

Democracy, Civic Dialogue and Governance

Introduction

Democracy is not static, it's changes over time.¹ Since the early 1990s there have been discussions about crisis of democracy in the Swedish and international context. In Sweden this includes, inter alia, the following expressions:

- Fewer and fewer citizens are willing to take on an assignment as an elected representative, especially at the local and regional level.
- Fewer and fewer citizens get involved in party politics and political parties have great difficulty in recruiting members. (The decline in membership has stalled in recent years.)
- Reduced voter turnout among socio-economically disadvantaged groups.
- Broad groups of citizens such as the young, the disabled and people with immigrant backgrounds are underrepresented in elected assemblies.²

The statements above assume that it is the representative (liberal) democracy which is in crisis. Representative democracy is based on the involvement of citizens and that citizens are interested in politics and social issues. Citizens must be willing to vote in elections, participate in policy between the election periods and to act as trustees.³

Based on the Swedish crisis of democracy, the Swedish Democracy Report SOU 2000:1 *A sustainable democracy - Politics of popular rule in the 2000s* formulated that citizen participation, influence and participation between elections need to increase to revitalize representative democracy.⁴ Therefore, the SKL (Swedish Association of Local Authorities and County Councils) has expanded their members' knowledge and its support to municipalities, counties and regions since the mid-2000s. The aim is to encourage local governments to work systematically to increase citizen participation in the rolling periods primarily by arranging dialogues with citizens. The term civic dialogue is multifaceted and can include multiple steps and moments.⁵ However, the focus should be on dialogue that is to the participants, whether they are citizens, elected representatives or service people, to listen and be listened to. At the same time, it should be possible for citizens to influence political decisions.⁶ Most of Sweden's 290 municipalities (83%) currently work with civic dialogue in some form.

In addition to the concept of civic dialogue, the concept of co-creation dialogues has also been introduced in recent years. Unlike ordinary civic dialogue, that usually revolves around the forms of influence, information and consultation⁷, co-creating dialogues gives citizens the opportunity to define a social problem, affecting what should be done, identify why it should be done, and jointly work out how it should be done.⁸ In recent years, strong interest in civic dialogue and participatory elements have not been unique to Sweden. Even, internationally citizen participation is advocated from various institutions such as the EU, UN and World Bank, while representative democracy also is challenged internationally for the same reasons stated above.⁹

Alongside the development of civic dialogue, a trend has also progressed towards a more network-based management (governance) in Swedish municipalities and regions. The concept of governance is

¹ Della Porta, D 2014 *Can Democracy Be Saved* s 5

² SOU 2016:5 *Låt fler forma framtiden* s 20-21; SKL *11 tankar om medborgardialog i styrning* s 5-8

³ Nilsson, L 2010 "Regionen och flernivådemokratin – Ett medborgarperspektiv" s 77 i Region Skåne, Västra Götalandsregionen, Regionplanekontoret vid Stockholms Läns Landsting Nilsson och Sveriges Kommuner och Landsting (ed) 2010 *Flernivåstyrning – framgångsfaktoren för kommuner, regioner och staten*

⁴ SOU 2000:1 *En uthållig demokrati – Politik för folkstyret under 2000-talet* s 194-210

⁵ Huddinge kommun *Handbok i delaktighet – Från ord till handling* s 11

⁶ Gislaveds kommun 2013 *En handbok för medborgardialog i Gislaveds kommun* s 7

⁷ SKL *11 tankar om dialog i styrningen* s 19

⁸ Abrahamsson, H 2015 *Vår tids stora samhällsodaning-Politiskt ledarskap, social hållbarhet och medskapande medborgardialog* s 37-38; SOU 2016:5 *Låt fler forma framtiden* s 394

⁹ Della Porta, D 2014 s 112-118; Tahvilzadeh, N 2014 "Det våras för medborgardialoger" i SOU 2016:5 *Låt fler forma framtiden – Forskarantologi* s 515

diverse but the common core is network-based management. The literature often speaks of a shift from "government to governance". In this context, government is seen to represent "traditional" top down government control, while governance is defined as the horizontal guidance by networks of diverse actors.¹⁰ There is a disagreement among scientists on whether the concept of governance is really a "new" social phenomenon of governance. Gun Hedlund and Stig Montin state in the book *Governance in Swedish*:

” that basically involves governance perspective ... that the state is not the only institution that contributes authoritative allocation of values.”¹¹

Governance, civic dialogue and co-creative dialogues have been criticized, in political scientific research, from a democratic perspective. Critics argue that public dialogue and governance can lead to the following problems for democracy: lack of political equality, limited transparency in political decision making and the ability to demand accountability, special interests get disproportionate influence, enhanced control of NGOs, and lack of legitimacy of citizens, etc.¹²

As shown, there has been a change, both nationally and internationally, of governance and the development of representative democracy in the last 20 years. A change that has, in particular, led to more participatory elements (civil dialogue) and changes in the organisation of governance. The change has not been without problems and has raised several questions that concern the functioning of democracy and its practice. Therefore, it is interesting to examine, from a democratic perspective, on what grounds and in what context the criticism is against civic dialogue and governance. Moreover, it is interesting to examine the relationship between governance and civic dialogue. That is, from a democratic perspective, are civic dialogue and governance the same phenomenon? My questions for further analysis are:

- I. On what grounds and in what context is the criticism of civic dialogue?
- II. What is the relationship between governance and civic dialogue?

Civic Dialogue and Co-Creative Dialogue

Democracy Theory

Within the field of political science, researchers consider three different types of democracy: liberal democracy, participatory democracy and deliberative democracy. To understand where the criticism of civic dialogue and governance has its starting point, short summary of these three types are reported here:

Liberal democracy focuses on stability and effective decision making. Voters participate politically by voting for representatives and parties competing for voters in general elections. This ensures political equality. Accountability by voters in retrospect is that voters can deselect the representatives they are unhappy with. The political opposition should also behave responsibly and should not prevent the ruling party's ability to enforce their decisions. In liberal democracy the individual is in the center. In this ethos there is no room for a collective identity or a pluralistic society's character and its conflicts. In *On the Political*, the political scientist Chantal Mouffe states that the vision of pluralism means that different perspectives and values may be combined as a unit to achieve consensus. Mouffe believes that this approach denies antagonism and conflicts between different perspectives and values, which mean that liberal democracy is ill-equipped to deal with the pluralist society's contradictions.¹³

¹⁰ Hedlund, G & Montin, S (ed) 2009 *Governance på svenska* s 7; Guevara, B (Mistra Urban Futures) 2015 *Styrning av offentlig sektor I rättvisa och social hållbara städer – En litteraturstudie om Public Value, Public Value Management, New Public Service & New Public Governance* s 11-12; Pierre, J 2011 *The Politics of Urban Governance* s 6-7

¹¹ Hedlund, G & Montin, S (ed) 2009 s 13

¹² Ibid s 27-28

¹³ Premfors, R. 2002 *Den starka demokratin* s 13-14; Lindensjö, B & Mörkenstam, U & Reinikainen, J. 1996. *Liberalismen och den moderna demokratin* s 79; Della Porta, D 2014 s 14-16; Mouffe, C 2008 *Om det politiska* s 19; Abrahamsson, H 2015 s 24

Participatory democracy sees the citizen as a social and responsible being that is willing and able to take responsibility for other people and society. Citizens should actively participate in politics, in various forums also between parliamentary terms, and in fact, influence and participate in political decision-making. The idea is not that the participatory elements should replace representative democracy, but rather act as a supplement that improves and strengthens democracy. According to the ideal of participatory democracy, citizen participation leads to more egalitarian, knowledgeable, committed and democratic citizens.¹⁴ In Western democracies, participatory democracy exists alongside representative democracy. This is done through institutional arrangements (citizen's participation, civic dialogue, etc.) and the reliance on the engagement of citizens in social movements and, thus, requires participation. The relationship between the elements of participatory and representative democracy is not unproblematic, which can be traced to the criticism of civic dialogue, as we shall see below.

Deliberative democracy is based on the interaction between people and the discussions between them. Deliberative democracy has more in common with participatory democracy. The starting point for both theories of democracy is that they are inclusive and that there should be venues for all citizens to meet and discuss social and political issues. However, most important in the deliberative context is the conversation and discussion. The idea is that it is possible for citizens to formulate opinions through discussions with others. The views are then weighed together into a whole. The discussion and the arguments will lead to a result that is better than the original starting point.¹⁵ Deliberative democracy has been criticized for its focus on consensus. Among others, the professor of sociology Donatella Della Porta argues that striving for consensus leads to resource-poor groups' opinions and ideas falling short and thus consolidates the inequality. Instead, people should who are representing an interest or an identity discuss with each other and confront each other to develop democratic perspectives and solutions. Conflict in itself is not a problem, but to arrive at common solutions, there must also be an agreement on common values. In this reasoning, we find the co-creative dialogue concept which says that citizens in deliberative spirit should participate in democratic arenas and identify social problems. That is, that participants should influence what should be done, why it should be done, and jointly work out how it should be done.¹⁶

Criticism of Civic Dialogue and Co-Creative Dialogue

Civic dialogue practice is built on participatory and deliberative democracy theory. In contrast, the criticism of civic dialogue and co-creative dialogue is usually founded in liberal democratic theory. Moreover, civic dialogue is also criticized for not living up to their participatory and deliberative ideals. There are few empirical studies of civic dialogue in practice. Most of them are case studies which are often very critical to the design of civic dialogue and the outcomes of the dialogues, although, there are positive examples.¹⁷ What then is the criticism? Many advocates of liberal democracy argue, above all, that the equality is threatened if a decision is taken based on civic dialogue and participatory elements. That not all citizens have the opportunity to make their voice heard through elections is seen as the biggest threat to democracy. Among others, the Swedish professor of political science Mickael Gilljam states that:

If the "law-abiding" pattern of political participation consists - with turnout as the most equitable form of political influence - will each transfer of power and influence in the decision-making process of electoral democracy to participatory democracy mean a deterioration of political equality.¹⁸

In the research anthology, in SOU 2016: 5 *Let More Shape the Future*, "The Local Democracy Challenges," political scientists David Karlsson and Mickael Gilljam state that if direct or participatory

¹⁴ Della Porta, D 2014 s 41-42; Bengtsson, Å 2008 *Politiskt deltagande* s 56; Gilljam, M & Hermansson, J 2003 (ed) *Delta-gandets mekanismer* s 19; Barber, B 1984 *Strong Democracy. Participatory Politics for a New Age* s 135f

¹⁵ Bengtsson, Å 2008 *Politiskt deltagande* s 60-61; Gilljam, M & Hermansson, J (ed) 2003 s 22

¹⁶ Abrahamsson, H 2015 s 37-38; SOU 2016:5 *Låt fler forma framtiden* s 394; Della Porta, D 2014 s 66-67, 84

¹⁷ Tahvilzadeh, N 2014 "Det våras för medborgardialoger" s 13 i SOU 2016:5 *Låt fler forma framtiden* – Forskarantologi; Karlsson, M 2011 "Kan medborgardialoger stärka den representativa demokratin?" s 113 i Hellberg, A-S & Karlsson, M & Larsson, H & Lundberg, E *Perspektiv på offentlig verksamhet i utveckling: tolv kapitel om demokrati, styrning och effektivitet*

¹⁸ Karlsson, M 2011 s 119

elements are implemented in Swedish municipalities, the aim should be to bring elected officials better decisions based on citizens' understanding and commitment. However, direct and participatory elements should not be implemented if they challenge and risk undermining representative democracy.¹⁹

The criticism of the implementation and operation of civic dialogue has been compiled by Nazem Tahvilzadehv in *The Future is Already Here*.²⁰ The meaning of the criticism is that the motives for implementing citizens' dialogues are questionable. Is the purpose of civic dialogue really to deepen democracy, give citizens' greater opportunities to influence and to offer a wider participation? Critics say that the dialogues instead tend to become a tool and instrument of power in the establishment's service. Dialogues are implemented to discipline and pacify active citizens, and make them accept "necessary" changes and cutbacks in the welfare state.²¹ Nazem Tahvilzadehv also contributes with two case studies from Gothenburg and Botkyrka in "Dawn of the Civic Dialogues" in the research anthology in SOU 2016: 5 *Let More Shape the Future*. He says, among other things, that there are deficiencies in the institutional arrangements of civic dialogues and the politicians' motives for conducting dialogues are unclear. In retrospect, Tahvilzadehv notes that the civic dialogues which have been conducted in Sweden over the past 15 years, for the most part can be seen as "exhilarating" elements, but have not led to deepened democracy and the representative institutions have not been challenged.²²

The professor of political science Chantal Mouffe is also highly critical of how citizen dialogues are used and implemented. She believes that the inability to handle social and political conflict is the reason for the liberal democracies lack of legitimacy. Whether participatory and deliberative elements, Mouffe believes that the establishment has no desire to share power and authority with the citizens. Mouffe suggested that the solution is that the political parties return to the origin and again become social movements representing citizens' interests. According to Mouffe, social conflicts must come up to the surface, be handled and discussed, so that democracy again can regain confidence.²³

Analysis

Based on the research mode, a gloomy picture emerges regarding the intentions and practice of civic dialogue. How should we practitioners in the Swedish municipalities manage this dystopia? Are we to be regarded as "blind sheep" in the service of the establishment, which performs, in the best case, pleasant, crowd-pleasing stunts and in the worst case, contributes to democracy's slippery slope? A democracy that cannot handle conflicts and contradictions, and that will ultimately collapse when social inequality has reached the end?

I agree with the critics, that if civic dialogues primary mission was and is to challenge the representative democracy, it is difficult to measure any positive impact. If the task of civic dialogue also is to resolve social injustices, giving voice to all and, especially, to marginalized groups, and to overthrow the current (new) liberal paradigm, you can conclude that the participatory elements have so far been rather ineffective. But, even here we must pause for a moment, for is it really realistic to have such high demands on a practice that has not been systematic for more than ten years in Sweden? Should we already throw the baby out with the bath water?

The criticism from advocates of liberal democracy is, from my perspective, in many cases excessive and simplistic. To highlight the egalitarian ideal as an insurmountable obstacle to the work of civil dialogue is not adequate. First, all practitioners of civic dialogue are very aware of the egalitarian ideal

¹⁹ Karlsson, D & Gilljam, M 2014 "Den lokala demokratins utmaningar" s 502 i SOU 2016:5 *Låt fler forma framtiden – Forskarantologin*

²⁰ Tahvilzadehv, N 2013 "Medborgardialog – dess kritiker och förkämpar" *Framtiden är redan här* forskningsprojekt, Chalmers tekniska högskola, Göteborg <<http://www.mellanplats.se/bok/del-2-dialog-i-tiden/dialogens-politik-demokratiutveckling-med-forhinder/>> 2016-05-12

²¹ Ibid

²² Tahvilzadeh, N 2014 s 514,534

²³ Mouffe, C 2009 *The Democratic Paradox* s 104-105; Tahvilzadehv, N 2013 "Medborgardialog – dess kritiker och förkämpar" *Framtiden är redan här* forskningsprojekt, Chalmers tekniska högskola, Göteborg <<http://www.mellanplats.se/bok/del-2-dialog-i-tiden/dialogens-politik-demokratiutveckling-med-forhinder/>> 2016-05-12

and struggle with it daily. One of our biggest headaches is to ensure equal representation in civic dialogues. How can we encourage underrepresented groups to participate? Sometimes we succeed, but in many cases, individuals and special interests has a disproportionately large space and influence. Is this an argument to stop working with civic dialogue? Of course not, I've ever heard of someone getting better at reading because they stop reading! We must continue to develop the dialogue process to make it more inclusive and attractive to people who usually do not participate. In this context there is room for co-creating dialogues. Secondly, there is no representative democracy that lives up to its own high ideal of equality. Citizens, groups and special interests have always contacted politicians and tried to influence policy between elections. In some cases, the contact is formalized by the state through corporate components, which means that the government selectively chooses some organized interests of institutional collaboration. In the Swedish context, the labor market policy is an area that has been characterized by a strong corporate lobby.²⁴ In other cases informally through lobbying (an unexplored area in Sweden) or by citizens and groups that have direct contact with elected officials, in order to influence them. In all the forms described, we can be confident that underrepresented and marginalized groups have not been represented in numbers.

Should then civic dialogue challenge the representative democracy? No, not necessarily. I agree with David Karlsson and Michael Gilljam, that if civic dialogues leads to politicians taking better informed decisions, that can be a reason good enough to legitimize civic dialogues. However, it is when it comes to the decision-making; both the participants and the deliberative ideal have its flaws. None of the ideals respond to how decision-making in practice will be done and in this context, representative democracy replies. Civic dialogues function should be seen as a complement to representative democracy where the real decisions clearly and transparently take place in the formal decision-making processes. However, it is essential that elected representatives (in conjunction with the officiants) try to arrange more experimental and progressive civic dialogues, partly to create interesting and engaging dialogues that many different citizens want to participate in. Partly also to highlight the different opinions, conflicts and perspectives that are ultimately handled in the representative system through decision-making or, in some cases, the transfer of decision-making to the citizens, for example through civic budgets.²⁵ There is also scope for co-creating dialogues. Co-creation dialogues can help to revitalize representative democracy and promote an active and more collective citizenship, unlike the liberal context that consolidates citizenship as an individual project.²⁶ The two forms of democracy must be given space to develop parallel and complement each other until a decision is finally taken, for the most part, by the representative decision-making processes.

Is then the implementation and operation of civic dialogue solely an instrument of a consensus culture that consolidates the (new) liberal hegemony and the prevailing power structure? The research highlights examples of civic dialogues where politicians are happy to participate, but only on their own terms, and even closing ranks when public opinion gets too loud and strong. Such dialogues suggest that elected officials are reluctant to open up and discuss issues where there are strong economic interests and different power relations. In certain contexts and in certain constellations of elected representatives is probably the correct interpretation. Another reason may be that the elected representatives do not have enough knowledge and are untrained in working with participatory and deliberative elements. To unite the historically established representative democracy with participatory and deliberative elements is difficult. In many cases, parties take a line at an early stage in the decision-making process, then perceived as impossible to dislodge. The politicians then refer back to their responsibility to the electorate and the party members. Is that a valid argument? No, if there is an opportunity to raise issues before the decision-making by the members, you can also do it with the citizens. Easy? No because, it is about changing parties, elected officials and officiants self-image and their ways of working, and last but not least, to delegate power. I'm not sure, right now; in what extent desires for change are among the politicians and providers within Sweden's municipalities and county councils? Well, is

²⁴ Hermansson, J & Lund, A & Svensson, T & Öberg, P-O 1999 *Avkorporatisering och lobbyism* s 11

²⁵ Mouffe, C 2008 s 9-14

²⁶ Abrahamsson, H 2015 s 66; Della Porta, D 2014 s 84

this a reason to stop the dialogues? No, of course not, we need to responsibly train, develop dialogue work and conduct dialogues that are more inclusive, responsive and co-created.

I am convinced that civic dialogue has come to stay. Citizens need to be involved, in one way or another, and it is no longer possible for politicians and officials to hide behind the function of liberal democracy. My view is, as I wrote earlier, that representative democracy should be developed in a parallel process with participatory democracy, and the two forms should complement each other. My belief is that if representative democracy finally is challenged, is that not because of the existence of participatory and deliberative elements, rather the absence of them, and the unwillingness of the power elite to share power, deal with conflict in a fair manner and an inability to create an egalitarian society. Right now is the golden opportunity to change that, which Hans Abrahamsson says occurs when the social order and market economy is threatened by rising inequality, climate change, and more. It is now that elected representatives can enter with active distribution policy, with measures to democratize democracy and to create a socially sustainable society.²⁷

Governance

The social and political science research on governance can be traced to the early 1980s. As previously mentioned in the introduction, governance can be understood in relation to the government that "the state is not the only institution that contributes to public power through the authoritative allocation of values".²⁸ Governance is considered as network management that involves the development of forms for samples and interaction between different social actors to resolve and manage complex and intractable social problems. Collaboration takes place through different networks where in addition to the public institutions companies and organizations can also be included to jointly control a political issue. Examples of questions that can be addressed through the governance / network management are the integration, through-keeping of major infrastructure projects, neighbourhood renewal, and others.

In research, there are divided opinions about if governance in Sweden really is a new phenomenon, as described in the international research. Some argue that the various forms of network governance have always existed among other things, on the basis that the Swedish and Nordic model has had more or less strong corporatist elements. In international, primarily British research, there are also questions about what governance stands for; is it a change of national and global conditions, movements of government and the role of politics in society or the 'new' descriptions of older phenomena? The Swedish researchers Stig Montin and Gun Hedlund believes that governance can be seen as an approach to describe new social phenomenon for political control but also to understand older and existing phenomenon. They believe that Swedish municipalities have unambiguously been changed in the last 25 years with extended forms of governance or network control and privatizations. Below is a description of the changes between the state and society as can be regarded as a development of governance:

1. Globalization has meant that the nation state has lost (or deliberately negotiated away) its sovereignty and no longer has power over all policy areas. Institutions such as the EU, the IMF, the World Bank and the UN have in some ways taken over the decision making power.
2. Regional and Local Government has taken on increased importance. It is not about strengthening local self-government but to develop local and network-like control with several actors involved.
3. National ways to allocate resources and how they are used has changed with more network-based arrangements.
4. New Public Management has since 1980 put strong influence on the public administration by including autonomous networks and various market solutions. The political control over government activities has in some cases fallen and policymakers have lost the power of decision-making.

²⁷ Abrahamsson,H 2015 s 40-43

²⁸ Hedlund,G & Montin,S (ed) 2009 s 13

The functions of representative democracy have changed and thinned since the 1980s and have been supplemented by more participatory and deliberative elements.²⁹

Governance, Democracy and Civic Dialogue

In light of the development of governance / network based control, discussions have arisen about the functioning of democracy. Critics argue that the extended network control leads to a lack of political equality, limited transparency in political decision making and the ability to demand accountability, enhanced control of NGOs, and the lack of legitimacy of citizens. The arguments are familiar from the criticism of civic dialogue. At the same time perspectives are presented that believe that governance is considered as a "new breath of fresh air" for representative democracy. New forms of participation that includes citizens and NGOs revitalize democracy. Another perspective is that governance is not a problem of representative democracy because the networks do not have any real political influence. The network's mission is usually to prepare matters for the political assemblies or to enforce political decisions.³⁰

As emerges above, is an elusive concept that in many cases, must be examined case by case. What then is the relationship between civil dialogue and governance? Is civil dialogue to be regarded as a form of network management that also includes the above criticism of civic dialogue? Or how can the relationship be described? I start with an article that the two researchers Joakim Åstrand and Michael Granberg have written "Citizen Participation and Interactive Decision-making: Continuity and Change in Spatial Planning."³¹ Åstrand and Granberg have studied the participation process linked to spatial planning in the transformation of the former shipyard and port area, Southern Älvstranden in Gothenburg. Prior to the transformation of Southern Älvstranden was a municipal company NUAB (Northern Älvstrandens Development Inc.) formed, with a board consisting of leading politicians in Gothenburg. The company's mission was to promote development and attract investors who wanted to buy land and property in Southern Älvstranden. NUAB were also responsible for managing the civic dialogue with Gothenburg's citizens about the area's development. Despite an invitation from the President of NUAB, politicians decided that they would not participate in the dialogue process.

Gothenburg City Museum was the venue for the dialogue. The museum organized a major exhibition of Southern Älvstranden and in conjunction with the exhibition the residents of Gothenburg could also submit ideas and proposals for the development of the area. The museum also conducted 184 different activities such as workshops, lectures, city tours, and more. Altogether about 90 000 people visited the exhibition and they left around 1000 proposals. At the same time NUAB worked with a parallel urban analysis where a sample of citizens participated in five groups with architects and representatives from the cultural sector. Altogether the groups approximately spend 60 hours (all participants received fees) and the task was to process the 1000 proposals that emerged during the exhibition. Dialogue also continued in parallel on Southern Älvstrandens website that had a discussion forum. Initially, the activity was low but the longer the process continued, the more citizens participated in the forum, leaving comments.³²

Åstrand and Granberg describe in their concluded analysis, that the dialogue process of the transformation of the Southern Älvstranden certainly was ambitious and innovative (the dialogue was conducted from the years 2004 to 2005), but that there were several difficulties. The authors point out several problems, for example the lack of transparency and that made it difficult to follow the dialogue and to understand where the decisions were made. In addition, the politicians chose to opt out of the dialogue, which made it impossible for them to communicate directly with the citizens. Åström and Granstedt believe that the politicians' decision to abstain can be seen as a control measure that gave them free reign to make the decisions that they wanted once the issue ended up on their tables. Furthermore, the authors discuss the problems of transferring the substrate from the informal arena to the

²⁹ Ibid s 7-10

³⁰ Hedlund, G & Montin, S 14, 27-28,32; Pierre, J 2011 *The Politics of Urban Governance* s 139

³¹ Åstrand, J & Granberg, M 2009 "Medborgerligt deltagande och interaktivt beslutsfattande: Kontinuitet och förändring inom fysisk planering." i Hedlund, G & Montin, S (ed). 2009

³² Ibid s 165-170

formal arena. A small portion of the visions from the informal arena were included in the actual decision-making. Åström and Granstedt mean that the elected picked the raisins from the cake. A contributor for that was probably the lack of communication between politicians and citizens. Expectations in participation also differed between the participating citizens and the officials from NUAB / City Planning Administration. The later saw the dialogue as wider public discussion for the annual planning process. The participating citizens, for their part, saw their mandate as much larger. Åström and Granstedt conclusion is that “new forms of governance can hardly replace the old forms of government, both old and new forms must interact with each other.”³³

Final Analysis

Åstrand and Granberg choose to term the civic dialogue around Southern Älvstranden as network management and governance. I share their view and I also regard the dialogue on Southern Älvstranden, as well as most of the civic dialogues conducted in Sweden today as an attempt at governance and network control, or rather governance arrangements. The Swedish professor in political science Jon Pierre believes in “Three Myths of governance” that: “It seems more reasonable to see the network governance arrangements that have increased in importance but likely with significant variations between different policy areas”.³⁴ Through applying a governance perspective on the study of civic dialogues we can develop a greater knowledge and understanding of the complex processes that civil dialogue at times can be.

However, my view is that attempts to govern civic dialogue do not always go well because representative democracy and participatory and deliberative democracy do not always manage to complement each other. Something that also Åström and Granstedt note when they write “new forms of governance can hardly replace the old forms of government, both old and new forms must interact with each other”.³⁵ I do not think there are general solutions for exactly how the interaction between representative and participatory democracy should be designed; arrangements must be developed from case to case. This can be addressed through meticulous planning and being aware of the worst pitfalls. And above all, as mentioned previously, there must be a sincere desire to change the approach and working methods among politicians and officials and a seriously willingness to include citizens and delegate power.

Unlike the dialogue on the development of Southern Älvstranden, I believe today that we practitioners in civic dialogue have become better at communicating what kind of influence that participants can expect when participating in dialogues. We have become better at talking about the extent to which participants can make a difference and what influence the outcome of the dialogues get on political decisions. But a problem that still persists in the current situation, which is also evident in the dialogue in Southern Älvstranden, is that elected officials choose to opt out of the dialogue process. A phenomenon that is common in urban construction projects. In many cases the dialogue is left to civil servants who may be held accountable without having a decision-making mandate. In my view, it is an approach which in most cases is completely reprehensible and waters down the purpose of the participatory and deliberative elements. Citizens must be able to communicate and dialogue directly with decision-makers, even if it is mostly politicians who finally make the decisions. When elected representative choose to opt out of the dialogue with citizens, it is just as Åström and Granstedt writes a control measure that does not commit to even consider the results of the dialogue and does not create better decision support. In such cases it is better to refrain from carrying out civic dialogue or at least choose to call gatherings for something else. The dialogue is, in many cases, given to civil servants that are outside of the decision making process.

As mentioned above, civic dialogue and governance are criticized from several perspectives and the ultimate process does not exist. Whatever it is, civic dialogue often means a (sincere) want to include and involve citizens even if the results, for various reasons, aren't always successful. But going forward in light of research on governance and civic dialogue, it is also interesting to examine govern-

³³ Ibid s 172-176

³⁴ Pierre, J 2009 ”Tre myter om governance” s 48 i Hedlund, G & Montin, S (ed). 2009

³⁵ Åstrand, J & Granberg, M 2009 ”Medborgerligt deltagande och interaktivt beslutsfattande: Kontinuitet och förändring inom fysisk planering.” i Hedlund, G & Montin, S (ed). 2009 s 176

ance arrangements, where citizens will not be let in and involved. How have elected representatives and leading civil servants reasoned regarding such processes? Why have they not chosen to include citizens? It is perhaps a greater problem for democracy than the relatively few citizen dialogues conducted? Two examples that it would be interesting to make a comparative study of, are the controversial infrastructure projects around the West Link in Gothenburg and the tramway project in Lund. Interesting research questions are how governance arrangements have been designed, and how leading players have resonated around the participation of citizens?

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