

Councillors' attitude to citizen participation in policymaking as a driver of, and barrier to, democratic innovation

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ABSTRACT

How can elected representatives' attitude to citizen participation in policymaking function as a driver of, and barrier to, democratic innovation? This paper aims to answer this question and empirically assess local councillors' views on innovative efforts to enhance citizens' participation in interactive governance processes in Norway. Unlike the bulk of previous research, which has focussed on the potential impact of citizen participation, this paper contributes to the understanding of what politicians think of the innovative measures. With councillors acting as gatekeepers with respect to democratic innovation, investigating their attitudes can help clarify why democratic renewal is or is not being prioritised. The findings of this empirical study on attempts to introduce new participatory initiatives in four Norwegian municipalities indicate that local politicians see an urgent need to innovate in order to increase public problem-solving capacity and efficiency; however, they are less concerned about strengthening democracy in and of itself. In addition, established democratic structures prevent elected representatives from seeing it as desirable or possible to involve citizens more directly in policymaking – even when they acknowledge that there are good reasons for doing so. Furthermore, councillor's attitudes may more generally affect democratic innovation at the local level of government since politicians decide whether and how to promote innovations in a local representative democracy.

Keywords: Democratic innovation, local councillors, interactive policymaking, collaborative governance, institutional design, public sector innovation.

Introduction

Many scholars point to the need for systematic innovation efforts to address complex public challenges in the twenty-first century (Hartley, 2008; Windrum, 2008). For several decades, advocates of New Public Management reforms have argued that innovation in the public sector can be ensured through the introduction of market-based competition, management techniques and organisational models from the private sector (Hartley, 2005; Hartley, Sørensen and Torfing, 2013). Various reform strategies have focussed largely on efficiency and cost-saving measures, due to the assumption that these objectives should and could be realised by public managers through “strategic management”, without elected politicians' involvement (Hood, 1991; Osborne and Gaebler, 1992; Sørensen and Torfing, 2016a: 450). However, there is growing evidence that collaboration is a key driver of public innovation, and new approaches stress the potential benefits of transforming the public sector into an arena for co-creation in which different relevant and affected actors work together in a shared attempt to solve societal challenges (Alford, 2009; Sørensen and Torfing, 2018; Torfing, Sørensen and Røiseland, 2019). It appears that innovative policymaking can be advanced through the expansion of opportunities for elected representatives to be in

continuous dialogue with citizens as stakeholders between elections (Sørensen, 2016; Sørensen and Torfing, 2012; Sørensen and Waldorff, 2014). Based on this concept, traditional democratic institutions seem ill-suited for solving many of today's complex policy problems. Rather than focussing on approaches which curtail democracy, current theoretical thinking focusses on how to deepen democracy through the institutionalisation of collaborative or interactive governance arenas in which citizens and politicians can come together more directly to establish a dialogue and allow creative problem-solving processes to unfold (Fung and Wright, 2003; Hertting and Kugelberg, 2018).

Existing research has focussed largely on how collaboration may enhance public service innovation capacity, while most studies have overlooked the important role of elected representatives as “gatekeepers” with regard to democratic innovation (Hansen, 2005; Lidström, Baldersheim, Hlynisdóttir, Marín and Klimovský, 2016; Sørensen and Torfing, 2011; Sørensen and Torfing, 2016a). At the local level of government, councillors mediate the political impact of new participatory initiatives. They have the mandate to decide whether and how local input – that is, citizens' demands and needs – is transformed into authoritative decisions and local policy reforms (De Groot, Denters and Klok, 2010; Karlsson, 2012). Research has revealed difficulties in encouraging elected politicians to collaborate with citizens as stakeholders: They fear that new participatory forms of democracy threaten their political primacy, and their ambiguous attitude acts as a barrier to the success of interactive policymaking processes (Klijn and Koppenjan, 2000; 2002). However, knowledge of what councillors think with respect to innovative measures aimed at enhancing citizen participation is limited, although it is unlikely to elicit effects if key actors are unwilling or unable to adapt or tolerate democratic reforms or innovations (De Groot, Denters and Klok, 2010). To fill this void, the present study investigated local councillors' attitudes towards citizen participation in policymaking by examining the following research question: How can their attitudes function as both a driver of, and barrier to, democratic innovation?

Elected representatives' attitudes are important for understanding not only why democratic innovations are placed on the agenda – but also why they do not always become a reality or work well. To reach a deeper understanding of the role politicians play as gatekeepers, this study focussed on their willingness and opportunities to collaborate directly with citizens in policy development. The following section theorises the concept of democratic innovation from an interactive governance perspective and illustrates what this entails in terms of institutional design choices, together with potential benefits and problems of involving citizens in policymaking. Next, the overall research project is explained, including how the data were collected and analysed. The main findings stem from an empirical study of attempts to introduce new forms of citizen participation in four Norwegian municipalities. These findings are employed to discuss the above question. The concluding section summarises the findings and suggests avenues for further research.

Theorising democratic innovation

Innovation can be viewed as a “heuristic and pragmatic search for and realisation of new and emergent solutions that disrupt the current way of thinking and doing things and, at least potentially, give us more than we hoped for” (Torfing and Triantafillou, 2016: 1). Pure representative democracies do not necessarily satisfy all needs, and several reasons exist to develop the concept of democracy further (Geißel, 2013). A multiplicity of innovative institutions and processes have been experimented with in various forms worldwide (Smith,

2005). What these new models have in common is that they seek to implement some variety of citizen participation in addition to institutions in a representative democracy. The ultimate goal is to reimagine citizens' role in governance processes by offering them new and increased opportunities to participate in and influence political processes, deliberation and decision-making. Efforts to enhance citizen participation through the proliferation of interactive governance arenas have been given many different names in the literature, including "governance-driven democratisation", "institutional innovations in empowered participatory governance", "participatory innovations", "innovations in democratic governance" and "collaborative policy innovations" (Agger and Sørensen, 2014; Fung and Wright, 2003; Geißel, 2013; Michels, 2011; Warren, 2009). In this paper, democratic innovation is defined as "institutions specifically designed to increase and deepen citizens' participation in the political decision-making process" (Smith, 2009: 1).

Innovation in local representative democracy may be conceived in two ways. First, democratic innovation can be understood as a strategic tool – that is a means for increasing problem-solving capacity and improving efficacy in the policy process. According to this "administrative effectiveness rationale" (Hertting and Kugelberg, 2018: 4), efforts to enhance citizen participation aim at mobilising crucial resources, knowledge and ideas from a plurality of public and private actors to arrive at innovative solutions to complex policy problems (Warren, 2009). Combining representative democracy with continuous citizen participation increasingly is portrayed as a relevant tool for policy development: To help co-create new solutions it is important to bring experiences and perspectives from different voices to the table (Torfing, Peters, Pierre and Sørensen, 2012; Sørensen and Torfing, 2019a). Interactive governance is a way of conducting policies whereby a government involves its citizens in the early stages of public policymaking, during the process of defining problems and exploring solutions (Edelenbos, 1999). Collaboration strengthens the possibility of mutual learning and enables the formation of political compromises that challenge established views and practices (Sørensen and Torfing, 2016b). Extant research shows that stakeholders' involvement enriches policymaking by providing new and different forms of input, which may lead to decisions with a more solid base of support (Røiseland and Vabo, 2016).

Second, increased citizen involvement can be understood as a normative democratic ideal – that is as a way to cure democracy of a democratic deficit and secure all citizens' right to participate on an equal basis. Hertting and Kugelberg (2018) describe this second version as a "democratic revitalisation rationale". The deficit is expressed, for instance, in low voter turnout in municipal elections, decreased party loyalty and dissatisfaction with regular forms of participation. The council's representative role has been challenged because of the decline in electoral turnout and falling party membership, leading to a democratic gap between the government and citizens (De Groot, Denters and Klok, 2010). In addition to evidence of electoral democracy's functional incapacities in complex societies (Warren, 2009), the need for democracy to change is based on the assumption that citizens can and should be able to exert more influence than what is possible in a purely representative model (Pierre and Peters, 2000). Strengthening or deepening citizens' participation in public governance and policy development has the potential to help political processes generate legitimacy and fairness (Pateman, 1970). As a democratic reconstruction strategy, Ansell (2012) claims that by deepening participation and deliberation, collaborative modes of governance seek to expand democratic control and restore trust in government. Some describe interactive policymaking as an injection of direct democracy – or citizen participation – into a decaying system of representation (Edelenbos, van Schie and Gerrits, 2010; Røiseland and Vabo, 2016).

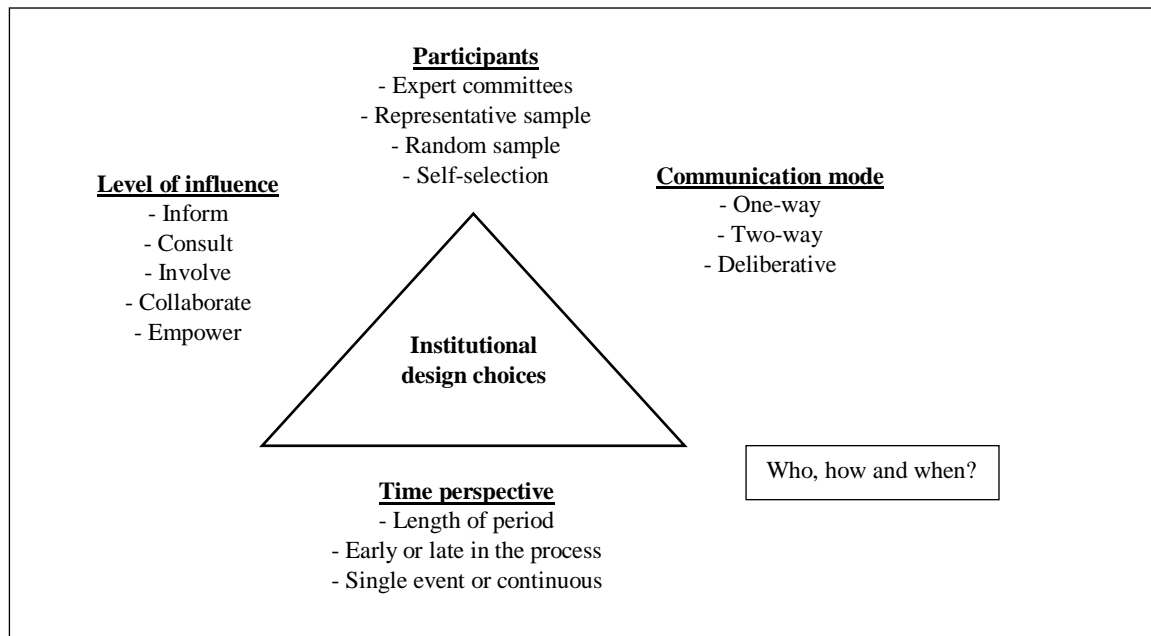
Ambitions are high. These innovation efforts may help in achieving key democratic values, strengthening democratic citizenship and ensuring legitimacy in public governance and politics by bridging the gap between elected representatives and citizens in municipalities. They also can contribute to increased efficiency and real outcomes, e.g., as strategic tools to create better politics. When citizens become involved in political processes, a greater chance exists that they will accept political bodies' decisions and trust the political system in general (Fung, 2015; Klijn and Koppenjan, 2000; Pateman, 1970). In this way, democratic innovation have a potential to mend current democratic malaises and improve the quality of democracy (Geißel, 2013). Moreover, elected representatives continuously must balance and compromise conflicting interests (Rønning, 2017). Thus, they need to be in close dialogue with actors who can provide the input they need to understand societal problems better and develop new solutions. One way to secure this outcome can be to institutionalise interactive governance arenas, and the potential for councillors to benefit from these efforts seems to exist (Sørensen and Torfing, 2018: 356). However, both normative and institutional tensions occur between enhanced citizen participation in policymaking and other fundamental ideas and practices within a representative democracy: In a liberal representative democracy, political will of the people is exercised through elections, citizens are viewed as passive voters and decision-making power is concentrated in elected representatives. In an interactive governance approach, political will is formed through continuous dialogue and cooperation between elected representatives and citizens as stakeholders. It builds on a participatory approach to democracy in which citizen participation is a valuable and legitimate goal in itself; it is educative and encourages civic skills and virtues (Michels, 2011). Critics claim that implementing these reforms entails several democratic risks, for instance, core democratic values, such as transparency and accountability, are jeopardised. According to Hertting and Kugelberg (2018), it is important to take these tensions seriously because they carry practical implications. It is difficult to find a balance between different governance ideals: "What seems to be a legitimate strategy to deepen democracy from one perspective might constitute a road toward undermining crucial democratic structures from another" (Hertting and Kugelberg, 2018: 7).

Nevertheless, today's liberal representative democracy is struggling globally, and political parties have problems maintaining their function as vital channels for public deliberation and participation (Norris, 2011; Offerdal and Ringkjøb, 2002). To cure such democratic ills, many are convinced there is a need for more democracy, e.g., in the sense of direct citizen influence on political decisions (Geißel, 2013). However, attempts to create new institutional arenas that facilitate co-creation in policy development depend on several conditions. At the structural level, different traditions might exist for stakeholder involvement, as well as different legal and institutional conditions for interactive governance. At the individual level, a lack of clear incentives, negative past experiences and strong power asymmetries may exist among involved actors (Ansell and Gash, 2008). This probably makes it difficult to promote the involvement of a plurality of actors in policymaking processes, despite the fact that these new procedures are expected to improve problem-solving capacities and develop effective and legitimate decision-making. More recently, researchers have begun to focus on councillors' role vis-à-vis interactive governance. To organise processes for articulating values and alternatives, elected politicians need a seat at the table and must be prepared to redefine their role – in other words, become initiators and facilitators of public debate and engagement. Moreover, citizens should be viewed as active, informed partners and co-creators instead of passive voters. If not, a danger exists that these initiatives will result in disillusionment and widespread disappointment, ultimately leading to an even greater democratic deficit and further distrust of political institutions (Fung, 2015). Citizen

participation must be supported by institutional rules, norms, and procedures to produce a positive effect in terms of integrating interests and ideas into innovative and sustainable solutions (Torfing and Skelcher, 2010). Therefore, it is important to accentuate the role and impact of the institutional design and structures.

Design choices should be based on the purpose of institutions (Geißel, 2012; Smith, 2009): If the goal is to create new and innovative solutions, i.e. according to the administrative effectiveness rationale, it is probably advantageous to involve citizens with certain knowledge and competencies – preferably to facilitate interaction between people with different roles, identities and resources – as this is a key driver of policy innovation (Sørensen and Waldorff, 2014). However, if the goal is to strengthen democracy according to the democratic revitalisation rationale, by giving citizens affected by political decisions opportunities to increase their influence, a search for these citizens’ preferences may be more appropriate. In any case, several design opportunities exist for municipal councils to include marginal groups if they wish to do so: They have the potential, through institutional design choices, to create more open deliberation that takes the plurality of interests and voices into consideration (Hansen, 2005; Smith, 2009). As illustrated in Figure 1, inspired by Fung’s (2006) “democratic cube” and the IAP2 Spectrum (Nabatchi, 2012), central institutional design choices are related to the following: choosing participants; communication mode; determining the phase or stage of the process, including choosing a time frame; and determining the level of influence or shared decision-making authority given to citizens.

Figure 1: Institutional design choices



In one of the most highly cited and influential articles in the field, Arnstein (1969) illustrates that citizen involvement can range from empty rituals to real control on a ladder of citizen participation. However, self-governance, where the final decision-making power is left in the hands of citizens, is not a feasible option in a complex and fragmented society (Torfing and Skelcher, 2010). Instead, interactive governance revolves around the possibility of partnering with the public in all aspects (Nabatchi and Leighninger, 2015: 251) to make use of citizen participation during the problem-definition phase and exploration (and co-creation) of new, innovative solutions (Klijn and Koppenjan, 2002). Therefore, in this paper, interactive

policymaking is considered distinct from other traditional participatory methods of elucidating citizens as actors who can make choices and exert influence. For instance, interactive policymaking is never merely consultative; it implies moderate-to-high levels of shared decision-making authority and processes that are linked to outcomes. The design of interactive governance processes is directed at allowing involved actors to collaborate and learn about each other – early in the process – to constructively explore differences, derive shared problem definitions and search for new solutions beyond their own limited visions of what is possible (Edelenbos, 1999; Gray, 1989). This requires deliberation, which is a special kind of two-way communication in which problems are explored and solutions are generated through inclusive and respectful considerations of different views (Nabatchi, 2012).

According to Sørensen and Torfing (2019), the adoption of new democratic models presupposes local politicians' willingness to co-create solutions with citizens. For that reason, the present study further investigated elected representatives' attitudes towards innovations in local democracy designed to enhance citizen participation in interactive policy development. After all, it is the councillors who have the authority to decide which way the democratic innovation efforts should go, including what new institutions or processes should look like (i.e. design). Fung (2015) claims that one of the greatest challenges is that those who have the authority and resources to implement new participatory initiatives lack the motivation to do so. There might also be institutional or structural conditions that affect opportunities to promote specific types of democratic innovations at the local government level. Therefore, to provide a theoretical framework for analysing politicians' role as gatekeepers with respect to these types of innovations, both willingness and opportunities are included in the discussion. These concepts are concerned with the relationships between politicians within their surrounding environments. Willingness represents the motives and choice processes that occur within the individual (at the micro level). It is related to calculations of advantages and disadvantages, and costs and benefits, at both the conscious and unconscious levels. Moreover, opportunities refer to possibilities or abilities to make changes if one wants to do so. This represents the macro level, such as formal and informal institutions or structural factors that may limit politicians' attitudes and behaviour (Siversen and Starr, 1990: 49). Rationality norms have emerged within the system over a long period of time and are built into established institutions, e.g., laws, norms, values and moral codes, which guide municipal actors. Furthermore, this process may have created built-in resistance, which makes municipalities fervently resist demands for change. As local councillors cannot step outside of institutional structures, they cannot make completely free design choices – in other words, they are influenced by cultural notions and the “logic of appropriateness” (March and Olsen, 1989). The dynamics of design choices are embedded in local councillors' image of the world or in the individual situation involved.

Methodology

The empirical data is derived from a case study, the primary objective of which was to examine and understand what institutional prerequisites need to be in place to enable collaborative governance initiatives to take place. The goal was to develop new empirical and theoretical insights regarding innovation in a local representative democracy setting by providing local councils in four Norwegian municipalities with scientific knowledge regarding political and democratic innovation. The biggest municipality comprises more than 100,000 residents, while each of the other three municipalities have fewer than 15,000 residents. The study was undertaken over a period of more than two years, from the summer

of 2015 to the autumn of 2017. In all four municipalities, the administration was very ambitious regarding involving citizens, placing the councillors in a situation where they had to express their sentiments towards democratic innovations that promote co-created policymaking between elected representatives and citizens. It was important to find and select municipalities that were motivated and interested in joining the research project, as they represent both crucial and most-likely cases (Gerring, 2007). This characterizes the municipalities in this study: They wished to participate. They are not to be seen as a representative sample of Norwegian municipalities, since they were chosen due to their more positive attitude compared to the average municipality. These types of “critical cases” are valuable for testing theoretical assumptions in practice because they make it possible to draw conclusions, for instance, “If this is (not) valid for this case, then it applies to all (no) cases” (Flyvbjerg, 2006: 230). That made these municipalities particularly relevant for studying councillors’ attitudes.

An approach relying on qualitative methods was chosen because the main objective was to understand what local politicians think about intentional efforts to enhance citizen participation. An initial round of interviews was conducted in August and September 2015 just before local elections. During this phase, I interviewed 29 members of the executive boards of all four municipalities. In Norwegian municipalities, these boards comprise one quarter of the municipal council and are proportionally composed to reflect the relative strength of the political parties represented on the council. The members of the executive boards comprise the most central politicians from these parties, and they all have a formal leader role. The selection of informants made it possible to gain insight into their experiences and what they think about the needs and conditions for democratic renewal. I interviewed six of seven municipal executive board members in the three smallest municipalities, but was not given the opportunity to talk to everyone. However, I do not believe that this affected the results because politicians from all parties were represented. In the largest municipality, I interviewed all political group leaders, the mayor, deputy mayor and two committee managers. The interviews lasted between 40 and 90 minutes each and were held in meeting rooms at the four respective city halls. In 2016 and the first half of 2017, the lead academic behind the study helped the municipal administrations plan and facilitate several seminars and workshops in which the local councils were exposed to knowledge and examples of democratic innovations. In addition to the lead academic, other researchers and practitioners from Norway and Denmark presented lectures on these days. I returned to the municipalities in the fall of 2017 for the second round of interviews – nine interviews with both politicians from the executive board and others from the municipal administrations who were in charge of the project. These lasted between 30 and 55 minutes each. Table 1 provides an overview of the study’s empirical data.

Despite some action research elements in the research design, the seminars and workshops did not result in any changes or new practices in the four municipalities. Instead, the municipal actors described these activities as isolated events. Nevertheless, this affected the research process in different ways. The case study started with certain assumptions and expectations based on theory, and these were tested in dialogue with the empirical data (Alvesson and Kärreman, 2007). The production of knowledge went back and forth between theory and empirical data, and data collection and analysis have been a continuous process. Findings from the analysis of 29 interviews with members of executive boards and empirical impressions from observations led to new research questions and theoretical perspectives. At the beginning of the project, I had assumed that the seminars and workshops would result, for example, in the facilitation of interactive governance processes, but nothing happened. This

changed both the theoretical and analytical concepts and categories, and conversely influenced how I interpreted the empirical material from the following interviews. I became more aware of how efforts to enhance citizen participation in policy development affect key principles in a local representative democracy, and this had great importance for the conclusions at the end.

Table 1: Data collected in each of the four municipalities

	Municipal 1 (biggest)	Municipal 2	Municipal 3	Municipal 4 (smallest)
Interviews with members of the executive boards	11 (August 2015)	6 (September 2015)	6 (August 2015)	6 (August 2015)
Observations of seminars and workshops in the municipalities	1 (August 2016)	2 (September 2016; March 2017)	3 (February 2016; April 2016; November 2016)	0
Interviews with politicians and administrators	1 (October 2017)	4 (November 2017)	3 (December 2017)	1 (October 2017)

Although the empirical study was conducted in Norway, I expect there to be some similarities in other countries with a similar democratic institutional structure. All countries in Europe have local government systems based on representative democracy, the cornerstone of which is that elected councillors – whom citizens can hold accountable – make the most important municipal decisions (Lidström, et al., 2016). Characteristics of “the social-democratic model” in Nordic countries are that the public sector carries much of the responsibility for establishing, financing and providing welfare services (Esping-Andersen, 1990). As Norway is a decentralised and strong welfare state, its local governments play a formal and central role: Elected political boards at the municipal level decide the extent and form of openness towards democratic renewal. This probably means that the role of councillors’ perceptions may face some of the same drivers and barriers to democratic innovations in other European countries as well.

Findings

In the analysis below, I will first consider the findings as they relate to the four chosen aspects of institutional design: the selection of participants, communication mode, time perspective and level of influence. Then I will move on to analyse how drivers and barriers to increased citizen participation in policy development may have something to do with both politicians’ willingness and opportunities, and finally discuss local councillors’ role as gatekeepers with respect to these kinds of innovation efforts.

A broad overview shows that the elected representatives in the study generally are enthusiastic about the idea of “involving” more actors and resources in the development of new solutions, which is in keeping with the municipalities’ high level of ambition for participatory innovation. In particular, they focus on how this may increase the applicability of the solutions and create greater ownership in the population. They are very concerned with strengthening user involvement in terms of specific municipal services, particularly the potential for improving efficiency and cost effectiveness. However, in terms of co-creating

new policy solutions with citizens in interactive governance processes, the politicians are hesitant – or, in some cases, downright reluctant. Findings from the first round of interviews indicate that the theoretical flow of new approaches to citizen participation, such as facilitating interactive governance processes, faces resistance owing to politicians' institutionalised beliefs and thoughts (Sønderskov, 2019). Despite the great enthusiasm shown at seminars and workshops, this study's findings show that certain design choices are easier and more desirable than others.

Regarding different design choices, each municipal council needs to consider how to select participants. At the seminars and workshops, politicians talked about the importance of inviting citizens directly – not just throwing the ball but seeking out invitees: “It is easier to attend when you have been invited”. The following quotation is an example of a perceived need to experiment with new selection methods:

The way it works today, it is the resourceful ones, the ones who are used to working in a bureaucratic system, who can figure out how to influence the processes. Although we have open meetings, not everyone wants to go to such a meeting. You know who shows up. You cannot reach all groups.

Another interviewee underlined that one must choose selection methods that are based on what the goal is – whether it is to let people sign up or to invite someone who is relevant to the issue at hand. Moreover, several formal participation arenas already exist in the municipalities, such as committees at schools and in kindergartens. One politician reflected on opportunities to use these arenas to a greater extent. In addition, he underlined a need to be creative in finding ways to involve new voices:

Sometimes it is very important to bring in those who are not represented in any formal arenas, right: How can you reach them, and how can they be representative of more than just themselves?

This empirical quotation illustrates a pervasive finding: Generally, the politicians are worried about the representativeness of participatory or collaborative processes. They are acutely aware of possible selection bias and the fact that existing formal arenas, such as public meetings, exclude many people: “It is not a natural way of working together for us humans, not being allowed to say anything”, one said. Another politician emphasised the importance of involving citizens more directly because people are getting involved anyway. If elected representatives ignore demands and needs in the community, citizens engage negatively, for instance, through protests – either in rallies covered in newspaper reports or via Facebook posts and groups. However, people's desire to join political parties is declining. According to one interviewee, this means “you have to stick your finger in the ground and find other ways to engage people. As a politician, this is our responsibility”.

When it comes to the communication mode, local politicians want dialogue, but they generally are most concerned about listening. At the seminars and workshops, they agreed that “after all we are citizens as well” and “we have to dare to discuss with other people”. When citizens have a sense of being seen, heard and understood, they will be more motivated to participate. However, this was not emphasised in the individual interviews: Discussions about political solutions with citizens, who have no democratic mandate, were not perceived as appropriate or legitimate behaviour. This reaction is partly based on a widespread challenge to move on from complaining to conversations and discourse. Moreover, improving

communication with citizens is a key aspect that they viewed as having great potential to elicit improvements. Citizens should not feel that “this is just an exercise in duty”, and improving communication is a task for politicians and administrators:

Politicians and the administration both have to help to say properly what is happening and inform the citizens before things are decided. They have to underline that this is a suggestion, and we are open to input – what do you guys think about it? And then make it clear: If you want to wield influence, you have to say it now. Maybe we are not good enough at explaining the consequences.

Councillors believe that it is important for citizens to understand the municipality’s complexities and the challenges that politicians face, including the numerous considerations, priorities and difficult choices that local politicians must make. Elected representatives are just people who work voluntarily for the good of the municipality: “But today, it is very easy to shoot a local politician for the choices he makes, or the choices he does not make”. One interviewee claimed that it is about “making the politician’s role a bit less dangerous” because (in Norway), “people do not stand in line to be put on lists for election”. Instead, political parties often must search for people who want to do their duty by being elected for a period of time. If politicians’ role was made less daunting, perhaps it could stimulate the development of a democracy in which more people want to participate in political activities.

Several politicians also considered opportunities for facilitating citizen involvement by using new digital solutions that make it possible to provide input in a simpler way. Councillors expressed a need to know what is going on in the local community, e.g., to determine the issues that people are concerned about and, thus, stay ahead of what is happening. Digitalisation may enable people to submit input directly to a digital municipal council portal, where political leaders can access it ahead of municipal council meetings.

Regarding the time perspective or timeliness, one interviewee said that it is very important to include citizen groups early on to avoid “a reactive democracy”. Consensus exists in the empirical material about the fact that citizens often get involved too late in the process because politicians and administrations already are “locked into certain patterns they cannot change”. However, many interviewees also agreed that if citizens are invited to participate too early in the process, the issues may not yet be sufficiently concrete, possibly preventing the effective use of input. Nevertheless, participation measures used today are stand-alone and momentary events. They are not permanent or institutionalised, and no efforts exist to give citizens more continuous and direct influence in decision-making processes. At the seminars and workshops, this was an issue of discussion:

If we are to improve on this, we cannot be ad hoc with citizen involvement. It should be a requirement and be included in all political matters. We should always have an answer to the question, “how have we carried out citizen involvement in this matter”? We need a strategy for that.

Generally, local councillors talked about citizen participation in terms of informing or consulting. For instance, they conduct start-up meetings on planning work or have idea meetings for situations in which they know something will happen, for example in connection with the closure of a school or nursing home. One interviewee described these meetings as innovative: The municipality invites people to come up with good ideas about the use of public property and buildings. However, no deliberation or co-creation occurs between

citizens and politicians in these arenas. Instead, the meetings are perceived as a way to bring people around, where elected representatives can inform and justify decisions that have already been made. The interviewed politicians view their role as elected representatives in a traditional way – as sovereign decision-makers who carry all the responsibilities of public policymaking. Moreover, they stated that these meetings have a minimal impact on formal decision-making processes. One reason for this is illustrated as follows:

I think citizen involvement is very healthy in terms of anchoring decisions, but only to some extent. Because in the role of an elected representative you are elected for a certain party programme. You are elected to some political positions you do not really have the mandate to change during the election period, although the involvement of citizens says otherwise. As a politician, I cannot change my view because I have to stand for the party's politics.

Even though most politicians brought up the idea of involvement, they were afraid to raise expectations too high because they believe that citizens expect their representatives to listen and do as they say. This is why several pointed to the important task of clarifying realistic alternatives, including room for municipal action. Again, they proposed developing a strategy to formalise citizen participation, but they were not sure how to get people to spend time on political engagement, as illustrated below:

It probably has something to do with transferring a small degree of decision-making authority, but I am not sure how to do it, because it is elected politicians who are responsible anyhow.

To sum up, politicians want to try new selection methods to avoid the selection bias that occurs when participants are self-selected. However, they have doubts about how this can be done due to concerns about representativeness in discussing participatory initiatives. Local councillors see an urgent need to improve communication with citizens, especially to make it possible for these leaders to know what citizens are concerned about and what their opinions are on different matters. New digital solutions were highlighted as a way to achieve this. They surmised that it may be beneficial to involve citizens earlier in the process, but no one mentioned the possibility of collaborating more directly in a two-way communication mode during the early phase of exploring problems and developing new solutions. This is probably related to the fact that these councillors do not think it is possible or desirable to share decision-making authority with citizens in policy-development. Not surprisingly, this idea is perceived as radical from the politicians' perspective. Below, I further highlight councillors' attitudes as a driver of, and barrier to, interactive policymaking in a local representative democracy.

In short, politicians acknowledged that good reasons exist to facilitate greater citizen involvement and promote public engagement: "We do not have the answer to everything, so we need to interact with people outside of city hall". Among other things, they pointed to possibilities of creating more nuanced debates and greater ownership of solutions, as well as bringing legitimacy to the choices that are made. As one politician stated: "The parties are far from good enough to cover all the issues, so we must bring people together to create new policies". During the seminars and workshops, politicians described the public as extremely resourceful and competent. Moreover, they believe that people will better understand and accept decisions if they are more directly involved. The interviewees want citizens to provide input on political issues that matter to them:

We must join the people and have good conversations. We need to ask three simple, important questions: What are you interested in, why are you interested in this, and how can we solve it? Then we can begin to explain how things are related. It is these conversations that get people engaged and are likely to increase turnout without having to run party politics, but saying what the municipality actually does and what our plan is.

However, this analysis reveals several challenges related to increased citizen participation in policy development. Generally, the barriers identified seemingly entail elected representatives' opinions regarding such efforts. Personal experiences of traditional public hearings and meetings have created certain assumptions about citizens: Politicians do not believe that people want to participate or even possess the necessary skills to participate (Sønderskov, 2019). This may influence how they think about the possibilities of co-creating policy solutions with citizens. Table 2 summarises the main findings.

Table 2: Summary of main findings

	Drivers	Barriers
Willingness	<p>Councillors are interested in trying out new selection methods (to avoid selection bias)</p> <p>They think it may increase the accuracy of solutions and improve efficiency</p> <p>They think it may create greater ownership and teach citizens about the complexity of political issues</p> <p>They think it is important to avoid a “reactive” democracy</p>	<p>Councillors are sceptical about handing over real opportunities for citizens to exert an influence</p> <p>They regard discussing policy solutions with citizens as inappropriate behaviour</p> <p>They do not necessarily think it will have any democratic or administrative benefits</p> <p>They are afraid that it will raise (too) high expectations</p>
Opportunities	<p>They need a strategy for citizen involvement to get participation measures institutionalized</p>	<p>They do not have the mandate to change party political views or positions anyway</p>

Nothing in the data suggests that political party affiliation affects politicians' attitudes towards citizen involvement in policymaking. However, the lack of sufficient knowledge and skills of interactive governance and co-creation seems to be an important factor in elected representatives' willingness to involve citizens in the development of new political solutions. When councillors talked about the idea of connecting more directly with citizens in policy development, they generally seemed to think of this as being tantamount to informing or consulting. Nevertheless, during the project, the municipal councils were introduced to the idea of using new institutional designs to allow citizens to be more involved personally in crafting policy. One concrete example presented to them was the use of task committees in Danish municipalities. These are open and thematic ad hoc committees that provide problem-specific arenas that facilitate collaboration between politicians and other actors. This model was also relatively successful after its adoption and implementation in Norway's Svelvik municipality (Sørensen and Torfing, 2019a: 2019b). Furthermore, the interviewed politicians did not have any personal experience with these kinds of models. However, the findings show that they do like the idea, though they are not sure to what degree citizens' participation in policy development can be enhanced and whether it is desirable. While theories and results from empirical studies indicate that they have something to gain, e.g., in the form of better

and more accurate solutions, greater trust and ownership, elected politicians are cautious, and possibly with good reason. Innovation is always risky.

Discussion

The idea of combining existing representative institutions with continuous citizen participation in interactive arenas leads to tension and conflict in numerous areas. This study's findings indicate that local councillors see an urgent need to innovate and co-create solutions and services with different kinds of actors to increase problem-solving capacity and efficiency. This need reflects a widespread economic or administrative effectiveness rationale – that is, politicians consider democratic innovation as a strategic tool. However, the elected representatives are less concerned with values related to the need to strengthen democracy in and of itself (i.e. the democratic revitalisation rationale). Inviting new voices into policymaking processes does not make much sense in a context where party politics loom large, as outcomes from interactive or collaborative processes may be at odds with party agendas, electoral promises or government statements. From a strategic perspective, involving more people with different views might make it even more difficult to overcome partisan political issues. Councillors are not pragmatic in their manner of thinking about those with whom they collaborate and in what ways: They are “selling” packages of political goods to their voters and fighting for their party's politics – something that is not surprising in a liberal representative democracy. Nevertheless, this means that elected representatives are not very concerned about working together in a shared attempt to find new solutions.

The study's findings indicate that even where municipalities as organisations have high ambitions for involving citizens in policymaking, elected representatives may lack the motivation for doing so. Furthermore, local politicians are more concerned with securing representativeness than seeking new or marginalised voices. This may indicate local politicians' awareness of power imbalances when people are invited to participate: They want to protect existing democratic institutions from boisterous, self-interested citizens – namely those who always show up when municipalities invite people to participate. Regarding councillors' opportunities to change the processes, the findings show that formal and informal institutional structures (e.g. rules, norms, and culture) may both hinder and foster politicians' ability to undertake democratic innovation efforts. First, the culture of representative democracy is not particularly stimulating from an innovation perspective. As long as elected representatives receive mainly positive feedback on timesaving and cost-effective solutions during a four-year election term, they probably will not spend much time and energy on developing long-term and sustainable societal solutions. If the incentives to change are weak, councillors stick to the beaten path and this limits the potential for democratic innovation. The findings show that when these local politicians calculate the pros and cons of different alternatives, they view the costs (economic, time resources and risks) associated with implementing new democratic models as too high compared to any possible gains. Existing models get precedence, and the municipalities continue to operate the same way as before.

Second, resistance to the idea of enhanced citizen participation in policymaking can be attributed to internalised role perceptions, which influence local politicians' notions of what is possible or desirable. Interactive governance ideas challenge fundamentally rooted ideas about representative democracy – ideas about roles, mandates and accountability relations among politicians and citizens (ref. normative and institutional tensions). These ideas are built into established government systems and create resistance to innovation, even though municipal actors may want to change. Cultural notions and the logic of appropriateness

influence politicians' beliefs about what is legitimate behaviour as an elected representative in a liberal democracy, and this may be an independent explanation related to their role as gatekeepers with regard to democratic innovations: It is not necessarily because local councillors are deliberately unwilling to co-create solutions with citizens. Rather, institutionalised thoughts and beliefs make it difficult to enter and participate in new collaborative arenas. Therefore, it is important to add explicit social norms, rules and role perceptions to the theoretical discussion about institutional design related to these innovative efforts.

Although it has been claimed that representative democracy is in a need of renewal and that innovative potential is bigger when citizens interact more directly with elected representatives, this study's findings suggest that existing institutions cause local politicians to block the development of new forms of democracy. They may be willing to co-create solutions with citizens, but ideals in a local representative democracy make it difficult – that is, strong beliefs in representative democratic norms and rules distance politicians from citizens.

Conclusion

Efforts to introduce new forms of citizen participation may foster effective solutions and increase problem-solving capacity at the local government level. Further, they can be a way to enhance the deliberation and democratic influence of citizens in policymaking processes, which may ensure the legitimacy of public governance and politics. This paper contributes to the discussion about politicians' role vis-à-vis interactive governance, particularly in answering the following question: How can local councillors' attitudes to citizen participation in policymaking function as a driver of, and barrier to, democratic innovation? The findings show that while elected representatives like the idea of inviting citizens into the process of developing public services or policies, they are uncertain about the extent to which it is feasible or desirable to collaborate more directly with citizens in such processes. Local councillors believe that the costs and risks are too high compared to possible gains. Moreover, internalised role perceptions affect notions of willingness and opportunity: Politicians do not perceive it as appropriate behaviour to interact with citizens in interactive arenas. Although legal conditions for collaborative forms of governance exist in Norway, negative past experiences at public meetings and a lack of clear incentives at the individual level affect politicians' attitudes towards democratic innovation. This likely also affects decisions regarding institutional design.

Although the municipalities in this study wished to participate in a research project and were expected to have a positive view of innovative measures for enhancing citizens' participation in policymaking, the findings reveal that elected representatives are hesitant to embrace democratic innovation. However, it is a question not only of willingness – namely, personal interests or motives – but also of perceived opportunities in a local democracy. From the elected representatives' point of view, local democracy is, first and foremost, a representative democracy where citizens exert influence by voting and joining political parties. This rationale is strongly institutionalised and combining representative models of democracy with participatory approaches seems difficult. Innovation theory tends to underestimate the time perspective, but this study highlights that innovations in a local representative democracy will likely require a long-term maturation process with an uncertain chain of events. If key municipal actors, such as local councillors, are unwilling or unable to

promote democratic innovations, it is unlikely that institutional changes will yield new practices because of their role as gatekeepers. Future research should account for this factor, as it is a matter of negotiating different ideas and perceptions concerning both politicians' and citizens' roles and the relation between them.

Another question to be answered in future is how we support local councillors in managing new expectations concerning their role. Citizens' participation does not necessarily mean politicians' loss of control or decision-making power. In any case, politicians continue to play a unique role in a representative democracy: They have the authoritative power and are substantive decision-makers at the end of the policymaking processes. However, we might need to provide them with access to resources (time, money and knowledge), in addition to interactive political leadership skills, if they are to facilitate and participate in co-created policy development with citizens. Compared to Danish municipalities, for example, with their widespread use of task committees, local politicians in Norway lack experience with citizen participation in policymaking. This may be one explanation for the differences between Nordic countries when it comes to local politicians' attitudes to collaborative governance initiatives.

This study suffered from several limitations that must be addressed in future research. First, it was mostly based on interview data. Further research could include observations of interactions between politicians and citizens within new collaborative arenas. Second, the views of elected representatives from four Norwegian municipalities were studied. Future research on democratic innovation in European countries will require a broader scope with a comparative element, and it may need to rely on quantitative data as well.

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