

ASSESSING DEMOCRACY IN LOCAL GOVERNANCE NETWORKS

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1. Local governance networks in their context

A lot of discussions about 'new governance' or 'modern governance' have taken place particularly after the early 1990s. Kooiman (1993, 6) regarded the new governance as changes in relations and interaction between the public administration and the surrounding society. The direction of these changes Kooiman presented as a movement from the separateness between administration and society towards increasing interaction and cooperation (1993, 35). One background for this development has been the increased recognition of mutual interdependencies between actors in public and private sectors. Another factor causing these changes has been the increased complexity of societal problems and systems which has created difficulties of governability (also Rhodes 1997). A third background factor of changes has been the rise of network society described by Castells (1996). The rise of network society has created a new potential for rapid and extensive interaction among organizations, groups and individuals. Altogether, new governance networks as a form of new governance have aimed to overcome the fragmentation of societal systems caused by the strong differentiation and top-down way of ruling within public administration and private markets (Theories of democratic network governance 2007, 31, 78).

At the local level the progress of economic globalisation can be added as an influential factor of new local governance. In many cases economic globalisation has been weakening the existing circumstances of local economy and culture. Global chains of influence have created new kind of uncertainties and tensions on into local life world. There is also the question about the future of local democracy in the pressure of global impacts. Defence mechanisms of local communities at the grass-root level can be the rapprochement of citizens' activities to local governance and decision-making, the empowerment of local actors and the building of infrastructures – like new social spaces – which prevent or retard fragmentation (Anttiroiko 1998, 2001).

The new way of governing has produced and still produces different new forms of cooperation between the public and private sectors. These new forms differ from the traditional corporatism. The new governance can be regarded as an extension of pluralism which develops to touch more and more societal actors and activities (Micheletti 1995, Hirst 2000, 18-19) in new ways of cooperation. New governance has evidently given an impulse to the rise of the citizens' organizations and the third sector to a more important position in different societal fields. Particularly within the local and regional governance the participation and eligibility of third sector actors have increased (Goss 2001, Local partnerships...2001). At the local level a new discussion about 'network municipalities' has arisen including the governance of local networks as an important issue (Haveri and Pehk 2007).

The inter-sector cooperation of the new governance has brought with it a transfer from governing by rules towards governing more by mutual agreements (Anttiroiko and Haveri 2003). Strengthened position of networks and agreements has opened new social spaces for action both to citizens' associations and business enterprises also in

the traditional public sector areas. This has been typical particularly in those situations where the capacity of the public sector has not been sufficient to respond to the risen demands and needs or has been deficient to solve changing societal problems. This kind of situations has been most frequent at the local level.

The roles of citizens' organizations have extended and multiplied in the context of new governance. Citizens' organizations have got more voice as channels of local and regional influence and as producers of services. Evidently the policy roles of these organizations have strengthened both in the planning phase (advocacy) and in the implementation phase (services) (Lowndes and Wilson 2001, Lewis 2007). Despite these changes the local government (municipality) still is the integrating institution of the local governance. The governance relations of municipalities are multiplying, and this development poses new requirements for the capacity of municipalities to govern agreements and networking policies. 'Network municipality' needs network governance, capacity to create synergy between established institutions and flexible networks (Mustakangas, Kiviniemi and Vihinen 2004).

Public-private partnerships have been at a central position of the forms of new governance already from the beginning. The European Union included the partnership principle into the action methods of regional and local development in the late 1980s. In Finland local partnerships increased particularly in the late 1990s after the EU membership. After this increase local partnerships have been studied and assessed from different perspectives (for example, Uudet kumppanuudet 2000, Rantama 2002, Häikiö 2005, Mustakangas, Kiviniemi and Vihinen 2003, 2004). Perspectives of research may vary from the productivity and effects of partnerships to the development of their internal processes, or to democracy of partnerships which can be studied both at the level of principles and of activities.

One discussion theme connected to new governance is the discussion about 'good governance'. Good governance has been most often seen as democratic governance (March and Olsen 1995, Bauman 1999, 84, 154-168). The issue of democracy in governance is, however, quite multidimensional. This paper is concentrating on the question: how local partnerships can be analysed and assessed from the perspective of democracy? The focus is particularly on the partnerships between municipal and citizens' organizations' actors. The purpose is to elaborate a multidimensional framework for the analysis of ended and coming partnerships from the perspectives of democratic dimensions.

Local partnerships should not be isolated from their context. When more and more partnerships are set up, there are good reasons to ask, why partnerships are taken in use. Are they replacing some other alternative ways of action? A municipality may keep on its own organization or establish partnerships with other municipalities. Partnerships can be started with citizens' organizations but also with enterprises and foundations. A municipality can also establish its own businesses (Möttönen and Niemelä 2005). A common background of partnerships is that they are often born in an institutional vacuum. In those situations there are no ready institutional responses to some arisen societal need. When the response is a partnership between a municipality and a citizens' organization, this usually adds new relations between municipal actors and civic actors. Some kind of perceived interdependency is often at the background of such partnership.

From the perspective of local democracy the main context of local partnerships is the municipal representative democracy. The questions rising from this context concern the 'democratic anchorage' of partnerships (Skelcher 2007). What kind of relation there is between the partnerships and municipal democracy, representative council and other elected bodies? Is this relation different from the relation of civil service or purchased business services? What does a local partnership mean to different partners?

2. Research on local partnerships

While local partnerships are already quite commonly used, research targeted to them has been relatively disperse and situational in character. Some general perspectives and themes have been brought ahead particularly by British researchers (for example, Stoker 1998). However, there is no general conceptual framework or research agenda. Separate research efforts start from different viewpoints and interests. By selective reading certain theoretical and empirical orientations and findings can be identified.

There is no official normative definition of local partnership. A definition which could link partnership studies with social scientific research has been searched for in earlier partnership studies. A conceptual perspective to local partnerships has been opened by the concepts of network, cooperation and process which are used also in political, administrative and governance studies (Kiviniemi and Saarelainen 2009). According to this perspective local partnerships are cooperative networks based on agreements among partners and developing through different social processes. Every network is not a partnership network. Partnerships are networks which are at least partially formalized by public agreements. Their durability and stability may vary. The agreement involves one or more cooperative purposes, and the partners commit their input for the purpose giving up a part of their autonomy for establishing a purposive mutual coordination.

According to Anheier (2006, 164-168) partnership as a concept situates between a mere coordination without a common formal purpose and a joint venture. A mere coordination refers to a situation where two or more actors are coordinating their activities remaining to be separate actors. A joint venture is a formal organization as a united actor. A partnership is a looser set of actors including several members of a network combined by an agreement. The biggest part of partnerships between municipalities and citizens' associations has been project partnerships. Another main alternative are strategy partnerships for local development. Examples of project partnerships are The UN Local Agenda 21 for promoting sustainable development, The EU Leader+ for regional and local development as well as employment projects by The European Social Fund. Examples of strategic partnerships are sub-municipal boards and fora, organized either by municipalities or residents' associations or local councils and other bodies within different functional branches (Pikkala 2006).

Formal organizations, like councils, agencies, enterprises and associations, are most often regarded as actors, subjects who have their own particular field of action. In comparison, networks and partnerships are not to be regarded as a subject but rather as a social space for encounters among several subjects, actors (Uudet kumppanuudet 2000).

Accordingly, local partnerships may be regarded as cooperative networks among several actors. Different actors in the network have their own background, position, task orientation, way of action and development process. These kinds of network have been called governance networks (for example, Häikiö 2005, 30-37, Haveri and Pehk 2007). The term governance network can be applied particularly to development and strategy partnerships.

Within the research of local partnerships as cooperative networks several different perspectives and approaches can be found. As background theories institutional theories, governance network theories and democratic theories have been presented (Theories of democratic network governance 2007). These theories are connecting partnership research to broader societal context. From a bit more internal perspective to partnerships, three different approaches can be distinguished: productivity approach, process approach and democracy approach. These approaches can be distinct analytically but it is possible and even useful also to combine them.

Research can focus on assessing local partnerships from the perspective of results and impacts (for example, Local Governance and the drivers of Growth 2005, Peters 2007). This is a productivity approach. Another alternative is to study partnerships as developing processes where the focus is most often on the interaction, learning and social nature of partnerships during cooperative processes (for example, Rantama 2002). The third alternative focuses on the perspective of democracy in local partnerships. The perspective of democracy includes different alternatives, as for example the relation between representative democracy and partnerships, or between participative democracy and partnerships (for example, Häikiö 2005). It may be questioned if local partnerships do promote or represent local democracy. If they do so, by which ways this takes place? Are local partnerships broadening democratic processes or adding something to democratic institutions or are they perhaps improving outcome democracy? In answering these types of questions, considerations of local power structures and equality between actors are needed.

3. Perspectives of democracy in local governance networks

The plurality of democracy theories and conceptions has given reason to speak about 'the era of embarrassed democracy' (Setälä 2003, 9). The principles of democracy have been defined in different ways in different democracy theories. It is possible to start from the viewpoint where democracy can exist in different forms. Main distinctions have been made between indirect (representative) and direct (participative) democracy (for example, Perczynski 2000, 162). Also concepts like aggregative democracy (representative) and integrative (participative) democracy have been used (Theories of democratic network governance 2007). After having analyzed different democracy theories Setälä (2003, 184) states that representative democracy as an expression of indirect democracy needs also other means of more direct and participative democratic ways of influence. The democracy of a political community, according to Setälä, is not a one-dimensional but a multi-dimensional issue.

When analysing local partnerships in the context of local political community it can be noted that the political-administrative organization and local citizens' associations

belong to the same political community. Members of local associations are most often local residents and in that sense local citizens. The roles of citizens' associations within the political community vary. According to Helander (2001) their general roles are production of services, making influence in local community and promoting local interaction and cohesion in voluntary ways. Citizens' associations create social spaces in their environment. They are arenas for bottom-up participation, they exemplify empowered participatory governance and create opportunities for social learning (Theories of democratic network governance 2007).

Institutional, on political representativeness based municipality has been usually regarded as the cornerstone of democratic political community. Representative democratic institutions are seen as the basis of other forms of democracy. In principle a part of these forms may be municipality-centred, another part developing within the civil society and in citizens' associations (for example, residents' associations, village boards). In this basic view representative and other forms of democracy are complementary to each other, creating together more targeted responsiveness and better outcomes of service functions.

Bauman (1999, 87) presents that for the development of political community the interface and encounter of private life sphere and public governance sphere is important. For this interface some social space is needed. Bauman calls this social space by the traditional term of antiquity *agora*. According to Bauman *agora* is a space or place where *oikos* (private household) and *ecclesia* (public politics) meet each other and can communicate.

Local partnerships are one – even if limited – space for the encounters between private and public spheres. The purpose, rules of game and nature of interaction may vary greatly. As characteristics of ideal political space has been presented (Rättilä 2000, 41; reference Benhabib 1994): 1) autonomy and independence, 2) inclusiveness, and 3) rational and equal processes of communication. The degree of autonomy and self-guidance can be considered for example by analysing the nature of decision-making situations. How independent is the decision-making in the space according to premises, procedures and formulations of alternative decisions? Inclusiveness can be studied in the light of the openness and access of the space. Rationality and equality of communication can be seen in the quality of real interaction dialogue. Are there space for different rationalities and several voices?

For elaborating the assessment of democracy in local partnerships as social spaces and interfaces two levels of examination can be distinguished: the level of principles and the level of action. Principles include the primary rules in the shaping and action patterning of local partnerships. Concerning local partnerships between the municipality and citizens' associations these rules refer to the formulation of content of the agreement as the basis of the partnership. The agreement creates the mandate of the social space. The degree of autonomy in partnership depends on the agreement. When partnerships are coming more frequent some models of agreements may be developed for guidelines of new agreements.

The agreement policy of a municipality is not separate from broader municipal strategies and policies. For example, municipal network and cooperation policies can define outlines for agreement policies. Also local citizens' associations may have their

own 'municipal policies'. Empirical findings however tell that local partnerships are most often born case by case without coherent strategies and policies neither by municipalities nor by associations. Local partnerships are often more a part of sector policies than of broader partnership policies because of the strong position of administrative sectors within the local governance (Mustakangas, Kiviniemi and Vihinen 2003, 2004).

The mandate given by the agreement defines the decision-making procedures, structures and methods in the partnership space. These definitions belong to the level of principles by setting formal authorizations and responsibility relations. The degree of autonomy evidently varies according to the agreement and the rules of decision making.

Montin (1998) has considered principal alternatives of municipal third sector policies. He regards as a dangerous trend that municipalities colonize citizens' associations as an extension of their own activities. In this development municipalities limit the role of citizens' associations to the implementation and they manage relations with associations primarily according to purchaser-provider model. Montin presents as alternative strategies for third sector policies vitalization and independence. Vitalization strategy refers to broad and multiplied interaction and cooperation between municipalities and associations as equal actors. Independence strategy refers to the separateness of municipalities and associations as independent actors. In this strategy both actors have their own regimes, and citizens' associations act primarily as advocacy and pressure groups without cooperative partnerships with municipalities.

There are evidently different outlines and practices of third sector policies in the municipal field. Also citizens' associations may have different profiles in their relations to municipal activities and projects. The general picture of relations has been the increase of local partnerships at least to the year 2004 in Finland. It is interesting to perceive a changing trend after that year. Särkelä (2009) states that while in 2004 70 % of Finnish national level associations regarded service production to be their primary function, in 2007 the corresponding percentage was dropped to 40. After 2004 there has been a clear trend to emphasize more the advocacy and expert functions in citizens' associations. One background factor for this development has been the impact of competition policy to the preconditions of local service production.

3.1 The level of principles

What kind of basis do local partnerships have? This question aims at understanding the starting points and principles of partnerships. The main thought is that local partnerships are defined by agreements which establish partnerships and present their tasks and ways of action. As a background make influence ideas, conceptions and expectations of the municipality and of citizens' associations. Also the municipal third sector policy and the policies of associations may play a role. The recognition of these background factors is important in the research of partnership principles. From the perspective of the municipality the term 'meta-governance' has been used (Theories of democratic network governance 2007). This term refers to the general design, rules and institutional context of partnership networks. The functional purpose of meta-governance is to facilitate network formation.

Partnership agreements do not originate in a vacuum but on the basis of negotiation processes in the context of local backgrounds, traditions and policies. These original negotiations have been called the explorative stage of partnership processes (Uudet kumppanuudet 2000, 123-129). A central issue of the explorative stage is if partners can find common conceptions and interests for the basis of partnership. According to research findings, the realisation of this central issue varies in different negotiations, and the degree of realisation makes impact on the whole partnership process (ibid.). Common and consistent interests in partnership increase social cohesion in partnership network (Peters 2007, 71-72).

In some Finnish cases, as for example in the LEADER+ action groups, there has been used beforehand defined models for the formation of partnerships (Rantama 2002, 136). On the other hand, in employment partnerships a characteristic has been a large variety and spectre of local partnership forms originated in local negotiations and in different local circumstances (Uudet kumppanuudet 2000). In both cases a broad participation of local associations and residents has been a starting point but as exemplified this participation can take place either with or without ready models. A main actor in the explorative phase is usually either a municipal civil servant or a project manager if such person has been already selected.

Backgrounds, initial stages and agreement negotiations of partnership processes have been only scarcely studied. Because principles of partnerships are defined in these contexts, it is reasonable to focus attention to the level of principles and its origins in partnership processes. Next, some questions are formulated as examples of themes for analysing principles of partnerships:

Who has done the initiative for a partnership?

Who have participated in the preparation and defining decisions of a partnership agreement?

How equally different partners have participated in the agreement negotiations?

How fully and in which way common conceptions and interests have been achieved in negotiations a basis of partnership?

What kinds of procedure have been included in the partnership agreement and on which grounds?

How much independence and self-guidance has been allowed for the partnership in its activities?

How the accountability of the partnership has been defined?

A common background of these questions is the vertical dimension of partnerships. The principles of partnerships are often defined in agreements which are decided by different actors than the proper partnership actors. The important issue is how the partners themselves have been participating in agreement negotiations. Do different partners possess so-called vertical capacity to make influence in this local decision-making? It can be thought that the meta-governance of partnership networks functions

as a joint place for relations between representative democracy and participative democracy. For example Olsson (2000) tells in his research that the local trustee persons regard partnerships to belong within the field of democracy as a way of action which has been accepted by elected local bodies. Partnerships accepted by elected local bodies are seen to be under democratic control. This way of thinking implies that democratically elected decision-makers define the mandates and ways of action for participative democracy.

In the context of new governance local partnerships have been described as horizontal and promoting social inclusion. For citizens' associations partnerships represent horizontal capacity of influence. At the level of meta-governance vertical and horizontal way of influence may coincide when all partners have some say in 'meta-negotiations'. At the level of single partnerships, the main issue is the nature of the mandate defined by common agreement. How independent this mandate is as a social space and in executing its development task? The question of independence is connected with the accountability of the partnership network. The classical *credo* is that 'the more autonomy, the more responsibility'.

Haveri and Pehk (2007, 28) tell that a big part of local partnerships seem to remain minor in their achievements. The common interest has not been always found for the basis of partnership network. A part of partnerships has been 'cosmetic' in character. They represent 'mode trends' as new social spaces but may remain discussion and debate clubs (Grefe 2005). It can be assumed that the questions above about the background and negotiation processes of partnerships could explain the development potential of partnerships. Additional evidence for explanations could be found at the level of action within partnership processes.

3.2 The level of action

According to the life cycle model of partnerships (Uudet kumppanuudet 2000) it can be stated that the preparation and explorative negotiations produce principles and starting points for the following stages of partnerships. In addition, the quality of experiences in interaction during the preparative negotiations creates meanings and expectations to the participating partners. A set of provisions for the partnership process is born. After achieving an agreement, organizing and realising stages follow the preparative stage. The level of action is starting in a new social space for purposive activities. This kind of social spaces has been called 'regimes of practices' (Theories of democratic network governance 2007, 40).

During the organizing phase partners outline and formulate main lines, ways and practices of action. The new social space is fulfilled with discussions and practical creations. When a new partnership starts, discussions about different partner roles are needed. An essential element of the nature of social space is to define practices of decision-making and leadership. Also defining the external relations, publicity and openness of the partnership are required. Organizing the partnership belongs still to early stages of partnership process where common conceptions are searched for. Partners' experiences of discussions and interaction make influence on how the partnerships is regarded from the viewpoints of different partners, how important it is seen and which kinds of motive are activated. In addition to concrete purposes, goals

and desired results also beliefs in one's empowerment and development of own capabilities may be important sources of motivation (March and Olsen 1995, 91-139).

During the realising stage of partnership process ideas and agreed ways of action produced by previous stages are discharged as practical deeds and activities. The partnership is branched out as flows and processes of concrete action. At this stage the meaning of information and coordination flows as cohesive functions is crucial for the integration of the partnership. Common discussions tend to decrease at this stage when practical action takes the primary position and roles of partners often diverge.

Considering partnerships according to the life cycle thought it can be stated that certain basic factors are defined during the preparative, explorative and organizing stages. Most important of these seem to be as starting points and principles:

- basic structure and resources of the partnership network
- the purpose and functional principles of cooperation
- the time span and defined intermediate stages of partnership

These three basic factors can be broadly connected to the key concepts of partnership research: network, cooperation and process (Kiviniemi and Saarelainen 2009). These basic factors are defined as frameworks at the early stages of partnerships. They are specialized, divided and targeted more exactly still during the realising stage. For example, there is often a resource pool for the partnership. This pool may often be a source of discord and fraction within the partnership process. How the resources are allocated to different sub-activities? Also the methods of action and micro-level priorities are often created in practical situations. Many factors expressing the nature of partnership are manifested and concretized during the realising stage. Realising implies to make operational the purpose and principles of the partnership. Essential for the democracy of partnership are:

- practices of decision-making and leadership
- the quality of communication and interaction
- the degree of inclusion in partnership practices

The assumption here is that these three factors or dimensions are developing in essential ways still during the realising stage of the partnership process. The threefold division into decision-making, communication and inclusion shares similarities with the three-dimensional model of participative democracy presented by Archon Fung (2006) by terms of power, communication and participation. In a similar way this threefold division has parallel features with the ideal political action space presented by Benhabib (Rättälä 2000, referred above).

Haveri and Pehk (2007) and Häikiö (2005) present as findings of their research that in the 'long run' of partnership processes during the realising stage the municipal civil servants often at the end have more power and influence in decision-making than representatives of citizens' associations. This findings point to that the ideal political action space does not easily come true in partnership networks. All three above-mentioned dimensions are included in the development of this democracy deficit as criteria of participative democracy. Another kind of democracy deficit may be identified in the flowing of power from municipal trustee persons to civil servants in

partnership networks (Haveri and Pehk 2007). For these reasons it is justified to analyse these three dimensions further for the assessment of democracy in partnerships.

4. Main aspects of democracy in local governance networks

When analysing aspects of democracy within partnerships one enters in the field 'pragmatic democracy' (Sabel 2005, 127-128) which covers issues of equal empowerment in used practices. Following this orientation, in the next considerations bridges and connections between theoretical concepts and people's life worlds are built instead of trying to present theoretical grains of gold.

4.1 Decision-making

During the organizing and realising stages of partnerships partners make decisions which mould and develop the nature and activities of partnerships. From the perspective of democracy the concern is about the community and equality in the decision processes. In addition the concern is about the ways of argumentation and the openness of discussions and the share of information. During the organizing stage decisions are more often long-term oriented, during the realising stage the issue is more often the application of decisions or the treatment of new situational requirements.

The partners have often different conceptions and experiences about the decision processes within the partnerships. Therefore it is necessary to analyse decision processes from the different perspectives of all participating partners. The preferred perspective is to analyse the appearance of democracy in pragmatic and concrete ways. The empirical materials then are gathered from the life world of actors, not from the theoretical concepts of democracy. The research effort tries to find out relations between life worlds and conceptual worlds. The co-existence of different life worlds as well as different conceptual orientations is accepted which includes also the acceptance of the emerging 'knowledge pluralism'. Concepts tend to create universal, theoretical delineations and dimensions, while everyday meanings found in practices tend to bear local, contextual understanding.

A broad conception of reflexive and open decision-making process may a general starting-point for studying decision processes in partnerships. The reflexive and open quality of processes should be connected with the quality of management which is supposed to be 'management by negotiations'. The nature of decision-making processes can be analysed for example by following questions:

What are the most important decisions made during the partnership?

How independent of external actors the decision-making and search for new ways of action has been?

Have external actors tried to make influence on decision-making?

How the decisions have been prepared?

How equally partners have participated in the decision-making?

What kind of role the management has in making decisions? How the network has been managed in decision-making?

These questions are aimed at find out power and autonomy aspects of democracy. Decision-making concerns the use of power and the opportunities to influence and the independence of participating actors. The 'partnership world' in this sense is a kind of micro-cosmos of power and autonomy created by the partnership agreement and included grounds and principles. It has been supposed that local partnerships can create new innovative ways of action. This implies that creative solutions and new functional ideas are possible and desirable by the partners. The principles and practices of partnerships should for this reason create innovative opportunities and not include too much limits of action.

In reality accustomed ways of thinking and acting as well as prevailing institutional structures and practices often make limits for creativeness and breakthrough of new ideas in the 'partnership world' (Rantama 2002). The inertia produced by prevailing power structures, practices and customs can be however decreased and softened by rational and equal communication and interaction and by expanding inclusion.

4.2 Interaction

Partnerships are particularly spaces of new social interaction where social learning is at a central place: partners are learning from each other. From the perspective of democracy it is important to ask how rational and equal this social interaction is. Rationality of interaction refers to the way of free argumentation and of using reliable and valid knowledge. It is clear that this 'ideal communication' is only rarely achieved but its obstacles can however be reduced by conscious efforts. One way towards the idea of rational interaction is the equality of communication. This implies that every partner has equal amount of communication space and opportunity of self-expression. This means a minimization of strivings for authority and submission as well as other inequality producing activities. These issues focus on the aspects of democracy in talking and discursive power in democracy. Experiences of partners about interaction can be mapped by for example the following questions:

How the interaction between partners has taken place?

How equal is the interaction? Does everybody have the same possibilities for expressing himself/herself?

How open is the discussion about the matters under treatment? Are some matters pushed away from open treatment?

Is the relevant information shared equally in the interaction?

What the partners have learned during the partnership?

In the research findings about local partnerships social learning among partners has been found out often as a rewarding experience (Uudet kumppanuudet 2000, Local

partnerships... 2000). The relationship between social learning experiences and the democracy of partnership has not been very much analysed. Most references point to that social learning produces better readiness to make influence in local affairs. Also it has been interpreted that social learning creates social capital in the local environment, in addition also increase of political capital and resources has been mentioned. The classical conception about local participation as a 'citizen education' is close to these findings. Generally expressed, social learning can create and modify shared meanings and ways of thinking. In terms of democratic theories, deliberative and participative theories may coincide in well-developed communication processes.

4.3 Social inclusion

Social inclusion refers to the coverage of actively participating parties as compared with all interested parties. Because of the limited action space offered by a local partnership, all interested local residents cannot directly participate in the partnership activities for practical reasons. Thus, the distinction between indirect and direct participation is needed. For example, citizens' associations offer opportunities for indirect participation and inclusion to their members. The main question is if affected and interested parties do really have equal and extensive opportunities for participation. Participation opportunities connect to the openness of partnerships. When the communication in partnerships is distributed openly both in internal and external terms, this extends simultaneously opportunities for indirect participation, for example by using net discussions. Young (2002) has emphasized the importance of broad social inclusion for democracy. When social inclusion is limited and defective, this means often 'a democracy of few' instead of 'a democracy of all'.

The manifestation of social inclusion is connected with ways of decision-making and interaction. Some question may, however, specify experiences of the reality of inclusion in partnerships:

Have all affected and interested parties been involved in the partnership?

How open the communication about the decision-making and activities of the partnership has been to the local residents?

How actively the parties of partnership have kept interacting relations to external parties and persons?

Have there been active efforts to get feedback about the partnership from local residents and what kind of feedback has been received?

Which external parties have been interest groups in relation to the partnership and how communications with these groups has been arranged?

Social inclusion refers to belonging to a community. In this sense the counter-concept is exclusion. In the questions above social inclusion is regarded as an active belonging to a community. When inclusion in the decision-making or interaction is studied, it involves more than a mere passive belonging. Inclusion and participation then are partially overlapping concepts. From the perspective of democracy social inclusion is a central aspect, particularly in the context of broader local community. Mere internal

dimensions of partnership are not alone sufficient for assessing the democracy of partnership.

4.4 Summary: a framework for assessing democracy

Main points of the previous considerations have been collected into the Table below. The Table presents a multi-dimensional framework for assessing and analysing local partnerships from the perspective of democracy. Two levels of assessment are distinguished: the level of principles and foundations and the level of action. At both levels three dimensions are distinguished: decision-making, interaction and inclusion.

In the Table the core questions of two levels and three dimensions are condensed and exemplified. The six boxes present in terms of questions how democracy is manifested in local partnerships. At the level of principles and foundations the focus is on local network and partnership policies and fundamentals of agreements. At the level of action the focus is on practices of decision-making, interaction and inclusion deduced from the concept of ideal political space. The core questions are aiming at building bridges between conceptual orientation and people's life worlds.

Table. A framework for assessing and analysing local partnerships from the perspective of democracy.

Levels of assessment→ Dimensions of assessment↓	Principles, foundations	Action
Decision-making	How the relationship between representative and participative democracy has been formulated?	How equal and independent have been the decision procedures within the partnership network?
Interaction	What kind of communication structure has been active in negotiations about partnerships?	How equal and open has been the interaction and communication within the partnership?
Inclusion	Who have participated in the negotiations about partnership agreement?	How broadly and inclusively have affected and interested parties got information and channels of influence in the partnership?

The presented core questions can be further divided into more specific sub-questions as presented above. The circle of analytic assessment starts from the position of a local partnership in the local democracy and of the related principles of making decisions about partnerships. Then the analytic approach penetrates into the practices of local partnerships focusing on aspects of equality, openness and inclusiveness within different stages of partnerships.

The multi-dimensional framework is aimed at functioning as a starting-point for empirical studies of local partnerships.

5. Discussion and conclusions

It may well be asked why to study democracy in local partnerships. All partnerships are not necessarily aimed to be democratic. For example, local partnerships may have functional goals which are preferred. An answer to the question might be generally that the research of democracy should not be restricted to such research objects that are officially said to present democracy. In the research of democracy it is important to pay attention also to areas and objects which lack democracy. For example, the idea of 'good governance' has thought to be one general criterion in assessing characteristics of new and old ways of governance. Local partnerships have become more common with the progress of new governance. Then it is well justified to ask how the principles of good governance are realised in local partnerships. Democracy is included in the principles of good governance. On these arguments the research interest in analysing local partnerships from the perspective of democracy is grounded and justified.

It can be also remarked that democracy may be more important research object in some other respects like relations between politics and public administration or relations between politics and business life. This is not to be contested. However, there is also a need to pay attention on the ways of new governance. There are also reasons to recognize that the democracy of local partnerships may well be dependent on the democracy of local institutions and action patterns at more general level. It may be asked how democratic a local political community really is. Remarkable differences in the activation of local participation development have been found in Finland (Pikkala 2006). Thus, in the local environment may well be such differences which either make positive preconditions for democratic partnerships or make restrictions for these preconditions. The research issues concern democracy both in political and administrative institutions and in local civil society. In this perspective democracy is understood both as institutional principles and as more concrete practices, cultures and ways of action.

It is well known that the political capital and resources of citizens and their groups vary in local communities. This could be recognized in partnership policies. The empowerment of weak groups has not often been a principle in local partnerships. However, there are certain examples of empowerment orientation at least in employment partnerships where unemployed people have actively participated. In the dimension of social inclusion can be included the striving of empowerment targeted at decreasing social exclusion. As a whole local partnerships offer a way of action by which an increasing amount of local residents can influence on some local development projects. Simultaneously a redistribution of political resources can take place.

Accountability issues have often been regarded as a restriction for the independent mandate of local partnerships. Local partnership is neither an elected body of trustees nor a public authority. Thus it does not possess a responsibility based on statutes. The definition of accountability is thought to be included in the decisions about principles and foundations of partnerships which should be visible in the partnership agreements. The responsibility is often concretized in reporting and accounting duties. In these methods it is possible to inspect results and economic items of partnerships.

As a point of comparison the outsourcing or purchasing of public services can be considered. Are local partnership and local outsourced service similar or different in their character of responsibility? Responsibility is a broad lane, it should not be reduced into a technical accounting perspective. In the report *Local partnerships for better governance* (OECD 2001) a broad perspective of responsibility is recommended in such a way that a local partnership is responsible to the whole local community and to its different actors.

In assessing local partnerships one possible starting-point is to consider what alternative ways there are to organize the governance of local development work. A traditional, old way of governance has been centralized in the political-administrative system. Local development has been a responsibility of the elected representative bodies and public agencies. The new governance increases the number of participating actors while the old governance still is the main integrating local institution. Alternatives for local partnerships could be professional reports and analyses or purchased consultancy services. From the perspective of democracy partnerships which are formed of local residents and associations as partners are potentially improving democracy and opening new channels of influence. The question of assessment is then if this kind of partnerships functions democratically and is striving for social inclusion.

In the research of local partnerships it is useful to ask on which kind of partnerships the analysis should be focused. While municipal structures are under big changes, as in Finland, there emerges the question about the position and significance of local partnerships in new big and merged municipalities. One interesting focus could be the study of local partnerships in these merged local governments. From the perspective of local development the evolving position and activities of sub-municipal boards and fora is very interesting. In new merged municipalities several earlier centres are changing to be peripheries in the new 'super-municipality'. These earlier centres have accustomed to be centres and have still potential and professional readiness for local development. Is it that in the new 'super-municipalities' there is a particularly strong need for partnerships as for example sub-municipal boards?

In analysing local partnerships it is possible to elaborate perspectives on how does the local *agora* shape up under the big changes. Is there still local autonomy, inclusion and social dialogue? How are the differences between local communities developing from the perspective of democracy? Can research find empirical examples of local partnerships promoting local democracy?

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