

# **Negotiating collaborative governance designs: a discursive approach**

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### **ABSTRACT**

This article addresses the design and implementation issues of collaborative governance, a public-management practice aimed at involving stakeholders in problem solving and public innovation. Although aspects of for example stakeholder inclusion and power are conceptualized in the literature, these issues remain challenging in practice. Therefore, the interest in understanding the emerging processes of collaborative governance is growing. This article contributes to theorizing discursive aspects of such processes by conceptualizing and exploring the meaning negotiations through which collaborative governance designs emerge and change. The findings of a case study of local governments' efforts to innovate quality management in education through collaborative governance suggest that such form of governance is continually negotiated in communication during both design and implementation phases. Through the meaning negotiations of local designs, discursive tensions and resistance generate changes in the organizing. The article shows that a discursive approach offers concepts valuable for refining the understanding of the emergence of collaborative governance in practice, and proposes approaching this process as organizing accomplished through and complicated by endemic meaning negotiations and change.

**Key Words:** Collaborative governance, organizational discourse, process, public innovation

### **Introduction**

The need to deal with complex problems in contemporary society has given rise to a growing interest in collaboration across the public, private, and non-profit sectors (Ferlie, Hartley, and Martin, 2003; Osborne, 2006; Christensen and Lægred, 2011). As such, collaborative governance initiatives emerge in public organizations with the aim of involving stakeholders in co-creating solutions for problems related to issues of policy and service innovation (Ansell and Gash, 2008; Sørensen and Torfing, 2013). The assumption is that interorganizational collaboration can co-create public value and innovation through:

[A]n emergent process – one driven more by a concern about solving certain common problems than by a desire to respond to narrowly conceived incentives. This emergent process of bringing together parties to identify opportunities for public value creation leads to strong demands for a kind of ‘simultaneous engineering’ [...] as a process of collaborative design. (Ansell and Torfing, 2014: 10)

However, in addition to its potential, the literature highlights considerable challenges of multi-actor interactions and interests. These issues are addressed in conceptual and practice-based models as design and implementation issues in terms of, for example, stakeholder inclusion, decision-making processes, power relations, and trust building (Vangen, Hayes, and Cornforth, 2014).

As such, social interaction within and between collaborations is stressed as the potential source of both success and failure owing to actors' idea generation and value

creation, but also interest conflicts, and goal confusion (Bryson et al., 2012). For instance, various actors concerned with healthcare issues, such as nurses, doctors, politicians, and patient organizations, may have different definitions of a shared problem. Through collaboration, they engage in dialogue that may broaden their understandings of both the problem and its possible solutions. However, this may also cause misunderstandings, frustration, and ineffective work. Despite efforts to theorize such aspects in terms of design and implementation issues, the practices to organize this form of governance remain tricky accomplishments (Huxham, Vangen, and Eden, 2000; Vangen and Huxham, 2011). Thus, a growing interest in understanding the emerging processes of collaborative governance designs and their socially dynamic and open-ended generative mechanisms is stressed (Ansell and Torfing, 2014: 3; Bryson et al., 2012: 24). This makes communicative interactions and discourse critical aspects to consider in relation to design and implementation in collaborative governance theory and practice (Purdy, 2012). However the conceptualizing of such is underdeveloped and their significance to understanding the organizing of this form of governance remain unexplored in greater detail.

In light of this, the article contributes with theorizing and unfolding communication and discursive aspects of the emerging processes of collaborative governance designs with the aim of understanding such accomplishments in greater detail. In so doing, it draws on organizational discourse studies of interorganizational collaboration and change, although these are not particularly concerned with public organizations (Hardy, Lawrence, and Grant, 2005; Thomas, Sargent, and Hardy, 2011). These offer useful concepts of communication and meaning negotiations, with which the article explores how collaborative governance designs emerge, are organized and change. The findings are based on an ethnographic case study of two local governments' collaborative governance practices in an effort to innovate quality-management methods for public daycare services in Denmark. Here daycare is a central welfare area, as up to 97% of all 0-6 year-old children are enrolled in daycare services. As such, these both ensure the gender equality in the labor force and serve as part of the overall Scandinavian education model (Plum, 2012).

This study shows that collaborative governance emerges through complex communicative processes of meaning negotiations, in which discursive resources and tensions of resistance are produced and generate change - both during processes of designing and implementing "final" designs. This proposes to approach the issues of collaborative governance designs as ongoing processes of organizing rather than clearly demarcated processes of 'design' and 'implementation'. The findings demonstrate how managers and others negotiate the local design of collaborative governance through multiple communication modes such as meetings, minutes, posters, e-mails, and booklets, through which managers include or exclude collaborative stakeholders. Furthermore, the study shows the ways in which collaborative governance designs are negotiated during implementation also. In these negotiations across actors, time, and space, tensions of competing public management discourses generate power-resistance relations that affect the process. Thereby the article adds to the literature on collaborative governance by offering useful concepts for theorizing and unpacking issues of design and implementation, as they are negotiated in practice, which strengthen our understanding of the processes involved in enabling particular collaborative governance designs.

The structure of the article is as follows. I first address the literature on design and implementation issues in collaborative governance. I then present concepts from extant discourse studies on interorganizational collaboration and change through meaning

negotiations. Subsequently, I describe the empirical case, methods, and analyses, and then present the findings. I discuss the contributions and implications for theory and practice in the conclusion section.

## **Design and implementation issues in collaborative governance**

Although variations appear, a recognized definition of collaborative governance is that it comprises various forms of networks and partnerships that gather actors from across “government/public agencies alongside private and not-for-profit stakeholders in the collective crafting and implementation of public policy” (Vangen, Hayes, and Cornforth, 2014: 1240). As such, it is often contrasted to more hierarchical organizing and forms of control associated with traditional public administration and new public management (NPM) and instead seen as part of a more flexible form of new public governance (NPG) (Ansell and Torfing, 2014; Ferlie, Hartley, and Martin, 2003; Osborne, 2006), which is developing currently due to: “the growing complexity of pertinent public issues and a high degree of interdependence among stakeholders’ interests” (Choi and Robertson, 2014: 224). The potential of bringing various stakeholders together is that their diversity and interdependence may contribute to public value and innovation. However, they may also lead to conflicting interests, goal confusion, and power struggles. Consequently, social interactions within and across collaborations are stressed as potential sources of both success and failure (Huxham, Vangen, and Eden, 2000; Ansell and Gash, 2008; Purdy, 2012). The literature thus conceptualizes key design and implementation issues critical to enhance collaborative governance theory and practice.

One stream of studies makes such effort by combining theoretical concepts of new public governance, innovation, and design (Ansell and Torfing, 2014; Ansell and Gash, 2008; Hartley, Sørensen, and Torfing, 2013). Thereby a link between collaborative governance and public innovation is explained through three generative mechanisms, which are: synergies of multi-actor processes, learning through collaborative communication, and the commitment to building consensus. As such, these mechanisms are stressing the potentials of the social interactions in this form of governance, and they are taken to emerge through and form collaborative design processes encompassing problem/future orientations in the invention of new solutions, heuristic devices to co-create and explore tangible ideas, and interactive arenas that include all relevant actors (Ansell and Torfing, 2014: 11-12). Thereby the emergence of collaborative governance is conceptualized in terms of generative mechanisms and design components. In so doing, the significance of open-ended and socially dynamic aspects of collaboration are highlighted, however their theorizing and complications are not unfolded in greater detail.

Another recent literature review of more than 250 studies of various forms of collaborative governance and public participation offers a set of design guidelines (Bryson et al., 2012). This study unfolds design and implementation issues such as aligning designs with local problems, involving stakeholders, managing power relations and social dynamics. The guidelines are built into a cycle of design and redesign, as opposed to a step-by-step template; the authors stress it as an: “ongoing, active process of *designing* (*verb*), which is typically iterative and involves testing various ideas and prototypes before settling on the “final” design (a noun)” (Bryson et al., 2012: 24). This latter study accumulates insights from multiple studies to enhance the link between theory of design and implementation issues and practice. Although, they offer instrumental guidelines, they also stress the significance of the ongoing social interactions affecting the designing and implementing.

In addition, another stream of studies also discuss the design and implementation issues identified in the literature on collaborative governance and, more generally, on interorganizational collaboration (Vangen, Hayes, and Cornforth, 2014). They outline the following critical issues: the degree of stakeholder inclusion, collective decision making, power relations, trust building, the distribution of public resources, policy-oriented goals, public leadership, and accountability. These issues are viewed as marking crucial choices that affect the tricky multi-actor processes of collaboration, therefore, for success. This is because it is through the interaction amongst actors within and in between collaborations that idea generation and co-creation, as well as interest conflicts and goal confusion emerge and affect the design, implementation and outcomes (Vangen and Huxham, 2011; Vangen and Winchester, 2013). This stream of literature argues for the significance of design choices in relation to socially dynamic tensions and power relations between actors and organizations from different settings and hierarchical structures. Nonetheless, the ways in which discursive powers and resistance are produced and negotiated between actors and affect the designing of collaborative governance are underexplored (Purdy, 2012).

As such, the literature is developing concepts to enhance the theory and practice of collaborative governance with regard to the socially dynamic and open-ended aspects of design and implementation, as it is acknowledged that such issues remain tricky accomplishments in practice (Huxham, Vangen, and Eden, 2000). However, the social interactions and communication through which this form of governance is emerging in daily, even mundane practices are under-theorized, although they are considered critical constituents to the accomplishment of collaborative governance.

### **Taking a discursive approach: exploring meaning negotiations**

In this regard, this article unfolds a discursive approach to study the communicative processes through which particular collaborative governance designs gets organized through everyday interactions. I argue that this is valuable for strengthening the understanding of the emerging processes and issues constitutive to collaborative governance design and implementation.

The interest in discourse within collaborative governance literature has mainly been concerned with how new public governance discourses of, for example, public participation, collaboration, and innovation ‘bears down’ and affect local public policy and management (Skelcher, Mathur, and Smith, 2005; Newman et al., 2004). Such studies argue that “discourses of innovation [...] do not merely describe pre-existing practices, but bring them into being, ‘ordering’ contingent elements into relational systems of meaning” (Griggs and Sullivan, 2014: 21). Another study covers “three rule-giving discourses [and] provides a deeper understanding of the forces shaping the design of the new collaborative institutions” (Skelcher, Mathur, and Smith, 2005: 580). These studies identify macro discourses as constitutive forces behind general types of collaborative partnerships in, for example, UK national policies. However, they say little about the emergence of collaborative processes in the everyday practices involved in designing and implementing such.

In addition to these studies, the discursive theorizing of interorganizational collaboration is developing, although not specifically in relation to public organizations (Hardy, Lawrence, and Grant, 2005; Koschmann, Kuhn, and Pharrer, 2012). Along with other discourse studies on organizational change (Thomas, Sargent, and Hardy, 2011; Grant and Marshak, 2011), these studies offer concepts to approach collaborative communication,

meaning negotiation and resistance – issues that are key to refine the understanding of collaborative governance as it emerges in particular local designs. They define discourse as:

[A] set of interrelated texts and their related practices of consumption, production, and distribution, which bring into being an object or idea. The texts that populate discourses range from written works to speech acts to nonlinguistic symbols and images. Temporarily and rhetorically related texts constitute conversations in which participants draw on and simultaneously produce discursive objects and ideas. (Hardy, Lawrence, and Grant, 2005: 61)

This is particularly intriguing to present article, as it advocates turning toward the discursive and material practices through which texts are interrelated in various communicative actions and events across time and space, and thereby shape organizing processes of particular designs. Two related concepts are relevant to such a study: text-conversation dialectics and meaning negotiation.

Two studies, in particular, focus on interorganizational collaboration in terms of a text-conversation dialectic (Hardy, Lawrence, and Grant, 2005; Koschmann, Kuhn, and Pharrer, 2012). Despite certain differences, both studies conceptualize this dialectic as constitutive of interorganizational collaboration through the ways in which discourse, as a set of interrelated texts, is (re-)produced and/or changed through participants' conversations and other discursive practices that affect the formation of collaborative processes and events across time and space. Hardy, Lawrence, and Grant (2005) conceptualize this dynamic in relation to effective collaboration and a collective identity. They argue that effective collaboration is produced discursively through two entangled stages. The first stage entails the communication of a collective identity to the actors involved, while the second involves communication regarding the ways in which the collective identity can be translated into innovation through other discursive practices, depending on different styles of speech and discursive tensions. Koschmann, Kuhn, and Pharrer (2012) develop a model demonstrating the constitutive nature of the text-conversation dialectic in collaborative processes of value creation, which they argue depends on the production of a collective agency across collaborative members. Both studies highlight the complex, ongoing emergence of collaboration through text-conversation dialectics. This entail a nuanced understanding of dialogue as not necessarily consensus driven, but as characterized by meaning negotiations producing discursive tensions between multiple, possibly conflicting views and positions related to the issues at hand.

Related discourse studies concerned with organizational change expand this point by conceptualizing change as multi-story processes that emerge in ongoing meaning negotiations producing discursive tensions and power-resistance relations (Thomas, Sargent, and Hardy, 2011; Grant and Marshak, 2011). The meanings of a change program, such as a collaborative governance initiative, are negotiated through interactions among actors that in so doing use and produce relevant texts. Meaning negotiations are both active resources in and effects of text-conversation dialectics, by which discursive tensions are produced between the positions and interests made relevant. In turn, these tensions produce further negotiations and through these communicative processes normative directions for change and collaborative outcomes are constructed. These studies thus stress that meaning negotiations are infused with power-resistance relations, although not necessarily in a repressive way, rather in a co-productive, generative way, as suggested by Foucault (1980: 142). This implies that some actors may be in a privileged position (e.g. managers) to negotiate meanings with other actors, but:

[I]nsofar as they design and introduce change initiatives, there is no guarantee that their interests will prevail. Such struggles are not necessarily negative or repressive, however, because there is always a creative potential to power-resistance relations as meanings are reordered and renegotiated – power-resistance relationships are thus enabling as well as restraining. (Thomas, Sargent, and Hardy, 2011: 24)

These concepts are useful not only for examining how collaboration becomes effective or change, but also exploring the communication through which particular collaborative governance designs emerge, are negotiated, and change. It directs the analysis to follow the design and implementation processes as they are communicated in diverse modes such as documents, meetings, e-mails, prototypes etc. to unpack when certain meanings are fixed or changed, how ideas and decisions are made, and how the organizing of certain designs are interacted and accomplished. This suggests exploring emergence through communicative processes of meaning negotiations, including the discursive tensions and power-resistance relations that may generate designs of such form of governance.

### **Research methods: data collection and analysis**

Present article is based on a qualitative case study of two local governments' efforts to develop quality-management methods in daycare services through collaborative governance. In Denmark child daycare is governed by national law and handled by local public departments. Each local department consists of a head along with managerial consultants, whom I will refer to as public managers, as they have the public managerial responsibility. A department encompasses a number of daycare centers in which daycare managers and professional teachers work with children. Daycare departments are accountable to a division head and a political committee for the quality of service provided by the daycare centers. Since 2004 a range of quality-management methods, including educational plans and quality inspections, have been introduced. Such practices are widely debated among professionals, managers, politicians, and researchers (Plum, 2012). Some view these methods as meaningless forms of control and useless paperwork that limit the teachers' time with the children, require translation into a more managerial format by the daycare departments, which is taken to provide little useful information for policy makers.

In continuation of a public-sector reform in 2007, two local daycare departments and the Danish Union of Early Childhood and Youth Educators established a partnership to innovate new quality-management methods that incorporate stakeholders' perspectives on daycare quality. From 2010 to 2013, these two departments developed collaborative governance designs through meetings, laboratory workshops, and conferences concerning existing and new quality-management methods, as well as their likely potential and challenges. Some work involved several stakeholder groups, such as public managers, daycare managers, professionals, children and parents, politicians, and union representatives. Other activities involved only specific groups.

In 2012, politicians in both municipalities decided to develop collaborative governance designs as new quality-management methods. Moreover, in 2013 and 2014, the management teams were made responsible for designing and implementing collaborative governance events, which were called "daycare marketplaces". During the designing both small-scale events with few stakeholders and large-scale events for all stakeholders were organized. At the marketplace events, daycare managers and teachers discussed the quality of their work with other stakeholders, including other daycare staff, politicians, parents, and

public managers, instead of accounting for it in written reports that are revised by public managers and presented to politicians. Accordingly, new quality accounts emerged in videos, pictures, narratives, and dialogues in workshops and meetings.

I conducted varying forms of fieldwork from 2010 to 2014. In some periods, I undertook ethnographic participant observations at city halls and daycare centers following the idea-generation and design phases of collaborative governance. This involved shadowing participants during and in between collaboration, engaging with and interviewing participants, plus gathering documents and other objects that emerged as significant to the designing. Methodologically, this data collection combined discursive approaches and organizational ethnography (Fairhurst and Grant, 2010; Grant and Marshak, 2011; Ybema et al., 2009), and aimed at producing rich data of everyday interaction as well as communication across time and space. The data-set resulted in audio and video recordings, field notes, actors' reflection notes, e-mails, visuals (e.g., participant-driven images, photos, and posters), reports, and organizational charts. The fieldwork focused, on the meanings and matters that were explicitly negotiated between actors, as well as implicit elements and enactments that might not have been intentional but that nonetheless affected the work.

The analysis began with a construction of a timeline in order create overview of what happened when, with whom, and through which interactions (Hardy and Thomas, 2014). While in the field, I had noted times at which "new" quality-management methods was an explicit topic and when collaborative designs and implementation was in question. Therefore, I also highlighted data related to idea generation and design. I then reviewed all data to ensure that I had included significant data sources that might not have been noticed otherwise. My final dataset included 6 laboratory workshops, 4 formal collaborative governance events (including daycare marketplaces), 16 design and management team meetings, 6 daycare meetings on quality management, and 12 single/group interviews with public managers (division heads, department heads, and consultants) and daycare managers. Data sources include field notes, audio and video recordings, organizational charts, website information, photos, a partnership article for a national magazine and partnership newsletters, meeting minutes, posters and booklets.

In the analysis, I searched for text-conversation dialectics and meaning negotiations to study the emerging processes of collaborative governance. To do so, I undertook multiple analytical iterations to construct and qualify patterns (James, 2012). From the iterative analyses two clusters became evident: one on designing, the other on implementing. The first encompassed text-conversation dialectics and meaning negotiations related to idea-generation, to problems of existing quality-management methods and potentials of new collaborative methods and their design. This part of the analysis primarily draws on data from 2010-2012, as design was an explicit topic at that time. The other cluster concerning the implementation of a final design of the daycare marketplace primarily draws on data from 2013-2014. This comprise of interactions negotiating issues of implementation such as the purpose and legitimacy of the design, as well as its accomplishments. In both parts the communication related to issues such as trust vs. control, top-bottom dynamics and collaboration vs. hierarchy invoked discursive tensions that either explicitly related to NPM and NPG discourse, or that echoed issues, which the literature diagnose in relation to these public management discourses (Ferlie, Hartley, and Martin, 2003; Ansell and Torfing, 2014).



## **Findings**

The findings are presented in two sections exploring how collaborative governance design and implementation processes emerged through various communication and meaning negotiations. The first focuses on how actors negotiated meanings of possible solutions to their problems of quality management in daycare, as well as how the design of collaborative governance emerged as a solution in meetings, text production, and managerial decisions. This elucidates the communication of ideas and decisions to solve quality management problems associated with control by designing collaborative governance events. In this case, managers sometimes included stakeholders in the idea generation and designing, while at other times they excluded them. The second section shows the ways in which a “final” collaborative governance design was legitimized and accomplished through discursive practices of booklets, articles, invites, meetings and collaboration. This elucidates the various communication involved in implementing the design, however, it also shows that even during implementation, the design of collaborative governance remained subject to meaning negotiations, which affected and changed its organizing continually. During both design and implementation discursive resources created tensions and resistance that sometimes enabled the emergence of collaborative governance, sometimes restrained it. The examples provided are used because they elucidate the emerging processes of design and implementation, while unfolding their interrelations and socially dynamic complexity.

### ***Negotiating the emerging collaborative governance designs: bringing ideas to life***

In the following I look into communications in which ideas for addressing problems of quality management were negotiated and how this affected the development of specific collaborative governance designs. The problems of existing quality-management methods were described as meaningless control rather than useful information about quality, e.g. in quality reports called education plans. As such, negotiations regarding what counted as meaningful became central to designing collaborative governance as a possible mean for innovating new quality-management methods.

The local governments addressed the problems of quality-management methods and ideas for potential solutions through meetings, workshops, conferences, and manager-written documents (e.g., meeting minutes and booklets), including interactions between public managers, politicians, daycare staff, and daycare union representatives. At a management meeting early in the partnership (2010), a department head explained the problems of existing methods to a consultant who just started that:

I am working as an economist and I am annoyed with the quality measurements we are using. I have been in situations where we measure things that do not make sense. For example, the education plans – they can be meaningless ... We need to be very critical, I think, when we start new things.

The department head described existing quality measurements and quality accounting as meaningless, and in this statement his position as an economist became a resource to strengthen this argument that downplayed the use of measurements to manage quality in a meaningful way. The point that their idea-generation in relation to new methods needed to consider the purpose of methods became defining for the emerging process as the ‘meaning’ was negotiated throughout the design phase. For example at an interorganizational conference (2011), the idea of establishing collaborative governance as a new, more meaningful quality-management method was discussed, after daycare staff presented daycare quality from their educational perspective – and not in written reports. That presentation included pictures and

videos from daycare life. In the audience were politicians, public managers, and union representatives, who then discussed collaboration as possible a solution to their problems:

Union representative: Does what we have seen here explain the education professionalism in a way that helps you reconsider your quality-management methods?

Division head: I have a dream [laughter] Well, I don't think I need to say more, because there is major potential for collaboration to result in a common language that includes the public managers, the politicians, and the daycare staff. That includes communication among staff, children, and parents in a way that... When sitting in the council chamber as a politician and deciding on something that affects other stakeholders, you know the consequences. And you informed by alternative insights that alter only thinking about the budget... It is not easy, especially because finances are lacking, but I have a dream!

Department head: I still really like quality management, I need a job tomorrow, right? [laughter]. No I think such form of governing is important, the question is how? I don't want education plans to be for the sake of public managers or politicians ... I am much more interested in finding methods that create value for the people that it is all about – and that is not me. I just need to know that what is going on in daycare reflects educational knowledge. In reality I think that all of us just want to know that daycare is offering children a good life.

At this conference actors negotiated the meanings of ideas for new methods that could be considered more meaningful than existing ones related to control, measurements and budgeting. The division head stressed collaboration and common language as potential methods for qualifying political decision making by adding educational insights relevant to budgeting. By referring to the idea of collaboration and common language as a “dream” he both stressed it as positive solution and as challenging to accomplish due to lacking resources. The department head altered the understanding of quality management as necessarily being problematic by using humor. In so doing he legitimized some sort of quality management, without directly agreeing but neither rejecting the idea of collaboration and common language as the solution. Instead he contrasted the meaning of quality management from being for the sake of policy makers and managers to creating value for stakeholders, and most importantly assuring the good life of children. Thereby he shifted the focus to the purpose of the method, rather than deciding on specific methods. In this conversation the problem-solution negotiation was nuanced, as the department head resisted echoing the problem as ‘quality management’ per se, and thereby the discussion of new methods shifted focus from being an issue of managerial control to one of creating public value. In effect, the meaning of new quality-management methods became to create value and reflect knowledge, but how was not settled yet.

In both municipalities, the meaning of new methods were negotiated in relation to purpose, with the result that focus was shifted from control to value and insights in children's life. Thus, laboratory workshops were organized to generate and discuss ideas for new quality-management methods, and between such the management teams summarized ideas in meeting minutes, which were then discussed at managerial meeting. During the managerial meeting the managers designed a workshop to explicitly explore “meaningful” knowledge concerning daycare quality from the different stakeholders' perspective and thereby generate ideas for new working methods (2012). The department head welcomed with the statement:

At our last meeting, we focused on what politicians want to know about how children benefit from being in daycare and how they might use that knowledge in policy making. We also discussed what daycare teachers and managers want to present to politicians. That gave rise to a few themes that we sent out as background material for the meeting today. I concluded last time by stressing that we need to move away from the laboratory to tangible experiments on accounting dialogically for children's benefits from daycare in a meaningful way. How can we organize large-scale dialogues that include the political committee, public managers, daycare managers, teachers in the municipality, and others who are involved in this work? What we need to do today is to generate ideas ... to begin moving from discussions toward developing tangible models of what can be meaningful. We won't make a decision today. Rather, the ideas generated today will be followed up by formal decision-making procedures, both administratively and politically.

In this extract, the department head framed the idea-generation of new methods in two ways; he linked the idea-generation of tangible methods to stakeholders' view on what knowledge about children's daycare life can be useful for in political work, and he stressed the decision about these methods were to be made separately. This framing invited actors to participate in generating method and design ideas and pushed the need to become tangible in terms of organizing, however, it clearly demarcated that influence was limited to this matter. In the following workshop, three groups brainstormed on ideas, which they then presented to the other groups on posters. The management team revised those presentations and posters in meetings and minutes afterwards, by which they concluded that four tangible ideas concerned different forms of collaborative governance, including recurring ideas for a daycare marketplace with different design issues associated.

As such, collaborative governance emerged as a solution to problems of quality management through these interrelated communications. Along the way some parts of the designs were explicitly negotiated between actors, and at other times, meanings were fixated through textual practices summarized by managers. In an e-mail, the managerial consultant later (October 2012) described that:

It has been politically decided that in the future we are to design collaborative governance (instead of written quality reports) to evaluate the quality of daycare in a more dialogue-based, narrative manner. This is a shift from public managers' translation of quality to politicians toward letting teachers and managers discuss the benefits of daycare with politicians, parents, public managers, children, and colleagues. We will work with the design from this point on and until the implementation of daycare marketplace next summer.

For this matter a design team including both public managers and daycare managers collaborated, and the meeting minutes and posters from earlier workshops were used to fixate what could be negotiated and what could not. The following discussion took place at such a meeting (2013):

Public manager: I have hung up these posters with ideas for collaborative governance designs because we now have to come up with concepts for how to bring them to life. We have to return to these posters with ideas for the daycare marketplace and the knowledge needs of stakeholders ... We have looked at them a couple of times, but this is just to remind us about the ideas for developing the design. There were different ideas for collaborative governance events – a children policy day, a daycare

fair, the life of children in daycare, and a marketplace. That is what we need to work with now ... We have discussed the name and decided the “daycare marketplace” is a quality-management community that should be designed as a structured process aimed at evaluating education planning. We have a guide that helps daycare staff to summarize results and quality, which might be used for presentations at the marketplace, right? In that guide, the children’s voice is also stressed in terms of accounting for the senses of seeing, feeling, tasting, and listening. You were part of developing that - can you say more about it?

Daycare manager A: Yeah, it was not to only having the quality accounting be in written form but to also be able to evaluate through dialogue and to use the senses. This is because politicians say: “Well, this is affecting me. This is making me curious, making me think more about daycare ... that is, when children are documented in narratives, via photos or in other ways.

Daycare manager A: Yes. I remember one of the politicians bringing a booklet from one of our daycare excursions to a political meeting – he thought that was quality too. So, we need to remember that such things are a good starting point for talking about quality.

Daycare manager B: I agree because sometimes I fear that this will be the same kind of control, just in a different way.

Public manager: Yes, we must be careful, right. That’s why we need other methods, right?

Daycare manager B: Yeah exactly, because when we are talking, I’m thinking they still want it in writing.

Public manager: No, it doesn’t say that anywhere, but you need to summarize and conclude on the quality - you can do that on tape.

Daycare manager A: That is exactly what you can do.

Daycare manager C: Or you can videotape the children and then analyze it.

Public manager: Yeah.

Daycare manager C: We can develop quality-management methods through IT ... technological advancements, like iPads and videos etc. right?

Public manager: Yeah, if you start developing your quality accounting in that way that’s great to use in a daycare marketplace.

In the design meetings documents were used to steer the process and as such they created the discursive space for maneuvering; as the conversation shows, the name and design was negotiable, but the concept of a marketplace was not in question, however its purpose as a collaborative governance event of quality management was. During the meetings the public manager held a privileged position insofar as she could refer to texts e.g. posters that legitimized certain design ideas and choices, while rejecting others. For example she summarized their definition as this form of collaborative governance as a structured evaluation community concerned with education plans, and stressed its purpose as more meaningful due to its ability to communicate quality by addressing the “senses” in relation to demonstrating the results of children’s time in daycare. This point was backed up by a manager, who argued for its positive effects on politicians. However, it was also challenged by another daycare manager, who questioned whether the daycare marketplace – despite its collaborative mode still could become a controlling quality-management method.

The negotiations affected the designing in two ways: the meaning of control was linked to writing which thus became negative and thus not something to be demanded for the daycare marketplace – as this was to be designed as more meaningful than earlier methods,

although the manager stressed a demand to summarize and conclude. The other effect was that a negotiation of methods to communicate quality through other modes than writing was generated which led to a design that included multimedia presentations during the marketplaces. As such, the daycare manager challenged the conversation by questioning the differences between earlier quality-management methods and the potential of collaborative governance to form more meaningful methods. But her resistance was not destructive; rather it generated a nuanced dialogue on how the new design might not become a form of control, and how quality might be presented in ways other than written reports. This leads to design ideas about videotaping children and analyzing the video footage. After this meeting the public manager decided that multi-media should be used to support the collaborations of marketplace. But she also stressed a need to ensure that a constructive but critical discussion about quality was enabled during the marketplace in order for it to be evaluative and not just “a sunshine story to promote one’s daycare center”. Thus a design issue also became to prepare and enable daycare staff to deal with constructive criticisms possibly emerging during the dialogues with other stakeholders. Therefore, the public managers decided that the design needed to include external facilitators to support the collaborations and respectful critique, while also pushing for critical discussion and reflection.

Through different communicative practices actors negotiated meanings of quality-management methods and how they could design collaborative governance events related to different purposes. They discussed how collaborative governance, as a solution, could be designed as a more meaningful quality-management method than existing ones. Various discursive resources were used such as education plans, quality measurements, law, posters with ideas and meeting minutes, through which discursive tensions were constructed in terms of control and measurements vs. dialogue and collaboration associated to competing ideals of NPM and NPG. As such, the collaborative governance ideas and designs emerged through complex, interrelated interactions between both human and non-human actors, as meanings were negotiated, nuanced, and retained. Along the way power-resistance relations appeared between diverging meanings, which generated both challenges and nuances in the communication that became constitutive to the emerging processes of collaborative governance. However, as the public managers were the ones concluding and writing minutes, their positions were defining; they decided to negotiate meanings of ideas for collaborative governance with other actors when it was useful, but they also used their privileged position to steer and make certain conclusions on their own.

### ***Negotiating the implementation of a “final” design: accomplishing the marketplace***

As shown above, a final design of the marketplace had been developed through meaning negotiations to become a solution to quality-management methods related to written reports and control. However, as this section unfolds, the design was negotiated and changed throughout its implementation too – both in relation to what its purpose was and in relation to how the organizing of collaboration became accomplished at certain daycare marketplaces. First, I briefly elucidate the negotiations of purpose in relation to legitimizing the implementation of a final design of marketplaces, and then I unpack the communicative practices that became critical to accomplishing the collaborative organizing of daycare marketplaces during 2013 and 2014.

Even during the implementation, the management teams struggled to legitimize the collaborative governance design of daycare marketplace. They experienced concurrent demands to still use quality-management methods associated with NPM, and they still

negotiated the design, although they were already implementing it. This was addressed at network meetings between the management teams:

Public manager A: This marketplace is a collaborative method of evaluating education plans, and until now I have steered the design enough to say it's about evaluating the education plans and not about promoting the daycare sector as a political agenda. It is about educational quality right? I don't know if I can maintain this design all the way. Because the department head really wants to show things off to the politicians. And I'm actually now using [the written reports] by turning it around and saying: "well that's in the quality report", so it might suddenly become an asset.

Public manager B: Well that's great for you!

Public manager A: I wrote this report that I was so frustrated, but now I can say: "Well, you can read it there".

At such meeting the managers discussed diverging meanings of the purpose of quality management and their effects on implementing collaborative governance events as a new working method. The manager explained that she had steered the design of the marketplace in order for it to be implemented as collaboration about education quality rather than political agendas, but that she was struggling with the department head, who was trying to change the design towards a political agenda, although they had started its implementation. However, she resisted this by turning attention to the written forms of quality-management methods associated with control, which she had been frustrated with doing, and argued that the political agenda was accounted for there. During this meeting and at other meetings, the public managers referred to an article to legitimize the implementation of a certain design of the daycare marketplace, instead of changing it to include political agendas and more writing. The article was written by the two local governments and published in a national public-management magazine in the spring of 2013. It stressed that:

In many municipalities, surveys, tests, measurements, and quality accounting take up a lot of time among teachers and other frontline workers. But with all the paperwork aimed at managing quality, the management agenda has become a challenge. [W]hat if the actors instead began to collaborate on new, more meaningful – and effective – methods of governing and developing local services like daycare? And what if public governance could build on trust rather than control?

By referring to the article the managers created discursive tensions of diverging meanings of written reports and collaboration, and in doing so they produced resources to resist efforts to change the implementation of certain designs, they had developed. In this way the article was used when the final designs of daycare marketplaces became questioned during implementation, and as such it became a discursive resource to legitimize implementing a certain design and thereby shifting away from practices of control that were often associated with NPM.

The final marketplace design was presented in various documents and in the invitation sent to stakeholders, including daycare staff, parents, union representatives, politicians, and public managers from various welfare services related to daycare. The invite used photos of children, text, and images of the location to explain the organizing of two collaborative processes: booths in which daycare staff were presenting and discussing their work on education plans with attendees, and workshops in which they evaluated their educational practices to support children's development and learning in dialogue and

reflection with attending stakeholders. At such a daycare marketplace in 2014 attended by around 400 stakeholders, a daycare center, for example, presented their work with the natural sciences in such a booth. The staff used various materials from nature (e.g., leaves, branches), technology (e.g., computers), visuals (e.g., videos, pictures), and writing (e.g., booklets) to engage in interorganizational dialogues with attendees. The computer showed videos of day-trips to the woods, and the booth was built from natural materials, including wooden sticks and plants. The posters contained pictures of animals and the accompanying text describing them. The booths materialized the design as spaces for collaborative dialogues, in which the materials became discursive resources concerning quality. A politician opened the marketplace by saying:

This daycare marketplace is a replacement of the yearly quality reports sent to us politicians. Previously, every daycare center was required to write a quality report evaluating their work with education plans. That report was sent to the administration, and summarized and presented for the committee. This daycare marketplace gives us an opportunity to see with our own eyes, to enter into a dialogue, and to hear you talk about what is happening in the daycare centers. It is considerably more interesting for us to experience it this way. It is great to see the support for this event. Furthermore, I think this is a unique possibility for the daycare staff to share knowledge and inspire each other... We also have a lot of parents here – and although I cannot distinguish the various stakeholder groups from each other, I hope you are all well represented! I think that this daycare marketplace... shows that daycare is much more than nursing and looking after kids. It is so much more substantial, as there is so much focus on learning and development, which is great to see. Thank you for that!

In her statement, she stressed the significance of experiencing daycare quality rather than reading about it. Her contrast of the design to written reports indicated it as a more meaningful quality-management method as it offered “a more interesting experience” and knowledge sharing between stakeholders. These strengths of the design were associated with the social interactions of stakeholders, but, as such, they also indicated the weaknesses; the accomplishment of the design depended on and changed through negotiations in both the booths and the workshops.

The workshops were designed to assure an in-depth presentation of educational quality by daycare staff which was then to frame dialogues between attendees. Prior to the events all attendees had signed up for specific workshops, so the management teams could assure that all stakeholder-groups were parts of the collaborations in workshops. Managerial facilitators also attended in case the dialogues needed to be framed or steered. However, in some of the workshops, the interactions of the attendees became defining for the collaborations. For example one workshop became more of an interrogation, because an attendee insisted on asking critical questions throughout the session. While another was changed from being a PowerPoint presentation and collaboration facilitated through questions and answers to a collective motor skill exercise.

At the latter workshop the daycare staff, three teachers and a manager, presented their education plans and practices with children by means of a PowerPoint presentation and a video, which showed a motor-skill program developed with a group of children. The teachers talked about developmental theories and learning goals that were the basis of their efforts. They also handed out a questionnaire with attention points which attendees could reflect upon and discuss during the workshop. On the walls there were photographs hanging and texts

explaining educational activities concerning ‘body and movement’. As the presentation ended and the discussion between the daycare presenters and participants were to begin, silence broke out however. The daycare manager asked if anybody had any questions, and the managerial facilitator asked a few questions, but collaboration between the attendees and the presenters did not seem to happen. Until one of the teachers turned around and started the video again. The video showed teachers and children engaging in a collective dance-balancing-act used to train motor function skills. She then said out loud: “This may look easy, but it’s really hard. Why don’t we all get up and use our motor functions – and then we can sit down and talk about the quality it brings to life?”

This invitation caused tumult; some people laughed, others looked a bit confused, and some looked at the door, until an attendee said: “All this writing is no good anyway” and stood up. The presenting teachers moved some chairs around, and the attendees started to get up, and next they all started to move around like the children in the video in between chairs and each other. Afterwards some people sat down again, others kept standing, and this more informal placement of the actors in the room that did not look like a meeting room anymore, produced new conversations. The attendees were smiling, looking around and talking to each other. Then the daycare manager asked about the experience of ‘sensing’ one’s own body in relation to discussing the work with children on the subject matter. This caused laughter and then a few other teachers, a politician and a parent started asking questions and discussed the presentations. This led to a dialogue about the educational plans and their theories of motor function skills in connection to cognitive skills. The workshop ended up taking longer time than planned, and a smaller group of attendees, including a public manager and a politician, stayed in the room afterwards and discussed visiting the daycare facilities.

Thereby the more and less (dis-)organized interactions became critical for the accomplishment of this collaborative governance event; the design was renegotiated across through both presentations, Power-Points, photographs, questionnaires, videos, dance-balancing acts and the actors’ movements as well as chair-arrangements. Altogether, this changed the design of collaboration and its dialogues. Along the way tensions were created between ‘sitting down’ and ‘standing up’ to engage in quality, as well as ‘writing’, and although some of the attendees seemed to resist the invitation to engage in that type of collaboration, the mentioning of writing became a discursive resource that changed the events.

Likewise, interactions in the booths differed. Some were busy, while others were more or less empty demanding the daycare staff presenting to advertise and demand attention. During this event, I shadowed the department head and the division head, who strolled around the booths, discussing current changes in the political committee and a forthcoming national education reform in relation to their efforts to challenge NPM practices and various forms of control. Ironically, these actors often missed the opportunity to practice collaborative governance, as they passed by booths without conversing with other stakeholders, by which their interaction rejected the organized dialogic opportunities. At one point, however a teacher interrupted them and pulled them into her booth to show a natural science project. She showed pictures and videos of children learning to climb trees, playing with natural materials, and learning about the seasons. Interestingly, this dialogue emerged due to the unpredictable involvement of a teacher who resisted hierarchical relationships in order to collaborate. Her interruption shifted the two heads’ attention to the quality and value sought created and communicated by various materials. Thereby her involvement changed the heads’ participation and, as such, the interactions shaped the final design through both enabling and resisting changes.



In the case of daycare marketplaces, the design and implementation of collaborative governance emerged through meaning negotiations regarding quality-management methods in terms of “control by writing” versus “trust by collaboration”. Thereby discursive tensions associated with NPM and NPG were produced and infused the communication with power-resistance relations, which both enabled and restrained the organizing of collaboration. Sometimes collaboration was seen as an innovative solution, at other times the collaborative designs were questioned as another form of control, and so this form of governance became constituted through more and less interrelated communication creating tensions between competing public management discourses and related practices of quality management in daycare. The socially dynamic strengths and weaknesses of the design became critical to its situated organizing within and across both workshops and booths.

In managerial network meetings during 2014, the management teams reflected upon the feedback of the implementation of the marketplace, and its success. Although stakeholders such as politicians, teachers, parents and union representatives had expressed their satisfaction with the events, the division head and department head expressed doubt about collaborative governance as a quality-management method, and they had requested a new search for quality-measurement methods, which caused frustrations amongst the managerial consultants, who had developed the collaborative governance designs. This point became evident in an e-mail from one of the management teams after their evaluation of marketplaces, concerning the next steps of their collaborative governance practices:

We are to design a version 2.0 of the daycare marketplace based on our experiences and future needs. We have not started it yet but, unfortunately, we cannot rely on this design as the only quality-management method used to evaluate education plans in daycare. We are also asked to find other quality-measurement methods, but believe me, I am fighting.

During 2014 both local governments initiated renegotiations of new design and implementation processes for collaborative governance events as quality-management methods, as well as searching for new quality-measurement methods. As the e-mail indicates, however, these new initiatives to redesign collaborative governance alongside other working methods associated with measurements produced resistance that may well affect the emerging organizing of changed designs and implementations.

### **Discussion: design as ongoing organizing**

The findings showed that collaborative governance practices emerge, are organized and change through the ways in which both their design and implementation are subjects for ongoing meaning negotiations in various communications across actors, time, and space. The first section elucidated first how the meaning negotiation of the problems in existing quality-management methods connected to control, such as written reports, led to collaborative governance as a more meaningful solution. Furthermore, that negotiations of the design were affected by this contrast between what was considered controlling methods and collaborative methods, the tensions of which produced resistance, but which also generated nuances and changes significant to the design. The second section elucidated the meaning negotiations of designs occurring during implementation, firstly in relation to fixating the purpose of the design, which produced tensions between a political agenda and educational quality. The findings demonstrated the ways in which the accomplishment of a “final” design was still negotiated when it was being implemented – in this case during interactions across the booths

and workshops at the daycare marketplace. In the communication of both the design and implementation, the use of discursive resources produced tensions and power-resistance relations associated with hierarchical control and NPM versus collaboration and NPG. These affected the meaning negotiations of design issues considered significant prior to the marketplaces, as well as the interactions that organized and changed the collaborations during marketplaces.

These findings suggest that collaborative governance does not necessarily emerge during demarcated phases and issues of design and implementation, but rather during ongoing organizing accomplished and complicated through endemic meaning negotiations and changes. This point relates to the current discussion of design and implementation issues of this governance form (Ansell and Torfing, 2014; Vangen, Hayes, and Cornforth, 2014; Bryson et al., 2012). In the discussions the socially dynamic, open-ended and iterative processes involved in the accomplishment of such designs are stressed, as is the need to theorize these processes further. Adding to the discussion, I will argue that we may both understand and conceptualize new aspects of design and implementation issues if we approach them as ongoing organizing constituted through various discursive practices emerging across actors, time and space. This point echoes the practice-based theorizing on collaborative governance (Huxham, Vangen, and Eden, 2000; Vangen and Huxham, 2011) which argue to strengthen the understanding of this governance form through studying everyday interaction, and it stresses a cross-fertilizing potential in relation to discourse-based studies of interorganizational collaboration (Hardy, Lawrence, and Grant, 2005; Koschmann, Kuhn, and Pharrer, 2012).

Many of the design and implementation issues covered in the literature concern the social dynamics of stakeholders involved in collaborative governance, and how design choices related to social interactions, communication, and power relations may affect and change the collaborative governance processes and products (Purdy, 2012; Bryson et al., 2012; Vangen, Hayes, and Cornforth, 2014). In this regard, the study has argued for a discursive approach because such pays attention to the formations of and struggles over meanings – with sensitivity to divergence as well as convergence, in the production of design ideas, choices, decisions and enactments (Hardy, Lawrence, and Grant, 2005; Koschmann, Kuhn, and Pharrer, 2012). This offers conceptualizing with which to explore the production of discursive power that may legitimize some design choices, while excluding others, as for example Purdy (2012) has called for. In extension, present article has demonstrated the potential of unfolding the communication of certain problems and possible solutions through which particular collaborative governance designs emerge, are negotiated, and change in discursive tensions and power-resistance relations. In particular, it allows for in-depth exploration of the meaning negotiations of certain issues emerging across actors, time and space, that become constitutive to the organizing of such governance form.

By elucidating discursive aspects the notion of generative mechanisms (Ansell and Torfing, 2014) can be unfolded analytically and nuanced theoretically. In this regard, the article has demonstrated the importance of power-resistance relations and discursive tensions as constitutive to changes in the emergent organizing of collaborative governance. As shown in the findings, these elements highlight both the restraining and generative dynamics of meaning negotiations, the exploration of which adds empirically grounded understandings of the significance of discourse in relation to developing this form of governance. In so doing, this study also addresses extant research on collaborative governance as a public-management discourse (Griggs and Sullivan, 2014; Skelcher, Mathur, and Smith, 2005). Not in order to

either affirm or reject the macro discourse diagnosed, but rather by taking another starting point and thereby show how and what kinds of communicative practices and discursive tensions emerge and become relevant across actors, time and space. These practices and tensions constitute the emerging design by organizing particular collaborative governance events, which are more and less associated with certain macro discourses.

## **Conclusion**

This article has explored theoretical and practical issues related to collaborative governance design and implementation. It has argued that a discursive approach adds a detailed understanding of the complex communicative practices constitutive to such form of governance and its socially dynamic and open-ended emergence. Drawing on extant organizational discourse concepts it has unfolded the meaning negotiations across both social and material practices that affect the emergence of particular collaborative governance designs. The findings of a case study demonstrated how managers and others negotiated local designs of collaborative governance through multiple communication modes including interaction, writing, visuals and technology, by which managers both included or excluded collaborative stakeholders in the designing. Moreover, the findings showed that such design is continually negotiated – also during its implementation as the stakeholder interaction affect the organizing and accomplishment of a "final" design. During the negotiations across actors, time, and space, discursive tensions related to competing public management discourses and power-resistance relations were elucidated by the ways in which they generated changes in the design.

The strength of present discourse approach is that it attends to everyday interactions and communication to refine the understanding of the emergence of collaborative governance. As such, the study contributes by offering both theorizing and empirical exploration of the meaning negotiations constitutive to design and implementation choices. This also highlights the discursive tensions and power-resistance relations that generate changes concerning issues significant to this form of governance in terms of e.g. trust, control, and dialogue. This adds to the current studies (Ansell and Torfing, 2014; Bryson et al., 2012; Vangen, Hayes, and Cornforth, 2014) as an approach for studying governance designs as they emerge, are negotiated and change through more and less ordered communicative practices across actors, time, and space. Moreover it suggests understanding such as ongoing organizing processes accomplished through and complicated by endemic meaning negotiations and change, rather than distinct phases of design and implementation.

That being said, the study is limited as a normative conceptualizing or instrumental guide; this is neither its scope nor aim. Nonetheless, it proposes that involved actors may reflect upon the open-ended and changing organizing of such form of governance (Vangen and Winchester, 2013), as they engage in negotiating meanings and matters of their local designs. Moreover, future research may well pay further attention to the more or less (dis-)organized and (un-)intended communicative practices emerging across actors, time, and space, as particular governance designs are becoming. In so doing, a stronger focus on the constitutive effects of situated meaning negotiations and their (re-)production of competing public management discourses and related power-resistance relations is needed. Thereby we may produce multifaceted insights on the emerging processes of collaborative governance – and the particular design and implementation issues that will be negotiated and thus become significant, as diverse stakeholders engage in co-creating public value and innovation.

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