

## **Introduction**

# **A Public Innovation Perspective on Change in Local Democracy**

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### **ABSTRACT**

Public innovation is high on the agenda in many Western liberal democracies. While a first wave of interest in public innovation research mainly focused on service innovation, a second wave is interested in innovations in the political realm that represent innovations in democratic institutions and processes and in policy content. Although there are many studies of democratic reform and experimentation in local government, they rarely examine these changes from an innovation perspective. This article develops a theoretical framework for studying democratic innovation and uses it to identify cutting-edge tendencies in democratic innovation in local government and to develop several propositions for further research. We do so by drawing on new developments in democratic theory and governance research and the study of current developments in local democracy in seven European countries—Denmark, England, Finland, the Netherlands, Norway, Slovenia and Switzerland—in this and a following special issue.

**Key words:** public innovation, democratic innovation, democratic theory

### **Introduction**

Public innovation figures prominently on the agenda in many Western liberal democracies. The first wave of public innovation research and government initiatives aiming to promote public innovation and the innovation capacity of the public sector mainly focused on service innovation and service production methods. A surging second wave is interested in innovation in the political realm; that is, innovations in democratic institutions and processes as well as in policy content (Sørensen, 2017). The factors driving the growing interest in innovating democracy include a mushrooming of unsolved wicked policy problems and declining trust in government (PEW, 2017; OECD, 2012; 2015). Both factors motivate governments to look for ways to improve their relationships with citizens and to mobilize relevant and affected actors in society in problem-solving. The surging interest in democratic innovation among governments runs parallel to the advent of new strands of democratic theory (Keane, 2009; Rosanvallon, 2011; Runciman, 2018; Neblo, Esterling and Lazer, 2018).

Although democratic innovation is mushrooming at all governmental levels in the political system, experimentation and reform initiatives appear to be particularly plentiful and varied in local democracy. There are already numerous studies of reforms in local democracy, but few of them study new developments in democracy from an innovation perspective (for exceptions, see Quirk, 2006; Smith, 2009; Newton, 2012; Agger et al., 2015). Since research investigating democratic innovation remains in its infancy, we lack knowledge about the scope conditions for promoting innovation in

local democracy as well as the implications of such innovations for how democracy functions and the relationships between the actors involved.

This special issue places democratic innovation on the research agenda by presenting a collection of inspiring studies of innovations in local democracy that provide indications of drivers and barriers and identify the problems and potentials related to current efforts to renew local democracy. This introductory article develops a conceptual framework for studying developments in local democracy from an innovation perspective and identifies cutting-edge themes and agendas guiding efforts to innovate local democracy with inspiration from the studies of democratic innovation presented in the other articles in this and a following special issue on innovation in local representative democracy.

## **An Innovation Perspective**

A specification of what it implies to study changes in local democracy from an innovation perspective starts with a definition of innovation. Broadly speaking, innovation refers to an intentional development and the realization of new, creative ideas (Torfing, 2016). As famously worded by Joseph Schumpeter (1939), the development of something new involves a ‘creative destruction’ of existing products, structures or processes. There are three stages in an innovation process, although the process is rarely linear (Tohidi and Jabbari, 2012): The development of a new idea, transforming it into something that works for its intended purpose through prototyping and experimentation, implementation, evaluation of impact and the diffusion of the new thing to others. While the ‘new’ that is created does not necessarily have to be ‘never seen before’, it must be new in the given context, and innovations tend to be adaptations of innovations developed elsewhere. As such, many innovations are triggered by the diffusion of innovations produced elsewhere (Rogers, 1995). Some are incremental adjustments of existing practices, whereas others are radical in the sense that they involve a game-changing reinterpretation of the meaning and purpose of a given phenomenon (Szekely and Strebel, 2013). Innovation is always risky, as the prediction of outputs and outcomes is difficult. There are always unintended consequences, which can be costly and difficult to remedy (Osborne and Brown, 2013; Keizer and Halman, 2007). The risk is particularly high if the goal is radical innovation, but an experience-based, step-by-step upscaling strategy can reduce the risk associated with venturing into the unknown. The choice between an incremental and radical innovation strategy ultimately relies on a balancing of risks against potential gains. In other words, the positive connotations attached to the concept of innovation should not overshadow the fact that innovating can have negative—sometimes even detrimental—outcomes. Moreover, whether the results of an innovation count as good or bad partly depend on the eyes of the beholder (Hartley, 2005). While an innovation might correspond to the intentions and goals of those who initiated a change process, other actors may find the innovation to have negative implications for them. Finally, the ability to cope with change varies over time, and the need for stability sometimes outweighs the need for change, in which case innovation may be put on hold.

While it should by now be clear that innovation can be a troublesome affair, innovation theory points to pull and push factors that nevertheless drive actors to innovate (Torfing, 2016). Pull factors

include the voicing of ambitious goals and aspirations that appear realistic to pursue. Accommodating factors could be the presence of entrepreneurial leadership, technological advancements and cutting-edge expertise. Push factors are in place when the present situation is dangerous and unsustainable. They may result from threatening competition or criticism of the status quo from powerful actors (Teece, 1992; Von Hippel, 2009; Cerney, 1997; Contini and Anzara 2009; Poetz and Schreider, 2012). When ambitions and self-confidence are high and the existing state of affairs appears threatening, the propensity to innovate will be greater than when aspirations and expected change capacity are low and existing conditions appear tolerable or even favorable. There are also barriers that hamper innovation. As highlighted in institutional theory (Peters, 2019), numerous factors hinder change, including deeply engrained routines, habits and role perceptions, hegemonic ideas and practices, and path-dependencies that preserve the status quo and consolidate the existing power relations (Hall, 2011). These barriers can hamper first-, second- and third-order innovation. First-order innovation is innovation in the form and content of a specific product or production method. Second-order innovation is change in goals, strategies and production methods. Third-order innovation changes how decisions are made and, thus, the power relation between a set of actors and the conditions for making first-, second- and third-order innovations in the future. Although third-order innovation (e.g. democratic innovations) can be both incremental and radical, it tends to have particularly wide implications because it affects the scope of further innovation and the transformative capacity of different actors.

Summing up, applying an innovation perspective on change, we are interested in the formulation and realization of new ideas through the creative destruction of existing products, processes and organizations, and in how the different phases in an innovation process unfold. From such a perspective, we explore how innovations travel and stimulate innovations elsewhere when they are adapted to different contexts, and we map pull and push factors and other drivers as well as considering the impact of different barriers to innovation. Moreover, assessment is made from within an innovation perspective as to whether an innovation is incremental or radical and whether it counts as a first-, second- or third-order innovation. Finally, an innovation perspective involves scrutinizing how different actors balance risks against potential gains and evaluates the output and/or outcome, as well as assessing how a given innovation affects the scope for innovation in the future and the distribution of power to block or promote innovations among different actors. An innovation perspective on public sector change involves a focus on all of these factors.

## **The Surge of a Public Innovation Perspective**

Until recently, conventional wisdom held that innovation was essential for private businesses but had little relevance for the public sector. To survive in a competitive market, private business entrepreneurs must create new products and ways of organizing the production process. If the public sector played any role, it was to provide good conditions for private-sector innovation in terms of a well-educated workforce and a supportive infrastructure. In the 1980s, however, mounting criticism of the public sector for being inefficient and paternalistic nurtured the view that it was necessary for the public sector itself to renew what it did and how it did it. The first step in this direction was the ideas expressed in New Public Management (NPM) on public administration in the 1980s and 90s, which

emphasized the importance of entrepreneurial leadership and competition for promoting the efficiency of public service provision and for responding to citizen demands (Hood, 1991; Osborne and Gaebler, 1992). Politicians would formulate bold visions and goals for the public sector, and entrepreneurial public managers would incentivize public employees and public and private service providers to compete for customers and create more and better for less.

In the early 21<sup>st</sup> Century, the NPM-inspired reforms were increasingly criticized for failing to deliver on their promises. Rather than producing more and better for less and becoming more attentive to citizen voices, the reforms nurtured distrust in government, demotivated public employees, and cultivated a customer culture among public-service users, which sent the demands for public services spiraling (Hood and Peters, 2004; Hood and Dixon, 2015). In light of these criticisms, the New Public Governance (NPG) approach proposed an alternative route to enhancing the ability of the public sector to renew itself as part of ongoing efforts to do better (Osborne, 2006, 2010). The main assumption was that public services are always co-produced by public employees and the citizens who use them and that the public sector's ability to renew itself and to do better in terms of public value production depends on its ability to fully benefit from this co-production (Alford, 2009; 2014; Pestoff, 2012). The NPG program did not originally link co-production to public innovation, but that changed with the growing pressure on the public sector to enhance its capacity to solve wicked policy problems. This development triggered interest in collaborations between public and private actors that do more than co-produce existing products through known methods. The term 'co-creation' came to signify collaborative efforts to develop new, innovative public services and ways of collaborating (first-order innovation), as well as new strategies, goals and ways of organizing public governance (second-order innovation) (Potts et al., 2008; Sørensen and Torfing, 2015; 2018; Voorberg, Bekkers and Tummers, 2015; Osborne, Radnor and Strokosch, 2016).

The different reform programs described above have gradually introduced an innovation perspective to the public sector, but the focus has mainly been on a first-order, service innovation perspective and a second-order, governance innovation perspective related to the choice of getting things done efficiently and effectively. NPM and NPG have paid little attention to third-order innovation; that is, innovation in the political realm where the overall purpose of the public sector is defined, where political priorities are made, and where different (and often conflicting) political views and interests battle for political influence. This may explain why the many studies of changes in democracy rarely apply a public innovation perspective. We will claim that approaching developments in democracy from a public innovation perspective will contribute new insight to our understanding of the state of and possible future for democracy in contemporary Western societies.

## **A Democratic Innovation Perspective**

The political realm is where the authoritative distribution of value in society takes place (Easton, 1953). This distribution is prone to ongoing contestations, and the role of political institutions, processes and regulatory procedures is to secure political stability and monitor conflicts by channeling political demands into the political process and to secure support for decisions made and satisfaction with the policy output. Political systems take many different forms, and democracy is one of many

ways of organizing the political. Broadly defined, *democracy refers to political systems that aspire to ensure that all the members of the political community have free and equal access to discuss and influence the decisions that affect their lives*. Over time, democratic theorists have interpreted this principle very differently and proposed a variety of models of democracy (Held, 2006). Empirically, concrete democratic regimes have also assumed many different forms. Some scholars argue that it is precisely this adaptability to different conditions over time and space that explains the persistence and success of the democratic idea and regime form (Dahl, 1989; Saward, 2010; Helms, 2016), whereas others argue that this persistence owes to the capacity of democracy to secure political legitimacy (Almond and Verba, 1963). With its lengthy history, ranging back to its birth in Athens 300 years BC and all the way up to its present hegemonic position in the Western world, the democratic idea is a story of persistence and success but also one of restlessness. Democracy is constantly reshaped and innovated in both theory and practice, and its capacity to do so appears crucial for its future survival, although it also reduces its clarity and solidity as standard for organizing political life (Helms, 2016; Sørensen, 2017).

The restlessness and haziness of democracies are not only the result of varying and changing societal conditions that function as pull and push factors for innovativeness; they also result from ongoing efforts to cope with three inherent tensions within the concept of democracy itself. One such tension is between the democratic ideal of a self-governing people and the need to delegate political decisions to political elites to promote effective collective action (Keohane, 2012: 155ff; Kane and Patapan, 2012: 2). This tension, which is present in both direct and representative democracy, tends to create animosity and legitimacy problems between political elites and citizens (Kane and Patapan, 2012: 170). The second tension relates to the fact that the *demos*—that is, the members of a political community—refers both to a collective unity with a shared will and purpose and a plurality of individuals with diverse ideas and interests (Sandel, 1998; Young, 2002; Bohman, 2007; Rosanvallon, 2011). Although there are theories and political voices that stress the singular interpretation of the *demos* and those who highlight the plurality of individual views and interests in society, the democratic idea builds on the recognition of both (March and Olsen, 1989; 1995). Balancing between the singular and plural understanding of the *demos* creates ongoing dilemmas in determining what should count as the voice of the people (Young, 2000; Mouffe, 2005; Sørensen, 2019). The third tension relates to the demarcation of the political community in terms of a territory or an organization. This demarcation draws a line between the included and the excluded; the former are eligible for democratic rights whereas the latter are not. Internal exclusion refers to those members of a political community who are not eligible, such as newcomers or those who are too young. External exclusion is when one political community has been authorized to make political decisions that have implications for the members of another political community (Bohman, 2007; Papadopoulos, 2014).

Based on the above, an innovation perspective on democratic change will ask the following eight questions:

- 1) What *pull and push factors* motivate public authorities or other political actors to innovate democracy in a given context at a given point in time? And to what extent and how are these factors related to inherent tensions in democracy?

- 2) What *ideas* guide the efforts to search for new innovative forms of democracy, and where did this inspiration come from?
- 3) Which *creative destructions* are involved in moving a new idea forward into a democratic innovation in the form of an institutional reform or a change in the political processes or procedures?
- 4) What is the *order and causality between the different phases* in the innovation process (i.e. idea formation, experimenting and testing, and realization and diffusion)? And what political dynamics and concerns are at play at different points in the process?
- 5) Is the innovation *incremental or radical in scope*? And what are the risks in terms of unintended consequences as well as potential gains for democracy?
- 6) What *implications* does the innovation have for patterns of inclusion and exclusion in democracy, the level of political equality between different actors, and the relationship between different groups of actors (i.e. politicians, public administrators and citizens)? And to what extent do the innovators consider these implications?
- 7) What *barriers* are at play in terms of traditional role perceptions, hegemonic discourses and institutional path dependencies that favor the status quo?
- 8) How will the innovation *condition* the simultaneous need for stability and change in liberal democracies?

## **Innovations in Local Democracy**

The eight questions listed above provide a conceptual framework for studying developments in local democracy from an innovation perspective. It is now time to illustrate its relevance and develop a number of propositions for further research by applying the framework in an analysis of some of the current developments in local democracy in Western liberal countries. What are the drivers and barriers for change? What types of innovation take form? What implications do the innovations have for the actors involved—as well as for democracy, as such? We find inspiration in the collection of studies of developments in local democracy in seven European countries in this and a following special issue on innovations in local government, and we relate them to more general developments in governance research and democratic theory.

The first question relates to the drivers of innovation in local democracy. One of the pull factors that is widely referred to in the broader research on democratic governance and democratic renewal is entrepreneurial public managers (Ansell and Gash, 2012; Fung, 2009, 2015; Agger and Sørensen, 2018). In the special issues, the articles by Asbjørn Røiseland and Signy Irene Vabo, and by Mette Sønderskov (in *TIJ*, 25(3), 2020) document how public managers in Norway are frontrunners in promoting new forms of democracy that bring citizens into the policy making and policy implementation processes. Patricia Buser and Daniel Kübler also find that civil servants played

a key role as policy entrepreneurs in the introduction of school boards in Switzerland. An explanatory factor behind this entrepreneurial activity among public managers may be professional ambitions related to the surge of new, intriguing governance strategies and tools advocates by New Public Management and New Public Governance reforms in the form of exit and voice channels for citizen influence, which count extended choice options between public services, representation in user boards and neighborhood councils, participatory budgeting, and citizen forums that advice politicians and political task committees where politicians and citizens develop policies together.

Closely related to these pull factors are push factors, such as unsolved wicked problems and fiscal austerity. Mark E. Warren (2009) describes recent developments in local democracy as governance-driven democratization, which refers to the transformation of democracy that takes place as a side-effect of engaging citizens in solving societal problems. In their study of new forms of democracy in two Danish and one Norwegian municipality, Tina Ø. Bentzen, Eva Sørensen and Jacob Torfing show how this governance-driven approach to democratic renewal creates a tendency to focus on involving citizens in service innovation together with public employees rather than in policy innovation with politicians. *One proposition following from these findings is that if democratic innovation is to become more than an unintended side effect of first- and second-order innovations, the involvement of politicians is required together with the application of a third-order approach to public innovation.*

Current strands of democratic theory, as well as some of the articles in this special issue, do actually identify push factors that may motivate politicians as well as public managers to apply a third-order perspective on democratic innovations. Pierre Rosanvallon (2008, 2011) argues that democracy currently faces a serious legitimacy crisis, and several large-scale surveys document low levels of trust in government (PEW, 2017; Edelman, 2019). Moreover, Russel Dalton and Christian Welzel (2014) document how citizens are approaching public authorities and democracy differently in Western liberal democracies. The 20<sup>th</sup> Century civic culture of citizens who trusted their government (Almond and Verba, 1963) no longer exists. Citizens in Western liberal democracies have become antiauthoritarian, critical and competent, it is held. They voice their opinions and stand up to public authorities if they are unsatisfied. This development has cast light on the inherent tensions in the democratic idea. In the research reported in Bas Denters, Hans Vollaard and Hester van de Bovenkamp's article (in no. 3/2020) of these special issues, a paradox is identified between the fact that citizens in many representative democracies tend to support democratic ideals while at the same time being increasingly critical of the functioning of key democratic institutions, including the politicians they elect to represent them. In a similar vein, Leiske van der Torre, Ank Michels, Paul 't Hart and Harmen Binnema find that an important push factor for public authorities in four Dutch municipalities experimenting with new forms of democracy is the view that contemporary citizens are unsatisfied with conventional policymaking. Similarly, Elizabeth Toft Kristjansen's study of democratic innovations in two Danish housing associations (in no. 3/2020) shows how some innovations are indeed motivated by a desire to improve the citizen-political representative relationship. Based on these findings, *we propose that an important push factor for initiating democratic innovations in local government is a troublesome relationship between citizens and politicians and other public authorities.*

At this particular point in time, new ideas are emerging in democratic theory as well as among governments regarding the future of democracy. For three decades, the strategy for soothing tensions between citizens and political elites and conflict between different interest groups in society has been to create lacunas of decentered self-governance in representative democracy, such as village- and neighborhood councils and user boards with some decision-making autonomy. Participatory budgeting is one of the newer innovations growing out of this strategy and has traveled from Porto Allegro in Brazil to local governments around the world (Ganuza and Baiocchi, 2012). The unintended result of these innovations has been the creation of that which Rosanvallon (2008) denotes a ‘counter democracy’, where citizens use the decentered platforms to formulate political demands but do not take part in considering what works for the totality. The implications are that public authorities have come under increasing pressure to deliver the impossible, the result being further disenchantment with democracy among citizens (Rosanvallon, 2011).

In response to this development, a new strand of democratic theory claims that the most promising way out of this predicament is to bring citizens into the political, where the focus is on what works for the totality. They propose developing a representative democracy that supports political dialogue between citizens and politicians under headings such as ‘a direct representative democracy’ (Neblo, Esterling and Lazer, 2018), ‘interactive democracy’ (Rosanvallon, 2011) and ‘hybrid democracy’ (Sørensen and Torfing, 2019). A recent survey among Australian federal politicians has shown that many politicians perceive reforms to representative democracy that strengthen their dialogue with citizens as crucial (Evans, Stoker and Halupka, 2019), and an analysis of a database of case studies of collaborative governance identifies 28 cases in which politicians have taken measures to collaborate more closely with citizens (Sørensen et al., 2020). Many of the innovations studied in the present collection of articles share this ambition. They aim to transform citizens from critical spectators to participants in democratic policymaking. With reference to this current trend, *we propose that it is timely to assess the extent to which and how democratic innovations bring citizens into the process of authoritative policymaking and how this contributes to soothing the tensions between public authorities and citizens.*

The notion that the escape from the current crisis facing representative democracy is to bring citizens into the political process implies some degree of creative destruction in the sense that it challenges traditional understandings of representation. Hence, representation understood as acting on a given mandate is incompatible with the aspiration to engage citizens in policymaking, and this incompatibility has stimulated intense efforts to innovate the representation concept (Saward, 2010; Runciman, 2009; Tormey, 2015). Nadia Urbinati (2011) proposes a process-oriented perception of representation that refers to a commitment on the side of the representative to engage in ongoing dialogue with the represented over the content of what is being represented. This conceptualization of representation goes well with the idea that politicians and citizens develop policies together.

As another related creative destruction of traditional notions of democratic representation, numerous researchers are challenging the core assumption in traditional models of representative democracy that free and competitive elections are sufficient, or even productive, for securing democratic representation. They propose the formation of citizen councils consisting of non-elected representatives who are commissioned to make authoritative decisions on behalf of the people or to give advice to elected politicians on complex and contested policy issues (Landemore, 2017;

Runciman, 2018). Drawing on survey-data from the 2018 Dutch Local Election Studies, the Denters, Vollaard and Bovenkamp article tests the theoretical proposition that non-elected representatives could potentially strengthen democracy, concluding that citizens tend to be more satisfied with non-elected representatives than with those they themselves have elected. *We propose that innovations in representative democracy aimed at engaging citizens in policymaking involve the creative destruction of existing perceptions of democratic representation and require a turn toward a process-oriented representation concept.*

Innovation processes are rarely linear, and the causality between different phases in the process is rarely clear. A number of studies of democratic innovations indicate the considerable risk of disconnecting different phases in the innovation process and that this risk relates to the weak institutional linkages between innovative policymaking arenas and party politics (Edelenbos, Klok, and van Tatenhove, 2009; Lees-Marshment, 2015; Hendriks, 2016; Herrting and Kugelberg, 2017). Moreover, the precise goal and purpose in democratic innovation processes may not be entirely clarified and coordinated between the involved actors, and the implementation methods and evaluation criteria may be equally vague and contested, as pointed out by Eleanor Glor (1998) and illustrated in the article by van der Torre, Michels, 't Hart and Binnema. In such cases, it is particularly difficult to secure some level of coherency between idea development, experimentation, evaluation, authorization and the diffusion of democratic innovations. As a further complication, innovations in local democracy take place within national political systems. In some cases, such as the one analyzed in the article by Buser and Kübler, the innovation is an element in a larger governmental reform, which complicates the dynamics, linkages and causalities between different phases in the innovation processes.

Another key challenge in public innovation processes is that there tends to be a limited scope and tradition for experimentation in representative government institutions and procedures (Bason, 2010; Torfing, 2016). Many democratic innovations aim to strengthen idea development, but new, creative ideas are not always tested through systematic experimentation; they never become more than bold ideas, never making it to the state of concrete democratic innovation. The article by Anne Vorre Hansen and Lars Fuglsang (in no. 3/2020) explores how the introduction of living labs in two Danish municipalities contributes to transforming ideas into democratic innovations promoting public value. *We propose that some level of coherence between idea-formation, experimentation, evaluation and diffusion will enhance the relevance and adaptability of democratic innovations and that the establishment of arenas such as living labs will accommodate this kind of coherence, thereby enhancing the capacity of the public sector to innovate democracy.*

It is difficult to assess the radicalism of the current wave of democratic innovations in local democracy. Some of the innovations, such as the creation of new participatory school councils in Switzerland and the introduction of so called deliberative forums and enriching the existing structures of policymaking with participatory elements in the Netherlands, appear to be relatively modest adjustments to the traditional institutions of representative democracy. Conversely, other examples stand out as relatively radical changes, such as the effort to co-create policymaking in Norwegian and Danish municipalities, the introduction of collaborative policy forums in Danish housing associations, and the introduction of living labs in two Danish cases. However, whether an innovation is incremental or radical depends on the context. In their study of participatory democracy in England, Finland, Poland and Slovenia, Katarzyna Radzik-Maruszak and Arto Haveri (in no. 3/2020) conclude that the

intentions and criteria behind inviting citizens into the political process vary considerably between ‘old’ and ‘new’ democracies. In the same vein, Røiseland and Vabo’s study, together with other comparative studies in this collection, illustrate the importance of considering contextual factors in evaluations of the degree to which an innovation breaks with the past. Moreover, an innovation may be radical in some respects and not in others, and if those who evaluate an innovation use different criteria, they may end up evaluating the impact of the innovation differently. This is the situation in the case presented in the article by van der Torre, Michels, ’t Hart and Binnema.

Whether an innovation is incremental or radical ultimately depends on the distance between the new practices it brings to the table and those which were there before. That said, the rhetoric motivating most of the innovations under scrutiny in the two special issues is noteworthy in the sense that they construct a crisis in representative democracy that signifies the necessity of radical changes rather than minor adjustments made to an otherwise well-functioning political system. As such, contemporary political rhetoric provides fertile ground for radical change. In such times, it is important not only to focus on the potential gains from making radical changes to representative democracy but also what there is to lose. Citizens might well trust non-elected representatives more than elected politicians. But how will innovations that shift power from elected to non-elected representatives affect the distribution of political power and influence in society? And how will such innovations affect the balance between the inherent tensions in democracy? *We propose that it is essential to balance risks and potential benefits against each other when assessing radical innovations in representative democracy, and that it is a key objective for social science researchers to provide the insights required by the innovators of democracy to assess risks and gains—and to avoid unintended consequences.*

Democratic innovations that bring citizens into the policymaking process have implications for politicians as well as for public administrators and citizens. For politicians, the price they must pay for sharing the responsibility for tough political decisions with citizens is having to surrender their position as sovereign decision-makers and political primacy, thereby sharing political power and influence with relevant and affected members of the political community (Sørensen, 2019). Denters, Vollaard and Bovenkamp suggest that the way out of this predicament is for local councilors to assume the role as democratic facilitators and monitors. Recent strands of research suggest that public administrators will need to move in a similar direction and become the competent initiators, stewards, facilitators and catalysts of co-created policymaking (Ansell and Gash, 2012; van Meerkerk and Edelenbos, 2018; Sørensen and Bentzen, 2019). The articles by Røiseland and Vabo and by Bentzen, Sørensen and Torfing both show how public administrators experiment with taking on these new roles and balance them against their traditional regulatory role. Finally, participation in policymaking also has implications for citizens. Citizens may not be given the opportunity to raise particular demands without considering and balancing them against demands made by others. They must take part in the difficult political task of prioritizing between demands and participate in a holistic assessment and discussion of what counts as a good society and how to get there. In a series of online experiments in which American governors discuss contested policy issues with their constituency, Neblo, Esterling and Lazer (2018) demonstrate how governors and citizens alike change their opinions on the subject and improve their mutual understanding. *We propose that democratic innovations have considerable implications for the involved actors and that assessments of such implications are important to consider when designing innovations and evaluating and explaining their success and failure.*

There is a close link between the implications for the actors involved and barriers to democratic innovation. The barrier that is most in focus in the articles in this collection are traditional role images. Sønderskov shows how traditional role perceptions and hegemonic discursive understandings of representation discourage councilors in four Norwegian municipalities from inviting citizens into the political process, and Radzik-Maruszak and Haveri's study of councilor attitudes toward citizen involvement in four European municipalities finds a similar reluctance. Bentzen, Sørensen and Torfing conclude that some politicians are indeed afraid of losing political power and influence, but add as another barrier that the traditional institutions of representative democracy provide very few arenas and platforms where politicians and citizens can meet, discuss and develop solutions to pressing policy problems. With this background, *we propose that traditional role perceptions and the lack of institutionalized meeting places between politicians and citizens are key barriers to democratic innovation.*

A public innovation perspective stresses the importance of considering a final point: How does a given innovation affect the scope for democratic stability and change? Stability is important in political life and society in general. As mentioned earlier, however, the long-term survival of democracy also depends on its capacity to adapt to changing conditions (Helms, 2016; Sørensen, 2017). It is therefore relevant to consider how democratic innovations affect the future scope for striking a productive balance between stability and change in democracy. Such considerations tend to focus on institutional factors, and such factors are indeed important. They can prevent public authorities from abusing their power but possibly fail to serve this purpose if they are easily changed. Likewise, institutions that support entrepreneurial agency can promote innovative activities and the capacity to pass reforms. As illustrated by many of the articles in these special issues, political culture is another factor that influences democratic stability and change. Role perceptions among the actors involved tend to stabilize democracy, but a shifting political culture destabilizes traditional institutions and practices. In the present context, it seems particularly important to consider whether the innovations that bring citizens into the political realm will destabilize representative democracy and hamper its capacity to renew itself or they will promote the innovative capacity of representative democracy and render it more robust by aligning its political institutions with the advent of a new political culture. *We propose that an assessment of the implications that an innovation has for securing democratic stability and accommodating change should take cultural as well as institutional factors into account.*

## **Conclusion**

The private sector no longer has a monopoly on innovation. We have also come to expect the public sector to innovate what it does and how it does so. When interest in public innovation first saw the light of day, the focus was on service innovation. In recent years, however, there has been surging interest in political innovation, particularly in democratic innovation. Representative democracy is criticized for being unable to solve some of the most pressing problems of our time and for creating a chasm between political elites and citizens. In response, local governments have begun experimenting with new forms of democracy, many of which aim to bring citizens into the political process. Although there is a massive literature on local democratic reform, little of it applies a public innovation

perspective on these changes. The public innovation perspective developed in this article contributes to our understanding of the dynamics that are at play when democracy changes. The perspective provides a theoretical framework consisting of eight questions that should be addressed by studies of democratic innovation. An application of this framework to current studies of change in local democracy allowed us to develop nine propositions for future research. Moreover, the findings have highlighted the pertinence of studying democratic innovation at this particular point in history.

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