Paper to be presented at JEPP@21 workshop, Berlin, September 9-10, 2019.

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Draft paper

Citizen participation in environmental policy making: the importance of political, organizational and managerial characteristics of the political administrative system?

The proponents claim participatory governance has a great potential to promote sustainable development. Citizen participation in decision-making processes can improve both the capacity and the responsiveness of environmental policy and planning. At the same time this literature often points to lack of success for participatory arrangements, due to the political-administrative systems lack openness and flexibility. Participatory governance challenges the role of elected politicians, of public administrators, and the parliamentary chain of representative democracy. We know less, however, about how politicians and managers interact with citizen and respond to citizen initiatives and inputs. We will elaborate on what we know regarding how characteristics of the political-administrative system and how the orientation of political and administrative actors affects citizen influence in environmental policy and planning and discuss the need for future research.

Introduction

Proponents claim that participatory and collaborative governance has a great potential to promote sustainable development. Such models are a promising way to approach the challenge of balancing capacity and responsiveness of environmental policy and planning (Innes and Booher 2003; Newig et al. 2005). Citizen participation is assumed to contribute to democracy, effectiveness and transparency in the policy system (Klausen and Sweeting 2005; Falleth et al. 2010). Through participatory measures, those most directly affected by a certain policy are given the possibility to influence decisions, and thus make the system more responsive. Additionally, citizen participation provides politicians and policy-makers with information that may lead to more informed and better decisions based on diverse knowledge and experiences. Participation can also make processes more transparent and accountable to local citizens. Thus, participation has several potential benefits, and its contribution to democracy and ability to identify superior solutions being two (Peters and Pierre 2016).

Participation is perceived important particularly related to complex or wicked problems; problems with no single cause, no clear solution, and with non-linear relationships among the variables involved (Peters and Pierre 2016: 51). The challenge to balance between governance capacity and representativeness is especially notable in such cases. When facing issues with complex causes and effects, the experience and knowledge of various actors will be important, in order to be able to develop and implement solutions that are integrated, coordinated and comprehensive. In environmental planning and policy making, stakeholders and other affected interests will bring in experiences and knowledge that will improve the knowledge base and quality of plans and policies, and their involvement will contribute to the legitimacy and implementation of the plans and policies (Newig et al. 2005; Emerson and Gerlak 2014). Therefore, it is no surprise that international organizations and national governments recommend or even require participatory arrangement, Agenda 21, the Convention on Biological Diversity and the EU Water Framework Directive being some examples.

At the same time, the literature often points to lack of success for participatory arrangements. Several studies of citizen participation in local governance demonstrate that it is difficult to get people to participate. Often, the most powerful stakeholders dominate, and input from participatory processes seldom seems to have strong and direct impact on political decision-making (Lowndes et al 2005; Michels and de Graaf 2010; Falleth et al 2010; McKenna 2011; Hanssen and Hovik 2013; Hovik 2017). Furthermore, participatory governance's capacity to solve environmental problems is disputed

(Newig et al 2018). The potential of citizen participation to improve governance capacity and representativeness is seldom realized.

As a response to the modest results of participatory governance, one branch of literature looks at the design of participatory channels and tools, and how design can *attract* and *facilitate* participation from new groups of citizens (Ritter et al 2014; Juárez-Ramirez 2017). Another is looking at how public governments through facilitative *management strategies* can embrace, empower, include and mobilize participation (Huxham and Vangen 2005; Agger and Damgaard 2018; Sørensen and Torfing 2016). These literatures are focusing on the design and management of participatory channels and processes.

So far, there are few studies of how local authorities (politicians and managers) promote, handle and utilize input from participatory arrangements. McKenna (2011) argue that peoples' decision to participate is not only related to the individuals' perception that they can make a difference (the 'internal dimension'), but also to the political system's responsiveness to their concerns (the 'external dimension'). It is important that citizens believe their participation will have an effect, that it will influence the policy process. Then, input from participatory arrangements must be channeled into and inform the governments' decision-making processes. In this paper we discuss to what extent such handling of citizen inputs are influenced by the actions of individual actors and structural characteristics of the political administrative system. We elaborate on how politicians and managers can demonstrate responsiveness in practice, and channel inputs from citizens into the policy-making processes: Are there individual actors in the political administrative system acting as advocates, policy entrepreneurs or ombudsmen for citizen involvement in environmental planning and policy making? (How) do they serve as liaisons between the citizens and local government? We, furthermore, discuss how this handling is influenced by policy issue characteristics (as complexity) and characteristics of the political-administrative system.

We acknowledge that the literature on participatory and collaborative governance is aware of the need to look at political and administrative actors and structures. There is, however, to our knowledge few studies of how politicians and administrators are handling input from participatory processes, and how their behavior is constrained by characteristics of the political-administrative system. By linking the study of citizen participation and participatory governance to theories of public policy formulation and local government, we elaborate on what we know regarding how characteristics of the political-administrative system and how the orientation of political and administrative actors affects citizen influence in environmental policy and planning and discuss the

need for future research. This paper is just the start of this effort, with obvious deficits in the literature review and shortcomings in the discussion of future needs.

This paper is written as part of the DEMUDIG[1] project, a project that focuses on citizen participation through ICT / new media in urban sustainable development in the city of Oslo, more precisely the Tøyen-Grønland area. This paper contributes to the development of a *conceptual framework* for studying the political-administrative system's responsiveness to citizens' concerns and their handling of input from citizens.

Citizen participation and influence

Participatory governance is often reserved to "government-sponsored direct participation between invited citizens and local officials in concrete arrangements and concerning problems that affect them" (Hertting and Kugelberg 2008: 1). The endeavors can be citizen-initiated, but most often they are city-initiated. Since they are purposeful actions, they are formal structures. Other concepts used to describe similar phenomenon are interactive governance (Edelenbos and van Meerkerk 2016) or collaborative governance (Ansell 2016). These branches of literature are focusing on collaboration, co-operation or co-creation between groups of citizens or stakeholders and government. While the concept of participatory governance stresses the involvement of actors who are not normally charged with decision making, collaborative governance emphasizes the process of working together (Newig et al. 2018).

By citizen influence, we mean that the information and articulation they bring into the participatory arenas and channels inform the content or the (printed/ explicit) premises of the decisions made by government authorities. The literature on participation often link citizen influence (or power) to Arnstein's (1969) ladder of participation (Klausen et al. 2013; Hedenstad Lund 2018). A simple version of this ladder distinguish between: 1) arrangements where citizen are informed about plans or services (tokenism or non-participation), 2) arrangements where citizen are invited to comment on cities plans or policies (information and consultation); 3) arrangements where citizen are invited to discuss and even negotiate solutions; and 4) arrangements where citizen are delegated the power to decide (participatory budgeting to example). As one moves up the ladder, the formal power or potential for influence increases. Citizens are, however, seldom delegated decision power. Participatory arrangements are implemented to inform and give input to decisions made by actors of

[1] DEMUDIG – Democratic Urban Development in the Digital Age, financed by the Norwegian Research Council DEMOS program. Project number 281131

representative government. Participation at the second and third steps of the ladder neither guarantee nor hinder influence. Information gathered through consultation can have a decisive impact on the final decision, or it might be completely ignored. Discussions with citizen in open meetings or in citizen's juries can make decision-takers change their preferences, or it might not. A prerequisite for influence is that inputs from participatory processes are channeled into and handled by the formal decision-making process.

Citizen participation in decision-making processes is said to have the potential to improve both the capacity and the responsiveness of urban governance (Innes and Booher 2003; Klausen and Sweeting 2005; Falleth et al. 2010). Participation is expected to increase governments effectiveness, its capacity to develop policy solutions that will lead to sustainable outcomes and improved environmental conditions (Newig et al. 2018). However, not only the lack of capacity to act on collective problems, but also the existence of a democratic deficit, fuel the interest of participatory governance (Danielsson et al 2018: 24). The democratic deficit is due to the lack of adequate articulation and formulation of the interests and preferences of the citizens or certain groups of citizens. Environmental policy, either it concerns climate change mitigation, management of biodiversity and of water and other nature resources, land use planning or urban sustainable development, or other themes, often affects different groups of citizens differently. Hence, actors often have different preferences regarding the future and conflicting interests in given policies and plans. For participatory processes to meet demands of input-based legitimacy (Scharpf 1999), they should meet democratic norms of equal access, transparency and accountability, and lead to a policy that is informed by the experiences and preferences of all affected citizens and groups of stakeholders.

Since participatory governance promise to balance capacity and representativeness (Innes and Booher 2003; Newig et al 2005), it is no surprise that local authorities throughout the Western world have introduced strategies and measures aiming to involve citizens in policy-making (Lowndes et al. 2006; McKenna 2011; Aars 2012; Klausen et al. 2013; Hanssen, Klausen and Winsvold 2013; Monkerud et al 2016 ; Winsvold et al. 2017). As mentioned above, this response is promoted and often even required by international treaties, the European Union and national authorities. Studies show that a huge majority of Norwegian municipalities regularly arranges open meetings and other efforts to consult citizens in land use planning and other matters, and a majority regularly conduct surveys among users of municipal services (Monkerud et al 2016: 115). Through recent national reforms in protected area management and water management, advisory groups composed by citizen and stakeholder representatives, is made mandatory (Hanssen and Hovik 2013; Hovik 2017).

These groups shall advice the relevant authorities in the formulation of management plans and choice of measures.

In this paper, we focus on the output side of participation: The output of the participation process must be channeled into the formal (and internal) decision making process – in order to inform this process. We focus on what is done in order to ensure that the citizen participation in informing decisions taken by governments. Participatory arrangements or processes will probably never be a total success or a total fiasco. We expect there will be examples where citizen participation has made a difference on governments environmental policy, and examples where it has not. The influence of citizen participation is a matter of degree, and of where and when, not either or.

Actors, policy issue characteristics and the political-administrative system

City actors' handling: advocates, policy entrepreneurs and ombudsmen

Participatory governance challenges the role of elected politicians (Sørensen and Torfing 2016), of public administrators and bureaucrats (Agger and Damgard 2018), and the parliamentary chain of representative democracy (Hertting and Kugelberg 2018). This leads to the question whether participatory arrangements can be accommodated within a basically representative structure (Danielson et al 2018). Klijn and Skelcher (2007), for example, have identified four different conjunctures about this relation; incompatible, complementary, transitional and instrumental. Røiseland and Vabo (2018) distinguish between two different roles elected politicians can play in government induced interactive governance – dependent of the relationship between representative democracy and interactive governance. In a complementary relationship, participation represent a widening and strengthening of democracy in terms of better decisions and increased legitimacy (resemblances the complementary conjunction). In a conflicting relationship (instrumental conjuncture), participatory arrangements are disconnected from the decisions made by representatives. The disconnecting outcome is "produced by elected leaders making decisions based on information and inputs different from those developed by interactive governance" (Røiseland and Vabo 2018: 131). Citizen participation has a symbolic value, and the role of civil servants is to serve the elected representatives in preparing decisions and implementing the chosen policies. It is not to organize, manage and participate in the practical activities taking place among citizens.

The openness of the political system and the orientation of city politicians and managers have proven important for the success of participatory systems (Lowndes et al 2006). For instance, the literature on collaborative or network governance points to the need to anchor the collaboration in the political-administrative system (Sørensen and Torfing 2005; Hovik and Hanssen 2016). One way is through direct participation on the collaborative arenas. In relation to co-creation, Agger and Damgaard (2018; 93) claim that public administrators "are forced to leave their desks in the back office and venture out to meet stakeholders. In effect they become frontline workers because they meet the public face to face, often on location".

In order to be able to consider or learn from inputs from citizen, administrators and/or politicians need to participate on or open for inputs from the participatory arenas. We argue that the most successful participatory processes are those that are intentionally linked to the formal decision-making processes of public government (Lowdens et al. 2006). Actors playing roles as 'boundary spanners' (Williams 2002) or 'bridge builders' (Hanssen et al 2015; Hovik and Hanssen 2015) can function as such linkages. They may anchor the participatory processes within public government, communicate the governments' premises to the participating citizens, and channel the inputs from participatory arenas into the formal processes of policy formulation.

In the context of this paper, their potential role as agents or advocates for the citizens in the formal policy processes is at focus. *We assume that the existence of such advocates for citizen participation in the political-administrative system will promote citizen influence on public government decisions.*

However, the existence of such advocates does not guarantee that citizen participation will influence policy decisions. Inputs from participatory arrangements must be channeled the whole way through to where the final decision is made. On the line there are "gate keepers" (Easton 1965) controlling which information, concerns and propositions that pass through. For instance, the chief executive officer plays a crucial role as gate keeper (or veto point) between the administrative and political levels of municipal government in Norway. Hence, the citizen advocates or boundary spanners access to such gate keepers or decision makers (Williams 2012) is probably important to secure citizen influence. The gate keepers' or leaders' presence at, or knowledge of, the participatory arenas, will arguably ease the channeling and influence of citizen input. As veto points, they can decide which arguments and propositions that pass through to the next stage of the decision-making process.

Furthermore, as is well known from the literature on public policy processes (Cohen, March and Olsen 1972; Kingdon 1984), decisions do not always follow the text books. Decisive inputs are brought into the process at all stages, and by various actors. Kingdon's (1984) concept of *policy entrepreneur*s describes how individual actors create or utilize *windows of opportunities* to change

public policy. In the context of this paper, this implies that input from the participatory arrangements influence the policy agenda or policy decisions, due to the purposeful action of an individual policy entrepreneur. In the study of the roles of local politicians, the concept of 'ombudsman' is used to describe how politicians address concerns and positions of individual citizens or group of citizens and ask for administrative action (Offerdal 1995). A study of Norwegian local politicians unveiled that they are active in searching for alternative or additional information to the information the administration produces (Hanssen et al 2008). ICT and new social media have improved this possibility. Politicians can be present on social media, not only by posting their own positions in given cases, they can also follow and participate in debates, e.g. on Facebook sites initiated by citizen groups. This illustrates the fact that individual politicians (or even public administrators) can pick up inputs from citizens outside institutionalized, formal arrangements and processes, and bring them (back) on the policy agenda. Politicians can do so to demonstrate responsiveness and increase her chances of re-election.

Citizens can, inform and influence city government decisions through other channels. The literature on interest group participation (see for instance Thesen and Rommetvedt 2009) often distinguish between formal (corporatist) and informal (lobby) channels where influence is achieved as part of a *direct* relationship between interest groups and city authorities. The formal and institutionalized channels typically imply more mutual obligations than the informal channels do. Furthermore, there are *indirect* channels of influence. Interest groups and organizations may mobilize members and supporters through activism, or they may use media to exert influence. In line with the literature on interest group involvement, we will expect that groups of citizens will attempt to use any means available for them in order to gain influence on policies of importance for them (Thesen and Rommetvedt 2009). They will probably combine strategies aiming to influence decision makers directly through formal, institutionalized and informal, less institutionalized channels, as well as indirectly through media and mobilization of members. Input from any of these channels can inform city government decisions, and thereby lead to better and more legitimized decisions.

The concepts of policy entrepreneurs and political ombudsman point to the possibility for citizens to influence through other means than city-initiated, formal participatory channels that we normally associate with participatory governance (Hertting and Kugelberg 2018). Interest group lobbying, media and mobilization are channels influencing public policy through activating mechanisms of representative democracy, - not participatory democracy. Thus, ideas and input developed through participatory governance can be promoted through lobbying, media or mass mobilization.

The complexity of the policy issue

While some policy issues are clearly defined and easy to anchor at specific levels of government and policy sectors, other issues cut across levels of government and/or sector boundaries. The most difficult ones are 'in between' wicked issues, those for which no specific department holds responsibility. Environmental policy often concerns such 'in-between' issues, climate change mitigation, water management or urban sustainable development being three examples. Anyhow, environmental policy must penetrate other policy areas in order to be effective (Hanf and Underdal 1998). Thus, inputs generated through participation in environmental planning and policymaking must inform decisions taken by for example road authorities, transport authorities, agricultural government or energy authorities.

Citizen inputs must be channeled through different levels and departments and pass several and different gate keepers. *Thus, we will assume that citizens will have less influence on matters involving several government departments (sectors) and several levels of government, than in matters being the responsibility for one single department only.*

In cases cutting across levels and sectors of government, it is probably particularly important that some actors have designated responsibility for channeling inputs from participatory arrangements. Boundary spanners or bridge builders that know which decision that should be anchored in the relevant agencies, and when, is particularly important in complex situations, in order to avoid veto-points (Hovik and Hanssen 2015).

One may, furthermore, assume that single purpose and specialist departments or agencies are more closed than multi-purpose generalist departments or agencies are. Hence, single purpose departments may be more reluctant to new ideas and initiatives, while multipurpose departments may demonstrate more openness. Citizen initiatives that concern complex issues may experience many veto points in the political administrative system.

Studies have unveiled that the impact of citizen initiatives is hindered by the rigidity of the political-administrative system (McKenna 2011; Reichborn-Kjennerud 2018b). Ideas are not realized, or they are delayed because they imply decisions and actions taken by several different agencies, agencies that must follow their annual assignments and budgets. And these ideas must be incorporated in the plans and budgets of various agencies. Thus, the complexity of the political-administrative system is important. This is our next theme.

The complexity of the policy-administrative system

We are interested in how system characteristics or the institutional landscape condition politicians and administrators handling of input from citizen participation, and hence citizen participation and influence. The complexity of the institutional landscape is a key variable. Whether a case is cutting across many levels and sectors of government or not, is not only dependent of the characteristics of the issue itself, but also of how the government is organized; the degree of vertical and horizontal specialization of the local administration. Increased complexity or fragmentation will arguably reduce citizen influence, because the number of veto points increases. It may also influence the actors' commitment towards following up input from participatory channels. In a fragmented system, everybody, and thus perhaps nobody, have the responsibility to channel these inputs further into the formal political decision-making processes.

Decentralization is another relevant system characteristic. Local level government may arguably be more open for citizen participation than higher level of government (Hertting and Kugelberg 2018). Closeness is the mechanism at work. *We assume that citizens will have stronger influence on matters decided at the city / municipal level than national level, and even stronger influence on matters decided at local city-district level.*

Other characteristics of the local political-administrative system may also be important. In their comparison of institutionalization of participatory governance at local level in Sweden, Netherlands and France, Hertting and Klijn (2018) discuss three arguments: 1) Participatory governance fits better with consensual democracies than majoritarian, since participation constitutes a larger threat to the dominating political actors in majoritarian systems. 2) Decentralization, both understood as the degree of local capacity and of local autonomy, is important, as there needs to be a real authority to share with participants. 3) Trust and social capital matters – both horizontal trust between citizens and vertical trust in local government.

Some of Herting and Klijn's findings do however point in the opposite direction (2018): Their interpretation of these findings is that if politicians are facing lack of trust, they have reasons to find new channels for legitimizing themselves and for introducing participatory arrangements as a supplement to the elections. Moreover, in situations where local politicians control crucial implementation resources (have decentralized capacity and autonomy), they do not have to depend on voluntary cooperation from citizens and have less incentive to share their power than in situations characterized by more centralized control over implementation resources. Their argument is that high level of trust in the representative system, a decentralized governance system, and a strong civil

society may not promote the institutionalization of participatory reforms, rather the opposite – such conditions may make sustainable and integrated forms of participatory arrangements more unlikely.

Conclusion

We acknowledge the importance of studying and improving the design of participatory channels, and the importance of facilitative management and meta governance of participatory arrangements. Our argument is that it is necessary also to turn the focus towards what is happening after participation; on how the political-administrative system is following up participation. It is not enough to link participatory channels to the decision-making processes of government. The government decision making processes should also be linked to the participatory processes.

Alongside studying how policymakers (politicians and managers) use various channels and measures to inform, be informed, and communicate with citizens and facilitate participatory arrangements, we also should study whether and how these policymakers act as gatekeepers or spokesmen for citizen initiatives in the formal policy-making process and how issue characteristics and structural conditions influence their abilities to follow up citizen-advanced ideas and propositions.

This line of arguments leads to further questions, such as: To what extent is citizen power dependent on active support from politicians and managers? How does policymakers' "channelling" influence the power relations among stakeholders? How do city politicians and managers "navigate" the tensions between participatory governance and hierarchical political-administrative structures? And, finally, does successful 'channelling' of inputs from citizen participation lead to increased citizen participation, as assumed in much of the literature (see McKenna 2011)?

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