procedural quality (ibid. p.139). Empirically, analysis of consent revolves around three questions. a) What issues are offered for consent? b) What are the mechanisms for consent, and c) what is the status of the obtained views? Third, accountability, defined as a reciprocal relationship in which decision makers provide an account of their actions, and are equally held accountable for their decisions, and actions, by an appropriate constituency or community (ibid. p. 143). Consequently, there needs to be both an appropriate mechanism for being accountable, as well as an informed and engaged citizenry to hold decision-makers accountable.

This framework mainly emphasises the design of hybrid governance arrangements, and the impact of design on democratic quality. While clearly acknowledging the dynamic and contextual aspects of these arrangements, much of the actual evaluation boils down to the institutional design, and national path-dependencies of institutions. Empirically, accountability is analysed by looking at the formal framework of governance, in this case the City Government, as part of the representative democracy.

The authors conclude that measuring the impacts of new forms of governance constitutes a significant challenge to the field. Furthermore, they argue that it is important to challenge the representative democratic model as a normative benchmark, and embrace models of democracy that do not presuppose a particular form. In terms of applying this model in contexts outside their specific research project, we have not been able to identify any examples (academic or practitioner-based).

This approach, which seeks to comprise both traditional and non-traditional (governance) forms of democracy, is tilting towards the input focussed sides of the democratic processes (with some ambiguity), and is probably more realistic-political in its understanding of performance measures.

Democratic Goods

The fourth framework, developed by Graham Smith, is presented in the book “Democratic Innovations: Designing Institutions for Citizen Participation” (Smith, 2009b). It is based on empirical studies of a number of more or less known democratic innovations including open assemblies (e.g. New England town meetings and participatory budgeting in Porto Alegre); mini-publics (e.g. The Citizens Assembly on Electoral Reform in British Columbia); direct legislation (with examples of plebiscites and referenda); and electronic democracy (e.g. discussion boards). Smith’s point of departure is that many assessments of democratic practices apply a deductive approach whereby institutions are judged by the degree to which they best match, or express, the principles of a particular model of democracy. Consequently, this forces the researcher to “commit to one particular position or model of democracy” (Ibid, p. 10).

In a true neo-liberal fashion (“democracy as a market”), Smith establishes four “democratic goods”, and two additional “institutional goods”, based on the existing body of democratic literature. This is followed by systematic reviews of the four types of innovations mentioned above. Unsurprisingly, the title concludes that none of the reviewed types of innovations delivers all the democratic goods.

As mentioned above, Smith applies a classical criteria-based approach for democratic evaluation. Inclusiveness relates to political equality concerning presence and voice. Popular control refers to the participants’ ability to influence different aspects of the decision-making process. Considered judgement entails inquiry into citizens’ understanding of both the technical details of the issue under consideration, and the perspectives of other citizens. Finally, transparency evaluates the openness of proceedings to both participants and the wider public (Ibid, p. 16). In addition to these four democratic goods, he adds two institutional goods: efficiency and transferability. Efficiency refers to the costs and benefits for the citizens, while transferability pertains to the possibility of conveying the experiences of the innovation to another location (preferably on a different scale). These democratic goods are firmly informed by modern democratic theory (including Saward, Dahl, Fung and Beetham) and do not really signal any deviation from the current academic and practitioner democratic discourse. The goods are converted to discrete questions all contextualised to the specific innovations in focus for a particular empirical investigation.

In terms of actual empirical studies, Smith’s book is itself an example of applying the framework to actual innovations. However, the evaluations in his book are not based on direct empirical studies of the innovations, but on second-hand sources. In terms of examples outside the author’s own works, we have identified one example where the “goods” have been applied in case studies of “area committees” in the Netherlands (Mattijssen, Behagel, and Buijs 2015).

Notwithstanding capturing all the different phases in the policy cycle by adhering to more traditional democratic norms, this framework shows a stronger preference for the input side. In addition, this one leans towards a realistic-political side of performance measurement.

Democratic Assessment of Collaborative Planning

The fifth model is one that although settled in traditional democratic theory, is specially drafted with collaborative planning processes in mind. The framework was presented in an article of *Planning Theory* (Agger & Löfgren 2008), and has afterwards been applied in a few empirical studies. Based on the premise that collaborative planning as a method for urban planning has become prevalent around the globe, the authors raise the issue of the democratic quality of these processes. This is partly because there is an implicit assumption in the collaborative planning discourse that the collaborative method enhances democratic values, but also because the authors advocate that any process (or practice) pertaining to a policy process (whether leading to a decision, or the implementation of a policy) should be subjected to democratic scrutiny in a democratic system. In contrast to some of the contemporary writings on democratic audits (such as Beetham), the authors claim that even though collaborative processes are taking place outside the realm of representative democracy and are based on network governance, they can, and should, be subject to the same standards of democratic quality. Mainly borne by the works of Dahl (1998) and March & Olsen (1995), the framework asks, “how can we assess the democratic effects of collaborative planning processes?” and presents five criteria for evaluating the democratic quality: *public access to political influence*, *public deliberation*, *development of adaptiveness (to the political system)*, *accountability*, and finally, *the development of political identities and capabilities*. Subsequently, these criteria are converted to 13 overarching evaluative questions meant to be adjusted to contextual circumstances, and in line with the stage of the process (input, throughput, and output). While acknowledging the importance of designing institutions for collaborative planning, the framework is mainly focussing on the processes.

In terms of empirical examples, there are only a few examples of the framework being applied including one by the authors themselves (Agger and Löfgren 2008; 2010), and empirically the model has given inspiration to the evaluation of participation in the decision-making processes used to create the Lansdown Partnership Plan (Koughnett 2011).

This framework is explicit about seeking to capture all the different phases of a policy cycle, and is aligned with a realistic-political version of performance measurement.

Evaluating Deliberative Events and Projects

The next evaluation model by Gastil, Knobloch, and Kelly is based on actual deliberative practices (primarily from the US) such as deliberative polls, participatory budgeting, and citizens’ assemblies. In terms of the scholarship, the main source for the model is presented in a contribution to an edited book on “democracy in motion” (Gastil, Knobloch and Kelly 2012). The authors begin by asserting that while deliberative practices are on the rise, there is a dearth of research design and evaluation methods for assessing their processes and outcomes. Many of the existing studies on deliberative practices are, according to the trio, very narrow in which aspects to include, rely too heavy on self-reported data, or just convey the optimistic and unsubstantiated nature of the impacts based on the organisers’ own stories (Ibid. p. 206).

Whilst clearly recognising the differences between process and outcome-oriented evaluations, the authors seek to include both in their frameworks. Furthermore, although the authors are not attempting to probe deeper into the annals of the philosophical side of democratic theory (apart from a sweeping reference that includes Habermas and Rawls), they distinguish that any evaluation model aspiring to generalisations and comparisons needs to be reflected in theory. Their evaluation model is intended to apply to “official and quasi-official processes whereby lay citizens play a central role, often in concert with policy-makers and/or stakeholders, in devising solutions to a public problem through a democratic and deliberative process” (p. 209). The model is based on four criteria (with succeeding sub-criteria):

- a) Design integrity: unbiased framing, procedural design involvement, representativeness
- b) Democratic deliberation and judgement: deliberative analytic process, democratic social process, sound judgement
- c) Influential conclusions/actions: influential recommendations, effective and coordinated action
- d) Long-term effects: transforming public attitudes and habits, changing public officials’ attitudes and behaviour, altering strategic political choices

Compared to the other frameworks presented in this article, this model actually devises some detailed advice on both design, measurement methods, and sources. The measures are different depending on the criteria (for example, the first one being judged along a pass/fail scale, and the final one as more balanced subjective judgements); all presented in a rather comprehensive and didactic table clearly aimed for a practitioner audience. In terms of applying this framework, the authors themselves have been involved applying this framework (at least partly) when evaluating a number of projects such as e.g., the 2010 Oregon Citizens’ Initiative (Knobloch, Gastil, Reedy and Cramer Walsh 2013) and the open global knowledge platform Participedia (Smith, Richards and Gastil 2015). At least the first of these two projects generated a few areas for improvement.

With respect to performance measures, this framework seeks to comprise all the different stages of the policy cycle. Furthermore, it subscribes to a more realistic-political version of performance measurement.

Evaluating Citizen Participation in Local Policy-Making

The final framework is developed by Ank Michels and was published in an article of *International Journal of Public Administration* (Michels 2012), but has its theoretical foundation in an older piece in *Local Government Studies* (Michels & de Graaf 2010). The focus is the design of what the author calls democratic innovations, and where she makes a (perhaps unorthodox) distinction between participatory governance (direct and active involvement of citizens and other stakeholders in a policy process) and deliberative forums (designed to exchange arguments and form opinions).

The criteria she is applying is based on a meta-analysis of outcomes (predominantly western Europe) including inclusion, deliberation and

legitimacy, and influence. Inclusion is here about access to the deliberative forum and representatives of the forum. Can anyone participate, or are the participants subject to a selection process? Is the forum representative? Deliberation relates to the quality of public reasoning, as well as propensity to change opinions and preferences. Legitimacy refers to the degree to which democratic innovation contributes to the broader support for political decisions in the population at large. Regarding influence, she makes the point that while the first three criteria are familiar in this type of evaluation; “influence” is often overlooked. She asks the obvious question whether the recommendations from the participants, or the outcome of the practice, has been converted to actual policy (and can be directly attributed to the practice).

As already mentioned, the focus here is solely on the design of the innovations (although the criterion of influence relies on the outcome of the process). With respect to the application of this framework, we have not been able to locate any examples beyond her own meta-analysis.

Finally, with respect to performance measurement this approach is primarily aimed to the input side of any citizen-oriented innovation for public engagement and is more tilting towards a realistic-political understanding of performance.

Discussion

The seven frameworks presented here show a number of commonalities as well as differences. The table below summarises the different approaches.

Although our review is limited, we think there is some reason to highlight a few significant and critical observations.

First, the employed democratic criteria are all similar in terms of aligning with classic values such as inclusion, access, dialogue, reason, legitimacy, and accountability. Accordingly, it is difficult to identify distinct normative paradigms in the reviewed body of literature, as they all seem to subscribe to the same indistinct mix of elements from both procedural and deliberative models of democracy (as well as seeking to cut across and balance the different models). What also seem to be a general theme across the frameworks, is that they are careful with providing detailed advice on how to verbalise investigative question beyond some high-level principles. A few of them (e.g. Skelcher & Mathur and Agger & Löfgren) also point out that any evaluator needs to take into account the local context before designing the evaluation.

If one should say something general about them, it is that they are probably more focussed on the “democratic software” understood as informal and subjective sides of democratic quality (e.g., the quality of the dialogue, the sense of legitimate processes etc.), rather than “the democratic hardware” or “the rules of the game” (for example the institutional framework). Consequently, most of the criteria are developed for qualitative aspects, rendering them less useful for aggregated measures, and although not completely encumbering comparisons between innovations, at least making them more difficult to apply in new and unexplored contexts.

Table 1. Frameworks of evaluating the quality of democracy

| Frameworks | Criteria | Purpose | Examples that apply the framework |
|--|--|--|---|
| Lowndes, Pratchett & Stoker (2006) | Can do – have the resources and knowledge to participate | ‘Self-reflective tool’ | Contribution to handbook - CDLR, (2008) |
| <i>CLEAR</i> | Like to – have a sense of attachment that reinforces participation | | |
| | Enabled to – provided with the opportunity for participation | | |
| | Asked to – are mobilised by official bodies or voluntary groups | | |
| | Responded to – see evidence that their views have been considered | | A study of local governments in Europe: Evans and Reid (2013) |
| Sørensen & Torfing (2005) | A governance network is considered to be democratic when the following criteria are fulfilled: | ‘Filling a (normative) gap in their theory’ | One infrastructural project: Sørensen and Torfing (2014) |
| <i>Democratic Anchorage</i> | It is controlled by democratically elected politicians; Represents the membership basis of the democratic rules specified by a particular grammar of conduct; Is accountable to the territorially defined citizenry; Follows the democratic rules specified by a particular grammar of conduct’ | | |
| Skelcher, Sullivan & Jeffers (2012) | They focus on the availability of a number of political rights: Legitimacy which is defined as: ‘the socially validated capacity to act; Consent that refers to the processes through which citizens are able to exercise voice and judgement; Accountability, referring to decision makers providing an account of their actions and can be held accountable | Evaluation of the democratic quality of hybrid governance arrangements | Empirical studies of urban governance in Birmingham, Rotterdam and Copenhagen. |
| <i>Democratic Performance</i> | | | |
| Smith (2009) | Inclusiveness, that relates to political presence and voice | Evaluation of democratic innovations | Various empirical examples of democratic innovations from all around the world. |
| <i>Democratic Goods</i> | Popular control refers to the participants’ ability to influence different aspects of the decision-making process | | |
| | Considered judgement entails inquiry into citizens’ understanding of both the technical details of the issue under consideration and the perspectives of other citizens Transparency evaluates the openness of proceedings to both participants and a wider public | | |
| Agger & Löfgren (2008) | Public access to political influence Public deliberation | Evaluation of collaborative planning | A few empirical examples by the authors, and a few practitioner-based cases |
| <i>Democratic Assessment of Collaborative Planning</i> | Development of adaptiveness (to the political system) | | |
| | Accountability The development of political identities and capabilities | | |
| Michels (2012) | Inclusion Deliberation | Evaluation of democratic innovations | Meta-study (literature review) of existing empirical experiments with democratic innovations. |
| <i>Design and Democracy</i> | Legitimacy | | |
| | Influence | | |
| Gastil, Knobloch & Kelly (2012) | Design Integrity Democratic Deliberation and Judgement | Evaluation of deliberative events and projects | A few examples (Knobloch et al. 2013; Smith et al. 2015) |
| <i>Deliberative Events and Projects</i> | Influential Conclusions and Actions | | |
| | Long Term Effects | | |

There is also a power dimension aligned with what here seems to be consensus around the democratic criteria. If an increasing number of academics, practitioners and politicians seem to advocate similar sets of democratic criteria, this may eventually affect the democratic discourse and subsequently the design of our democratic institutions. Also, the frameworks are developed by academics, for academic outputs, and with an academic readership as the primary audience. They are only indirectly crafted with the community of practitioners in mind (who in all fairness, have very limited access to academic outputs). In fact, many of the cases presented here seem to have been driven to align the design of the actual applications (i.e., the democratic innovations) with positive outcomes in the evaluative phase of the “experiment”. And in addition to that, some (but not all) of the actual “practices” which have been subjected to the frameworks reviewed here, have been restricted to geographical locations populated with resourceful citizens, resilient local communities, and strong (representative) institutions protecting against unintended consequences. Although naturally not explicit in any of the frameworks (and by no means significant for the broader picture of democratic innovations), the ones we have described here are designed for experiments in safe and affluent local communities. Thirdly, there are very few reflections on the practice of evaluation, nor performance measures in general. Negative consequences leading to opportunism, gaming, bureaucratisation etc. (Lewis 2015), is missing in their reflections. It does not take much thinking to foreshadow how organisers of these practices very quickly can game the whole process by adjusting the design and process leading to a non-innovative and non-dynamic compliance exercise. Fourth, the evaluative frameworks presented in this article are, by and large, developed for single-purpose experiments and events. In many ways, this reflects the “projectification” of public sector activities and organisations (Sjöblom, Löfgren and Godenhjelm, 2013; Hodgson, Fred, Bailey and Hall, 2019). While being posited as a convenient technique for organising a business process, it is also fairly technocratic and depoliticised. It produces some ambiguity to whether the overarching criterion for success is about attaining the desired outcome, or about completing the “project” per se.

Finally, despite the prescriptive policy intention of delivering frameworks for use in the practitioner community, some of the criteria presented from the different frameworks are both wide and imprecise. It does not take much imagination to see how these criteria can be “twisted” to assess any outcome as a positive democratic quality (as there are many ways of segment these criteria to something tangible). In addition, although most of the frameworks reviewed here do mention the problems with trade-offs between the criteria, the authors are not overly troubled.

Conclusions

The frameworks presented here are all examples of academic endeavours to add a more evaluative angle to the democratic quality in local projects and events. Whereas the overall literature on public sector reforms seems to be firmly convinced that we are about to exit the paradigm of New Public Management by entering a new stage of collaboration and co-production, the strong belief in

measuring outputs, outcomes, and organisational performance reviews seems to have become robustly institutionalised in most industrialised democracies (Brandsen, Steen and Verschuere, 2018). Consequently, it is our contention that the frameworks we have presented in this framework will be followed by new ones. Based on our review, we feel it is safe to say that while there is a need to identify some kind of indicators or benchmarks for good (or at least “acceptable”) democratic quality, and that there are many lessons that can be learnt from the evaluative frameworks. Yet, the actual message to the community of practitioners is to design their own such frameworks based on the specific context (something also recommended in many of the frameworks).

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