Ambiguous Accountability in Municipal Innovation

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ABSTRACT

What forms of accountability are employed in the development of municipal innovations? This is the main question of this paper, and is a central question in the discussion of the relationship between public innovation and democracy. The background for asking it, is the possible differences in the dynamics of innovations and the way representative democracy works. The paper offers a model for assessing accountability in innovation processes by combining which actors participate in different phases of the innovation process with the motivations of the central actors for carrying out innovations. The analysis is anchored in institutionalised forms of accountability. Empirically, it is based on seven in-depth case studies of innovation processes in Norwegian municipalities. The findings show that the innovations answer to political, legal and administrative officials, in keeping with the formal system's demands. They also show, however, that professional accountability is the main motivation behind the innovations. Ambiguity emerges from the fact that in the formative phases of the innovation, the professionals who instigated the innovation were the most active participants. Among politicians, only the mayors were active in this part of the process, and political accountability was otherwise ensured by formal decision making or within the delegated power to the administration.

***Key words*:** Innovation, participation, motivation, accountability

Introduction

Innovation has become an ambition of public policy in a more explicit way during the last 5-10 years, and public organisations are encouraged to enhance their innovation capacity. In Norway, as in many other countries, municipalities are important actors because of their responsibility for a large part of public service and local societal development. Norwegian municipalities are in general regarded as capable of implementing centrally defined policy in the local reality (Haukelien et al., 2011) and of being drivers and participants in innovation processes (Teigen, Ringholm and Aarsæther, 2013). The legislation allows the Norwegian municipalities to take on any task that is not assigned by law as another institution's responsibility, included the delivery of more than the minimum standards (Aarsæther and Nyseth, 2007). Because innovation is a young theme in research on Norwegian municipalities, knowledge of their achievements as innovators so far stems as much from re-interpretation of research under the label of local societal development, service development and organisation development, as from research within an analytical framework deriving explicitly from the innovation concept.

This paper contributes to understanding the framing of municipal innovation, by addressing how innovation processes comply with the aspect of accountability, an essential democratic standard. Public innovation is public policy and as such, subject to democratic steering and control. Since innovation often occurs along unpredictable paths, it is an activity with the potential to escape the common democratic standards. If this is the case, is there a total mismatch between innovation and accountability, are there major or minor discrepancies, and, in the latter case, are the discrepancies related to certain phases of the innovation process or to certain types of actors involved in the process? In dealing with innovation and accountability, different systems of accountability coexist. What importance do they have for municipal innovation processes?

Excluding the introduction, this paper has six sections. The first outlines the possible challenges in the meeting between innovation processes and the democratic framework. Section two emphasizes the interconnectedness of participation and accountability as a theoretical framework for the analysis. Section three presents the method used in the study of seven cases of municipal innovation. In section four, the case studies from different Norwegian municipalities are analysed and section five discusses the accountability aspects of the process. The last section sums up the analysis and points to questions for further research.

Dynamics of innovation and democracy

In a changing mix of democratic forms and expression, the values and standards of democracy can be addressed in many different ways, and by combinations of formal and informal mechanisms. Expressions of democratic standards differ considerably, as do innovation processes. Democracy includes election, participation, open discussion and dialogue. The representative democracy is connected to elections and the party system, while participative democracy (Pateman, 1970) is a term used in order to emphasize the importance of including participation that is not directly connected to the representative system into the democracy definition. Deliberative democracy (Huxley, 2000) focuses on the political communication in particular. These broad categories take a multitude of forms and expressions. Participative and deliberative forms have, to a large extent, been developed in order to mend the imperfections of the participative system. Along the way, however, they have also turned out to be a challenge to it. The challenge is often connected to collaboration and dialogue, bringing actors who are outside of political institutions into the decision-making process, thus shaping policy making in arenas that escape ordinary mechanisms of accountability (Stoker, 2004; Considine, 2002; Sørensen, 2012). The representative system – elections, party organisations, councils and committees – is a formalised system. Other forms of participation, debate and policy changes that are not directly linked to the representative system can happen in less formal, less regular and less predictable ways.

Participation is a crucial element in network governance, co-management and co-production (Hartley, Sørensen and Torfing, 2013). This development is characterised by increasing involvement of business actors, third sector actors and others in some phases of the policymaking process, and of politicians in processes initiated by them. Literature on public sector innovation accentuates in particular the collaborative aspects of the innovation process (Hartley, Sørensen and Torfing, 2013). Collaboration is emphasised both with regard to reducing

the divide between public departments (Bason, 2007), and with regard to combining the creativity, knowledge and implementation capacity of different societal "spheres" (Agger and Lund, 2011). This corresponds with knowledge about innovation in general, where the literature underlines the interdependence and the "untidiness" of innovation processes, rather than a "tidy" linearity (Pavitt 2005; Fuglsang and Rønning, 2014). Innovations often seem to emerge when new actors meet in unfamiliar settings or by the emergence of a situation that opens minds to change. As much as this can be of value for both the process and the output, there is also concern that the multitude of participants and collaborators blurs the relatively clear-cut lines of accountability and representation that traditionally associated with the representative democracy system (Considine, 2005; Sørensen, 2012; Schillemans and Busuioc, 2014).

Various forms of collaborative innovation, then, both confirm the development of the public sector into a more collaborative, open and ambiguous system, and a possible challenge to the institutionalised practices of democracy, in particular practices of representative democracy. In the early years of research on public innovation, the democracy aspects have not been at the forefront. To a large extent, the literature on innovation in the public sector belongs in the organisation design tradition, focussing on organisational barriers and facilitating factors for innovation, along with recommendations on how the barriers can be overcome and the facilitating factors can be made useful (Bason, 2010; Torfing et al., 2014, De Vries, Bekkers and Tummers, 2015). Within this research, traditional organisational process devices required in a representative system, such as procedures for participation, reporting and accounting, may appear as 'barriers' in the innovation process (Bason, 2007). Such frames are by their nature conservative, because they were set up in order to secure predictability, equality and transparency in the policymaking process and service production.

Innovation is risky (Brown and Osborne, 2013), and willingness to take risk is a classic feature of entrepreneurship. Mixing actors, problems and solutions in new ways will often represent a risk to democracy, and entering a risk situation can have both positive and negative outcomes. Eva Sørensen outlines a framework for a more multi-faceted understanding of accountability in light of both New Public Management and New Public Government. The thrust of her paper is that there is "an urgent need to develop a model for measuring the accountability of collaborative forms of governance, and to apply this model in empirical studies" (Sørensen, 2012: 15).

One approach to this task is offered in this study. The approach connects different anchors of accountability with who participates at different stages of the innovation process.

Accountability as an essential democratic standard

Democracy has many mediators. Which ones to emphasise is partly connected to the perception of democracy employed. Regarding representative democracy, Beetham identifies four essential mediators: authorisation, responsiveness, accountability, and representativeness (Beetham, 1994: 36-39; Beetham, 1996: 32-37). Representatives are authorised through free elections, guided by the principle of representativeness. Responsiveness describes the obligation of the system to listen to and be aware of the diversity of the population – to keep in contact with the electorate during the election period. Accountability follows from authorisation, and describes the responsibility of the representatives to present the accounts to the electorate.

Accounts are in this respect both the income and expenditure sheet – transparency in terms of how the policy process is carried out, as well as the output and outcome of the process.

To the degree that democratic values have been a topic in discussions of public innovation, the emphasis has often been on participation and accountability. The participation aspect protrudes from the literature on collaborative innovation (Hartley et al., 2013), user-driven innovation (Bason, 2007; Langergaard, 2014) and employee-driven innovation (Karlsson et al., 2014; Engen, 2016). Accountability is addressed as a concern strongly related to participation in the form of collaborative innovation (Sørensen, 2012; Sørensen and Boch Waldorff, 2014), from several different angles. One angle is addressed in the introduction—the possibility of the innovation process escaping the established system of accountability. Another angle is that of changing the view on what is to be included in the accountability system, such as media publicity (Aarsæther et al., 2009) and informality (Ringholm, 2004). Different types of actors are seen as answering to different systems of accountability. Politicians are, for example, subject to demands of openness and transparency to a much higher degree than actors from the business sphere. Accountability is also important, however, to innovations taking place within the political-administrative sphere of the public sector. The risk aspect of innovation in principle applies to all innovation settings and accountability may be violated within the formalised political sphere, as it may be honoured in instances where formal arrangements to guide the practice are not available.

One strand of the discussion has suggested there are parallel systems of accountability (Bovens, 2007). Hence, the actors involved in a policy process may conceive of themselves as being responsible to more than one system, and possibly as emphasizing one more than another, depending on the circumstances.

The framework of accountability

The core idea of accountability as a concept is that some actors have the right to hold others responsible for their actions "…and to impose sanctions if they determine that these responsibilities have not been met" (Grant and Keohane, 2005: 29). The actual components of accountability are subject to an ongoing process of interpretation. Ngaire Woods suggests three: transparency, compliance and performance (Woods, 2001). This corresponds with Robert Behns' more practical approach: accountability for finances, accountability for fairness and accountability for performance (Behn, 2001: 6). Types of accountability can also be distinguished according to the types of forums to which an actor reports (Bovens, 2007). *Political accountability* derives from the principal-agent relationship in a representative democracy, with reporting from civil servants to politicians, who are authorised by the voters. It is a way to express that even if administrators are authorized to make decisions, the final responsibility for their actions is with the elected politicians. Political accountability has two aspects. One way to understand it is that policy matters should be subject to control by elected politicians. Another is that the content of the policy should be in accordance with the reigning political programme. In other words, political accountability has both an input and an output-side to it. One line of discussion in the accountability debate is how the other forms of accountability that Bovens presents us with, modify or enhance the political accountability (Byrkjeflot, Christensen and Lægreid, 2013). One possible modification is *legal accountability*;

to what degree an individual's legal rights are secured. Another is *administrative accountability*, the monitoring of the process of transforming inputs. A third modification is *professional accountability* – scrutiny of codes of conduct. Finally, we have s*ocial accountability*, which describes the situation where public organisations experience an obligation vis-à-vis the public in general, or certain groups of "holders" to report and account for their procedures and output. Values are embedded in all forms of accountability, in the way that legislation, the administrative framework and professional codes of conduct are based on certain sets of values.

Actors, both as individuals and as groups, may face conflicts of accountability. Administrative requirements may conflict with professional ones, and the tales of such are manifold – for example in the wake of New Public Management. Questions of how much and what to tell the public occur frequently in policymaking processes even if the process is carried out in accordance with the legal framing, and illustrate the conflict between legal and social accountability.

When asking whether the values that drive innovation processes are in conflict with democratic standards, the different understandings of accountability need to be taken into consideration. Innovation, though not a linear process, undergoes phases. Different forms of accountability may apply to different phases. Normally, it would be challenging to subjugate the initiating phase – when the idea emerges and starts to develop – to a formal framework of accountability. From a political accountability perspective this is a loss, since this will often be a defining phase for further development of the innovation. This is the case with regard to the values that are defined as important, the actors that are considered relevant for taking the process forward, and other measures of importance for the innovation's realisation.

In other words, the values that motivate the innovation and carry it forward, the actors that take part in the process, and how it is carried out are indications of the forms of accountability the actors and the process as a whole answer to – what framework of accountability they consider themselves answerable to. The working questions, thus, are 1) What actors participated in the different phases of the innovation process? 2) What was the main motivation for initiating the innovation? 3) Did the motivation change during the process?

Method: Case studies of seven innovation processes

The data on these seven innovation processes stem from a process-study carried out by a team of four researhers, in a total of twelve municipalities. Data gathering took form as backward mapping. The core criterion for selecting the innovations for the study was that they should answer to the commonly used Schumpeterian definition of being at least new to the context (Schumpeter, 1934, 1975). This means that similar solutions may previously have been applied in other places and contexts. A search was conducted for cases from different service sectors and municipalities of different sizes. We wanted to include both service innovation and organisational innovation in the study. The large service-sectors – health, care and education – were in particular included. More municipalities than innovations appear because two of the innovations were inter-municipal collaborations – in one instance between three municipalities and in another between four.

A sizeable amount of work was necessary in order to identify the innovations. We asked the 'Innovation Alliance'[1] of KS (The Association of Local and Regional Authorities in Norway) for help, in addition to asking colleagues and others with knowledge of municipalities for suggestions. This gave us a long list of 31 innovations, from which we selected the seven according to the criteria presented above.

We mapped the innovation processes by group interviews of actors who had been involved in the innovation process, and studies of relevant documents connected to each innovation. Two of the researchers attended each group interview. The average length of the group interviews was two hours, and between three and eight informants were present at each interview – 46 informants altogether. In addition, eight informants who were not able to attend the group interview were interviewed individually. These interviews did, with one exception, comply with the process description provided by the group interviews. The exception was that in one instance a significant political debate had not been mentioned in the group interview, which added insight into the process. The total number of informants is therefore 54. Due to the differences between the innovations, there was no standard participation in the groups. For some, politicians attended, in others, business or third sector representatives.

The interviews were recorded and then transcribed, thus providing accounts of different approaches. A first analysis was carried out in order to detect drivers and barriers of the processes (Ringholm et al., 2011).

The innovations

Good Circles is an inter-municipal organisation designed to support local industrial and business development in Fjell, Sund and Øygarden municipalities in Western Norway. It is organised in an unorthodox way compared to the tradition for such organisations in Norwegian municipalities. Only one person, the leader, makes up the regular staff, and project based, short-term employment is the method for carrying out the different forms of developmental work. The innovative element of Good Circles is the unusual way of organising it, which had no equal in any other municipal industrial development organisation. Good Circles has subsequently instigated innovative activities and cooperation in the development area.

The Community Centre Model was an integrated organisation of municipal services, in new community centre buildings, physically located in a large, new municipal development area on a former airfield. Bærum is the municipality where it was carried out. The rest of the municipality was organised by a traditional sector-based model. The innovative element was, first and foremost, its adversary model of organisation, with the aim of improvements in service-quality.

"Oil-rotation" is the popular concept for uncommon work rotations in the caring homes for mentally disabled and mentally ill people, in Bergen municipality. It represents a change into longer periods at work and longer periods off work, inspired by the work arrangements in the petroleum industry, hence the 'oil-rotation' label. Observations of how the frequent changing of

[1] The Innovation Alliance is a network of municipalities within KS, that gather to discuss topics of innovation.

personnel made the inhabitants uneasy and disturbed spurred the innovation, as the personnel turnover was assumed to be the main reason for stress and increasing frequency of sick leave by the staff. The problems were creating a vicious circle of new and temporary staff coming in, the inhabitants' challenges getting used to them, more commotion, and yet more sick leaves. The change in the organisation of the work is the innovative element, as the service as such was not changed.

The Senja Doctor was the first inter-municipal medical service provider in the country. The reason behind it was the experience of a tremendously high turnover by the doctors in remote areas of four neighbouring municipalities: Berg, Tranøy, Torsken and Lenvik, all located on the island of Senja in Northern Norway. A new, inter-municipal medical service was set up. The objectives were to create a larger unity that would reduce turnover by providing medical staff with a better and larger professional environment, more continuity in the way of longer employment periods to improve the service experienced by the users, and to secure more applicants for vacant positions in the future because of the improvements. The innovation was the way of organising the medical services, a first in the country.

"YES" is an advice and support service for youth in a rural area of Grong municipality. The service was established because of concern for youth that were not finding their place either in school or in social and leisure activities, and/or had other problems for which they were not getting adequate help. This is a new service that complements the existing system by improving the connection between the different service providers in the field (school, public health nurse, psychological help, etc.), public services and local civil society organisations.

"TRT-service" is another advisory and adjustment youth service provider, located in an urban context in Oslo municipality. The service resembles the "YES" service described above in the way that it sought better coherence among services offered to youth at risk. The two differ from each other in the way the process of establishing it was carried out. TRT-service is also a new service in the municipality, and it is in particular characterised by the creation and testing of solutions at the intersection between the public and the private sectors.

The Farm School is an on-the-farm educational service that established in Tromsø municipality, where pupils who have a problem with traditional classroom-based learning spend one school-day a week at a farm. At the farm, teaching is based on practical work experiences, which are connected to the theory taught in traditional school subjects. Though the innovation needed some new organisational arrangements to be put into practice, the main innovative element is the way children with learning difficulties are taught ordinary school subjects.

Participation and motivation in the processes

This section details, firstly, the overview of who participated in what phase of the innovation process presented. Then the question of what motivated the innovation is addressed, and in the following section the findings are discussed with regard to what form of accountability emerges from the material.

Who participated?

Who participated in the different phases of the seven innovations? In Table 1, below, identifies the actors involved in developing the idea, taking the discussion and development forward, making decisions, implementing and following up. These stages are inspired by Booz, Hallen and Hamilton (1982). However, since the democracy aspect is important here, decision-making was separated from the developments that take place before and after this particular stage. The phases did not develop as chronologically as may be suggested by the table. The three first phases in particular—identifying the problem, discussing and developing the ideas—were in most instances very intertwined. In terms of participation, it matters whether the scope of actors changes between the phases.

Table 1: Participants in Different Phases of the Innovation Process

	Participants	***Motivation***
Good Circles (Local development support)	Problem identification: mayor and Chief Administrative Officer (CAO) in one of the municipalities, research institute Discussion of ideas: mayors (3), CAOs (3), research institute Developing of ideas: mayors (3), CAOs (3), research institute Decision: all local councils, separately Implementation: municipal administration, local business, local culture actors, municipal schools and nurseries, university college Follow-up: CAOs (3), mayors (3), research institute, local business leaders, local culture actors, schools, nurseries, University college	The wish to make the municipal support for the local industry and businesses more in accordance with the needs of the industry, and thereby contribute to the robustness and further development of the local communities.
Community Centre Model (Integrated municipal services)	Problem identification: CAO, administrative staff Discussion of ideas: administrative staff, CAO, planners, Public meeting Developing of ideas: planners, administrative staff, CAO Decision: local council Implementation: professional staff, voluntary organisations, business actors Follow-up: CAO, professional staff	The wish to make the municipal services more connected with each other on a territorial basis, stemming from the idea that this would make better services. Also, to have a "laboratory" where ideas of new forms of administration could be tested before implementation on a larger scale
"Oil-rotation" (New staff work schedules)	Problem identification: service unit leader, professional staff Discussion of ideas: service unit leader, professional staff, union deputy Developing of ideas: service unit leader, local union leader Decision: administrative leader of service dempartment Implementation: service unit leader, employees, union deputy Follow-up: local council, service unit leader, administrative leader of service department, unions	The wish to give the inhabitants of the homes services that were up to professional standards, in combination with improving the working conditions for the employees.
The Senja Doctor (Intermunicipal medical services)	Problem identification: mayors in 4 municipalities Discussion of ideas: mayors (4) Developing of ideas: CAOs (4), unions, professional staff, public meetings, local councils, regional competence centre Decision: local councils Implementation: professional staff, CAOs (4) Follow-up: administrative leaders, unions	Providing stability in the medical services offered to the sparsely populated areas of the municipalities, both as a service improvement and as a means for sustaining the population in the affected areas.

"YES" (Youth service connecting multiple providers)	Problem identification: mayors, service unit leaders Discussion of ideas: political executive committee, leaders of service units Developing of ideas: project leader and forum of service unit leaders Decision: local council Implementation: professional staff in YES and adjoining municipal services, voluntary organisations Follow-up: professional staff, mayor	A general wish to secure that young people do not drop out of school, work and social life, and also a sense of responsibility for the young people from other municipalities that came to stay in the municipality for educational reasons.
TRT-service (Youth service involving multiple providers)	Problem identification: professional staff, service unit leaders Discussion of ideas: professional staff, service unit leaders Developing of ideas: professional staff, service unit leaders Decision: administrative leader Implementation: professional staff, service unit leaders Follow-up: professional staff	A wish to find better ways of hindering drop-out from school and facilitating social life among youth in the particular part of the city.
The Farm School (Schooling solution for practice learners)	Problem identification: head teacher (unit leader) Discussion of ideas: service unit leader, professional staff, farmer Developing of ideas: service unit leader, professional staff, farmer, teachers' union Decision: service unit leaders (5 head teachers) Implementation: service unit leader, teachers, farmer Follow-up: service unit leader, teachers, farmer	The urge to give all pupils, including those who have problems with classroom-based learning, the opportunity to learn what they are supposed to learn at primary school, and to give them a platform of self-confidence and knowledge that is fit for making them able professionals and citizens.

With few exceptions, the problems that the innovations are intended to solve were identified through a dialogue between different actors, and often with a background of long time experiences with the problem. In this early phase of the innovation process, the conversations often happened in informal settings, like lunch breaks, social occasions or a pause during a formal meeting. The unit leaders, the central administration officers and the professional staff were those that most commonly addressed the problem, based on the background of their own work experiences. Politicians were, in general, absent in this initial phase, except for the mayor. In three of the cases the mayor was pointed to as one of the most important actors when it came to putting the issue on the municipal agenda. Only in two of the cases were actors that did not belong in the same municipal organisation engaged at this stage, namely the two inter-municipal innovations. In both of these cases, the external actors were research-based organisations.

Furthermore, when ideas were discussed and developed into practical policy solutions, the professionals and the administration assumed most of the responsibility, unsurprisingly. However, this was also a phase in which other actors participated. In two instances public meetings were held, for differing purposes. There was political conflict in the local council and uncertainty amongst the population concerning the Senja Doctor, which is why the project leader arranged a public meeting in each of the four collaborating municipalities. While the main purpose of this public meeting was to inform the public and reassure people that their medical service would not decrease in standard because of the innovation, the meeting of the Community-Centre model had a different aim. The latter had the form of a gathering – the "Wild Night" – in order to develop ideas for how the former airfield-area should be developed, in spatial as well as organisational and societal terms. There are no records of whether elected politicians participated in the public meetings, but it is reasonable to assume that they did. In two

other instances, professional collaboration and advice was sought outside the municipal organisation; a farmer for the Farm School and a regional competence centre for medical issues for the Senja Doctor.

Only two of the innovations formally required the local council to decide upon them, namely the two that were based on inter-municipal collaboration – the Senja Doctor and Good Circles. Good Circles was also subject to great disagreement and heavy debate in the three councils before it was accepted. The five other innovations were carried out within the delegated authority of the CAO, the section leader or unit leader. Nevertheless, two of those were brought before the local council for decision making: the Community-Centre model and YES Youth Service. The Community-Centre Model was the organisational part of a large spatial development, which was decided upon as a whole. YES was a new service and needed extra funding, that among other sources was to come from the local council.

Implementation of the innovations was in all the cases broadly a matter for the professional staff, the central administration, union representatives and – when the nature of the innovation demanded it – external partners. The politicians did not take part here, neither mayors nor political bodies. However, they seem, to a certain degree, to return to the process when it is time to see how things are going and ask whether there is a need for adjustments – in what we have called the "follow-up". Again, the mayors are more present than other council members. As the data on this phase is somewhat lacking because of the different time-spans of the innovations, there is uncertainty about this. Some of the innovations had been implemented a few years before the interviews took place, while others had been put into practice as recent as 3-4 months before the interviews took place.

What motivated the innovations?

The desire to provide better municipal services was the common motivating factor for all seven innovations. They do, however, differ somewhat with regard to how different motivations are combined and anchored.

Four of the innovations, YES, TRT-service, the Farm School and "Oil-rotation", were initiated by the unit leaders. The wish among the unit leaders to help the unit meet high professional standards was a major motivation behind the initiation of these four case studies. This objective was also pointed to as the reason why the organisation and content of the services were changed. They also expressed frustration with not being able to perform their work the way they had been educated, and the unit leaders who launched the ideas also pointed out to us in the interviews that these matters had been worrying them for a long time. Also, the connection between the failure to meet standards and a problematic work-situation contributed to the motivation. The interviewees were even more eager to emphasize that they experienced that the service they were able to provide in the situation prior to the innovation was immensely at odds with the service standards their professional consciences told them to live up to. They described problems in the work situation; for example, where pupils who were having difficulties with classroom-based learning would cause noise and interruption (Farm School), and where mental patients who were disturbed by frequent shifts of staff displayed unruly and out-acting behaviour that was demanding for the staff, and thus led to sick leaves and high staff turnover ("Oil-rotation").

Behind the three innovations that were not initiated by the unit leaders or other professional staff, another type of motivation goes hand in hand with the wish to improve services. With these three – Good Circles, The Senja Doctor and the Community Centre Model – local development is a common denominator. The first two are also the ones where the mayors were most active in the initiating and developing phases, and confirm what we know from earlier studies of the mayor's role in local development.

In none of the seven processes did the motivation behind the innovation seem to change. This is not surprising, as the actors involved in the process, to a large extent, have remained unchanged during the process, with the exception of the decision phase. As presented above, this is where the political level has been brought into the process. The interviews show that once the issue was brought to the table, the discussion centred on how to shape the innovation. Thus, the motivations – service improvement, living up to professional standards, improving working conditions, local development – were not questioned or altered.

Accountability in the innovation processes

What forms of accountability do the innovations answer to? A broad overview shows that in all seven cases the local council was directly or indirectly involved in one or more phases of the innovation process. In some of the cases, the innovation was brought before the local council for a formal decision before it was put into practice. This happened in four of the processes: Good Circles, the Community-Centre Model, the Senja Doctor and YES Youth Service. These innovations were of a kind that either demanded financing that was not in the budget or within the delegated authority of the service units, were subject to common debate and uncertainty, or spurred political disagreement, or all three. The formal decisions made by the councils do display that the input-side of political accountability was taken care of in the process. In addition to this, the local councils were informed at least once during the development process regarding YES and the Senja Doctor. In Grong municipality, the executive committee was monitoring the development of YES rather closely: the project leader was summoned to give information on two occasions. This was basically because the progression was not as expected, and the committee had to decide on whether to proceed with the innovation, and also because the innovation was contested by some professionals that it was targeting for cooperation.

The fact that there was, in several instances, heavy debate in the local council or the executive committee on whether to accept and proceed with the innovation, shows that the innovations that were brought in for political decisions, did challenge the established or accepted policy. This may indicate a certain challenge to the output-side of political accountability. It is the nature of innovations not to be predicted in political programs.

In general, the political bodies became involved when the decision-making phase of the innovation occurred. In the earlier phases, connected to idea discussion and development, other politicians besides the mayors were hardly involved at all, at least not in a formal way. Of course, one cannot rule out the possibility that the mayors or the administration, on occasion, discussed aspects of the innovations with other politicians and informally exchanged views and information. However, in the interviews the only politicians pointed to as active in the preparatory and developing phases are the mayors – with the exceptions mentioned.

Social accountability can first and foremost be traced back to the public meetings held in connection with two of the processes, the Community Center and the Senja Doctor. The two had different purposes. The purpose of the gathering related to the Community Centre Model was primarily to accumulate good ideas for the development of the area, but also to boost general local engagement for local community and place development. The output from the gathering was a vision, "The Fornebu Declaration" (Aarsæther, 2013). In the Senja Doctor process the primary purpose was to inform the inhabitants of the collaborating municipalities about the consequences of the merging of medical services. Of the two, the latter one stands out as the one closest to social accountability. In these public meetings, local people were literally holding the administration and politicians accountable for their actions and plans, and emphasising the service standards that they regarded as necessary. The 'Wild Night' was held at a much more preparatory stage, and 'The Fornebu Declaration' was, to a very little extent, concretely about organisation, or spatial distribution, for that matter (Aarsæther, 2013: 279).

Three innovations were carried out by the professional staff and the administration, without involving either political bodies or individual politicians in any part of the process—apart from a certain engagement from politicians in the follow-up to the implementation. Political accountability is in these instances connected to the fact that the authority delegated to the respective service units allowed for these innovations. Since delegation of authority is a matter of political decision-making, this also belongs under the label of political accountability. Along the road, other forms of accountability were brought into the process. One example is legal accountability, which applied in particular to The Senja Doctor, Oil-Rotation, YES and the Farm School, as their construction would need either an exception from a legal regulation or the use of another legal framework that was not normally used. All the legal adaption was done in a meticulous and formal way. Violating the law would risk both repercussions and the reversing of the innovation for legal reasons. The actors referred to it as a time-consuming part of the innovation process.

Administrative accountability framed all the innovations, in the way that the staff and administration reported to their superiors and followed the ordinary reporting routines. However, the innovations are services and practices in the making, and parts of the output – sometimes important parts – were not amongst the particularities that are reported in the administrative system. One example is the diversity of outcomes from Good Circles. This was first and foremost aimed at recruiting competences for the regional industry. Regional skills are not something that municipal staff report on routinely. Furthermore, it is difficult to assess, and causality is seldom obvious. The causality side is ambiguous in several of the innovations, like in the Senja Doctor, the Farm School, and YES. However, there are examples of causality being identified by administrative routines, and most clearly in the case of Oil-Rotation. After the innovation was implemented, the reported deviations decreased, as did sick-leave, and the use of tranquilisers.

The professional standards that the staff is held up to, are to some degree explicit in the work and service description. This is where the interviews reveal a higher degree of informality than we find with regard to the other sides of accountability. In the formal terms of accountability, all the units were delivering service according to schedule, in the form of care, education, counselling and administration. What we found, however, was that in several instances there was conflict between the current service level – the "going rate" accepted by the system – and the professional standards to which the head teachers, teachers, nurses, social

services, doctors and public health nurses held themselves. On several occasions a motivation was expressed by professionals as a wish to be able to do the work they were educated for – living up to their ideals (Ringholm et al., 2011). This motivation was strongly expressed in the interviews about Oil Rotation, the Farm School, TRT and YES.

Conclusion

The introduction to this paper asked how the values that motivate and initiate innovations comply with different systems of accountability. By looking into the different phases of the innovation process, the analysis has revealed, firstly, that none of the innovations escapes the input-side of political accountability. Other necessary formal steps were also taken, both with regard to legal anchoring and to administrative procedures. What the analysis has also shown, however, is that by combining the question of what motivates the innovation with the question of which actors participate in the different stages of the innovation process, a pattern appears that reveals ambiguous accountability.

Firstly, a prominent feature of the seven innovation processes is the importance of the professional standards of the staff and the staff's wish to do a decent job according to them. This was described as a *professional conscience*, that had been internalised through education and experience. In several cases, this had spurred the innovation process, and the innovation became a means to bridge the gap between the standards and the present situation. While considerations for the users—the pupils, youth, the mentally ill—was the primary concern, staff also had their own and their colleagues' work situations in mind when the ideas for solutions came up.

The role of professionals was important in all the phases of the innovation process, while politicians were mostly absent, and the political bodies did not make any changes to proposals when they were put forward for decision-making. The early shaping of the idea took place in informal settings where no politician except perhaps the mayor was present. Also, in the cases where others, for example the mayor, initiated the innovation, the administration and professional staff in general took part in the development phases. In other words, while the unit leaders and the professionals—the ordinary employees—were to a quite large extent involved in the initiation and development phases of the innovation, the ordinary politicians were only involved in the decision making phase. This gave professional accountability a lot of weight when the real decisions about the shape and function of the innovation were being made.

Secondly, the analysis has shown that political involvement in innovation development seems very much to be a matter for the mayors, the elite among local politicians. One obvious explanation for this is that the mayor holds a full time position while the council members do not. Another may be that this is the usual way of forming local policy.

The mayor/mayors played an important role in several of these case studies, and were in some of the cases also identified as a driving force in the process. This is not surprising, as Norwegian mayors have a long tradition of engaging actively in developmental work in the municipalities (Sandberg and Ståhlberg, 2001; Buck and Willumsen, 2012). Only in two of the cases was the local council informed during the development process. Hence, when the innovation arrived for decision in the local council, it seemed in general to be "finished", developed, in the sense that it was ready for the implementation process. Though in a couple of

instances the innovation was subject to heavy debate in the local council, in none of the seven cases did the debate lead to substantial changes. The discussion of possible solutions, and "exnovations", took place during the earlier phases if they ever happened. The local council was also not an ideal forum for chiselling out particularities of a new service or form of organisation.

The discussion of how to match innovation processes with those of representative democracy is multi-faceted, and we are still in early stages of gathering empirical knowledge about the interconnectedness of the two. Concerning further development and research, this paper points in two directions. Firstly, there is little information about how mayors actually work in innovation processes. Though a substantial body of research on mayors has been carried out in Europe over the last decades (Reynart et al., 2009; Steyver et al., 2008; Aarsæther and Mikalsen, 2015), this has concentrated on the formal framing of political leadership. It is clear from this analysis that their involvement in the innovations may be one expression of leadership. From both a democracy and an innovation perspective, more knowledge of whether the mayors take on a function of bridging between democracy and innovation, and also between conflicting values, would be useful.

The second line of development and research could be exploration of the connection between elected politicians and professionals. The professionals whose internalised values challenge established services seem, to a large degree, to be the unit leaders. Those are not the leaders that routinely meet the political bodies or report directly to them. At the same time, ordinary politicians are absent from the innovation processes. A very simple line of reasoning tells us that there could be democratic as well as innovative potential in investigating the possibilities for connecting the two. This could lead to new reflections on the motivation of the innovations. As the analysis has shown, motivation was an important driving force, as it did not seem to change during the process of shaping the innovation.

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