Democratic accountability in decentralized governance

Paper to be presented at XV Nordiske Kommunalforskerkonference
Odense, Denmark, 24-26 November 2006.

Anders Hanberger

Umeå Centre for Evaluation Research, Umeå University, Sweden

Mail to anders.hanberger@ucer.umu.se
Introduction

One way to deal with governance problems and improve public policy could be to strengthen public review for accountability. However, there is also a need to critically analyze the implications of the audit or review society (cf. Power, 1997). Policy analysts and evaluation researchers, in particular, have a responsibility to illuminate the accountability trend and critically examine its consequences. Thus, there is a need to study the implications of existing public review from different point of view, and not take the assumptions of the audit society uncritically.

Democratic governance is changing and there is a need to illuminate and discuss the conditions for democratic accountability in different types of governance. Edward Weber, who is concerned with the changing conditions for accountability, talks about the need for developing an effective system of accountability “….in a world of decentralized governance, shared power, collaborative decision processes, results-oriented management, and broad civic participation?” (Weber, 1999:451). At present, traditional government and new modes of governance continue living side by side. However, the problem of accountability is not the same in new modes of governance compared with traditional government. Although democratic governance has developed in a number of directions, the way citizens can hold those responsible accountable has more or less stayed the same. When citizens vote in elections they are assumed to also hold the government accountable for the execution of power (cf. Behn, 2001; Hutchings, 2003; Mulgan, 2000). This is the formal way citizens can hold the elected to account for public policies implemented during the last three or four years. Between elections it is assumed that citizens have delegated the accountability function to public reviewers (state inspectors, auditors and the media) and the elected representatives. In other words citizens are most of the time not given an opportunity to act as a principal and accountability holder. However, the formal accountability system is being challenged in the practice of public policy (cf. Weber, 1999). Instead of waiting for the next election citizens search ways to hold those in power accountable and by doing so they reclaim their principal role. In participatory policy making accountability and coming to judgement about what course of action to take is more or less integrated. Then the traditional notion of principal and agents is not quite appropriate to use.

The central arena of democratic accountability, in a representative democracy, is the political assembly. However, it is not sufficient to limit the discussion about democratic accountability to the formal, prescribed institutions which give the elected representatives the role of holding the administration accountable for policy implementation and citizens the role of holding the elected to account for general direction of public policy in elections (Behn, 2001; Mulgan, 2000). Generally, citizens do not conceive the elected representatives to be the only accountability holdees. They are inclined to think that administrators and professionals share responsibility and should be held accountable for policy implementation directly. In practice, many citizens search direct ways to hold, not only politicians but also administrators and professionals, accountable for policy and program decisions.

From a citizen perspective, one can say that democratic accountability can be performed in two ways, the direct and the indirect way (cf. Behn, 2001:125; Weber:1999:453). Citizens can, besides voting in elections, take direct accountability action by talking directly to a
responsible politician or write in a newspaper to bring attention to bad performance, for example. A citizen organisation can arrange a public hearing, or undertake a citizen inspection of the situation in schools, nurseries, the local traffic situation, for examples. The indirect way refers to when public reviewers, on behalf of citizens, scrutinize the elected representatives and the administration.

The traditional accountability system relies heavily on mandated public reviewers inquiries and accounts, and the formal democratic accountability function is mainly based on written political accounts (cf. Hutchings, 2003:3; March & Olsen, 1995:141pp). Unfortunately, from a citizen perspective, these accounts are primarily compiled for the elected representatives, to be used in holding the administration to account. The same accounts could of course be used by citizens when they vote, but they have limited value for citizens. Local government audit reports, for example, are not easily accessible, issue-focused and hard to put in context. Furthermore, the reports are not written in a language that the ordinary citizen can understand, and few citizens are informed that such accounts exist (Hanberger et al, 2005). For citizens the reports have minor value as a source for making accountability assessments. Obviously, the current accountability system is not primarily designed to meet the needs of citizens directly.

The purpose of this paper is to discuss democratic accountability in decentralized governance and to contribute to public review and policy evaluation methodology. The paper consists of three parts. The first part deals with different notions of democratic accountability. The second part discusses democratic accountability in decentralised governance more specifically, and the third part discusses how public reviewers, operating in decentralised governance in Sweden, impact local government policy and democracy.

**Rethinking democratic accountability**

It is not the aim of this paper to discuss all kinds of democratic accountability relations and mechanisms. Mainly, the interest is on how citizens can hold those responsible for public policy accountable, and more specifically accountable for public policy in decentralised governance. Due to changes in democratic governance there is a need to reconsider accountability from new perspectives. Rethinking democratic accountability includes ways that citizens participating in public policy and sharing responsibility with other policy makers can hold and be held accountable. Democratic dialogue (Mulgan, 2000) is then included in the notion of democratic accountability. Rethinking democratic accountability implies adopting the concept to a dynamic environment. Citizens participating in public policy and sharing responsibility should then be included in the concept.

The meaning of *accountability* has extended in several directions during the last decades (Behn, 2001; March & Olsen, 1995; Mulgan, 2000; Weber, 1999). The word accountability has its roots in the Latin *computare*. *Com* means together and *putare* count or consider (Behn, 2001:7). The traditional notion of accountability, referring to external scrutiny and counting,
is based on the assumption of a clear distinction between politics and administration (Finer, 1941; Mulgan, 2000).¹

Democracy has a core meaning which has extended in different directions. Mainly, ‘democracy’ refers to a regime where the people or “demos” govern public affairs. Today a distinction can be made between three notions of democracy: the elitist, the participatory and the deliberative or discursive (Dryzek, 1996, 2000). These notions of democracy are not contradictory to representative democracy but indicate three different directions which a democracy can take (Hanberger, 2001, 2006b). Accountability should be considered in relation to different notions of democracy because the conditions for accountability vary in different models of democracy.

The traditional notion of democratic accountability refers to ways that citizens can control its government and the mechanisms for doing this. According to Edward Weber, the meaning of the term has shifted over time and “Each conceptualization emphasizes different institutions and locates the ultimate authority for accountability in differing combinations and types of sectors (public, private, intermediary), processes, decision rules, knowledge, and values” (Weber, 1999:453). He distinguishes between five conceptualizations of democratic accountability (ibid.) and is most concerned with accountability in Grassroots Ecosystem Management (GREM). The ‘GREM’ conceptualization of accountability implies shared authority between levels of government, and between government and citizens. It is not the aim of this paper to discuss all aspects of democratic accountability. Mainly, the focus is on how citizens can hold those responsible for public policy accountable.

As been said, democratic accountability can refer to either finances, fairness or performance accountability (Behn, 2001). Accountability for finances has to do with controlling how well the responsible individuals or departments have performed their obligations and functions. A key question in this type of accountability is to what extent the resources have been used wisely according to explicit rules, procedures and standards (ibid. p.7). Democratic citizens also have an interest to find out whether those in power, individuals or departments, have paid due attention to ethical standards such as fairness and equity. According to Robert Behn the process of creating accountability for fairness has many similarities with the process of creating accountability for finances. Rules, standards and procedures are set for the values we want an organisation to pay sufficient attention to. In both of these forms of accountability the standards and rules are set to create expectations (ibid.). It is assumed that public organizations shall live up to finances and fairness expectations and that bureaucrats, and professionals, can be held accountable if they do not pay due attention to the rules of conduct.² There is also a need for holding government and public organisations accountable for performance, outcomes and consequences of public policy. As in the first two types of accountability there must be expectations to which performance can be assessed. Performance, however, is not about rules and compliance (ibid.) and can not be evaluated in

¹ Carl Friederich (1940) includes inner responsibility (to conscience, moral values) of civil servants in his use of the term.
² Weber reminds us that peoples’ concern with accountability is much older than democracy and has to do with a fundamental need for controlling misuse of power in all societies. All regimes create procedures for holding those in power to account, that is, for legitimatizing power execution. According to Behn “Accountability for the use (or abuse) of power is nothing more than accountability for finances and fairness” (p.9).
the same manner as accountability for finances and fairness. Setting performance expectations is a critical question in a democracy. For whom and against what should government or governance performance be assessed? It is not reasonable, in all notions of democracy, to just permit those in power to set the expectations and then assess to what extent these have been met. From a participatory or deliberative democratic perspective it is justifiable to permit all those affected by a policy to “contribute feedback” concerning performance. Behn uses the term “360-degree accountability” when referring to feedback from the concerned accountability environment (ibid. p 203).

Following Behn there is a need for introducing a new concept of democratic accountability which changes how we think about the phenomenon. He suggests that democratic accountability should refer to “a compact of mutual, collective responsibility” (ibid, 2001:125). Instead of searching someone to blame and punish it moves attention to the responsibility of all those that constitute the accountability environment, that is, all those affected by public policy. If one views accountability from the perspective of deliberative democracy, for example, collective responsibility comes to the fore. In this notion of democracy, the focus is not to look for individual scapegoats, but to think of justification of public policy and collective responsibility for policy failure and success. A “web of mutual responsibility” implies holding the mandated politicians responsible for imposing additional performance requirements, budget cut backs which make it impossible to achieve the tasks and performance targets that public agencies have been given, for example (ibid).

“Responsibility compact” also includes journalists’ responsibility to highlight any mistakes, failures but also accomplishments and not the least “for educating citizens about who, specifically, will need to do what if government is to improve performance” (ibid. 127). What about citizens themselves – are they included in Behn’s concept? Citizens are definitely part of the accountability environment and citizens have more responsibility than holding the elected to account which implies that participatory and discursive notions of democracy are embedded in Behn’s concept of democratic accountability.

“A compact of mutual, collective responsibility holds citizens responsible and, if necessary, accountable for paying attention not only to agency performance that affects them directly but also to government performance as a whole. It is a compact under which citizens not only have their constitutional right to complain about the poor performance of public agencies but also a democratic obligation to ensure that public agencies have the resources necessary to produce results” (ibid.128).

This argument could be taken a step further to include the implications for accountability of citizen participation in policy making and implementation. Discursive democracy assumes an active and responsible citizenship, and when this is realized in public policy the citizen has a shared responsibility for both failures and achievements. If the traditional notion of

---

3 The word ‘compact’ refers to “an ethical commitment and not a not a legal document”, and ‘responsibility’ refers to “obligations willingly accepted” (in contrast to punishment imposed). The word ‘mutual’ refers to a commitment and “personal sense of duty to others, not a detached debt to some abstract rule”. The word ‘collective’, finally, implies “…that the members of the compact are accepting responsibility as a team and abandoning the search for individual scapegoats.” (Behn, 2001:125)
democratic accountability is extended to include democratic dialogue, the concept becomes useful for all forms of democratic governance.

**Key accountability questions to be considered in democratic accountability**

“Who are accountable” and “to whom are they accountable” are two basic questions that need consideration. The accountability discourse prerequisites two types of actors (Behn, 2001), those that can be held to account, referred to as the accountability holdees, and their counterpart, that is, those holding them to account, the accountability holders.

A distinction should also be made between citizens, elected representatives and civil servants when accountability holdees and holders are discussed. In the traditional system of accountability citizens are accountability holders in relation to the elected representatives whereas the elected politicians are accountability holders in relation to civil servants. In representative democracy citizens’ principal role is assumed to be delegated to the elected politicians through the act of voting in elections. In representative democracy, and mainly in the elitist notion of democracy, citizens are not accountability holdees. However, in participatory and discursive democracy citizens do get involved and take responsibility and by doing so they partly adopt the role of accountability holdee. From a citizen perspective, civil servants are both accountability holdees and holders, but in the formal system of accountability they are only accountability holdees in relation to the elected representatives.

Another issue that needs consideration is that of individual and collective accountability (Behn, 2001; March & Olsen, 1995; Mulgan, 2000). In order to resolve the accountability problem in terms of individual and collective accountability there are at least four options available (SOU:2005, annex 5 p.498):

- institutional accountability (juridical person)
- hierarchical accountability (minister, board president, CEO)
- collective accountability (all individuals of an organisation)
- modified personal accountability

Each type of accountability has its own advantages and disadvantages (ibid.), but these will not be discussed further in this paper except in relation to democratic accountability. If the appropriateness of these options is considered in relation to different notions of democracy, one could assume that in elitist democracy it is most appropriate to demand accountability holdees of flesh and blood, and then the hierarchical and modified personal accountability type would best match this model’s accountability needs. In contrast participatory or discursive democracy goes well together with collective accountability (or perhaps inter-collective accountability would be a better word) and this form of accountability is more in line with an active citizenship and many principals.

“By whom?” is a key question to be consider in all accountability systems. A distinction can be made between public review and reviewers that have a formal commission and those that formulate their commission themselves. Municipality auditors, EU (in Europe) and state inspectors have a formal commission specified in laws and regulations. External evaluators undertake evaluations on commission to meet the knowledge and information need of politicians, officials and other stakeholders. By contrast, citizens, NGOs and the media have
created their own commission. Who carries out a public inquiry, and how, has implications for the account or story that the elected representatives and citizens shall base their accountability decision on.

Accountability “for what” is another key question that should be considered closely. As indicated, “for what” could either refer to “fairness”, “finances” or “performance”. A critical question is who is allowed to decide “for what”. Mainly, one can separate between who set the standards and goals in public policy and who is responsible for the implementation and results and consequences. In practice performance standards and goals are often set by civil servants for which they can not be held accountable. Even if politicians legitimatize policies and performance standards, the implementing agencies escape responsibility. The ideal of a clear division of roles between politics and administration is a fiction (Behn 2001:66). The fact that citizens meet civil servants more often than politicians and the former make binding decisions affecting citizens has become a pressing problem in contemporary democracies. That is, citizens can not hold civil servants and professionals to account for consequences of policy and program implementation.

To sum up, the traditional notion of democratic accountability is too narrow and linked to formal rules and the delegation of power in representative democracy. The concept has to be extended and include democratic dialogue to be useful in representing prevailing forms of accountability in democratic governance.

Democratic accountability in decentralised governance
During the last 30 years there has been a shift away from traditional government to governance in modern democracies (cf. Björk, Bostedt and Johansson, 2003; March and Olsen, 1995; Pierre and Peters, 2000). Governance refers to new emerging institutions that have transformed from established forms of government or evolved independently of the state, including different modes of governing and coordination where public and private institutions and actors are involved (Björk, Bostedt and Johansson, 2003; Pierre and Peters, 2000). Today many levels of government and none governmental institutions and actors are involved in the making and implementation of public policy. Generally, the need for evaluation and new ways of performing accountability grow when new modes of governance and management systems are introduced. Apparently, the intended function and democratic implications are not the same in different models of governance and management systems, and neither are the conditions for accountability. Compare, for example, new public management and Total Quality Management with public policy models in which civil society actors are engaged (cf. Behn, 2001; Berg, 2002; Fischer, 2003; Hanberger, 2001; Karlsson, 2002; Pierre and Peters, 2000; Weber, 1999).

Governance is used in many ways and refers to phenomena such as governing (Jessop, 1998; Stoker, 1998; Pierre and Peters, 2000), policy networks (Rhodes, 1997), public-private partnerships (Wettenhall, 2003), corporate governance (Williamson, 1998), multilevel governance (Hooghe and Marks, 2001), and societal governance (Kooiman, 2000).  

Governance is also now and then used for a new analytical perspective or framework (Pierre and Peters, 2000; Björk, Bostedt and Johansson, 2003). In short, governance has multiple meanings and is an umbrella concept.
Decentralized governance refers, in this paper, to various forms of governance originated from the centre and made for the local and regional level, as well as governance that evolves from the discretion of local and regional government, and governance that develops in local networks and partnerships. Pierre and Peters (2000) discuss governance from a state perspective and separate between four governance structures: hierarchies, markets, networks and communities. These structures or models differ in many respects, for example, concerning the role of the state, the power conditions between institutions/actors and the conditions for accountability (p.67-68). This paper identifies four models of decentralized governance which bear some resemblance with Pierre and Peters’ models. The four models are synthesised to capture prevailing forms of decentralised governance and to facilitate a discussion about democratic accountability in public policy in decentralised governance.

Characteristics of decentralized governance

Governance models generally differ in a number of ways but first of all in terms of who possess power to make binding decisions. Applied to the context of public policy it refers to the actors permitted to participate in and influence policy making. More specifically models of governance differ regarding the legal ground and regulations on which binding decisions are shaped; the democratic orientations that a governance model is oriented towards; the principal-agent relations within the model; the nature of problems that are appropriate to deal with; how the implementation process is expected to work; and not the least the conditions for accountability which is of major concern in this paper.

As indicated earlier democratic governance can be orientated towards different democratic ideals. Similarly, the principle-agent relations are not the same in different models of governance. In any form of democracy and democratic governance, citizens are the first principal. In a representative democracy, however, it is assumed that citizens delegate the principal role to the elected representatives, and that the elected representatives, on behalf of the citizens, act as the second principal between elections. Citizens reclaim the power of holding those in power to account in public elections and referenda. The act of voting is assumed to be sufficient for holding those in power to account in a representative democracy. It is also assumed that citizens again and again approve to give up the principal-ship to the elected representatives. However, in prevailing forms of decentralised governance and public policy a growing number of citizens are no longer satisfied of being consumers of public goods and voters. Some citizens consider getting involved in public policy as a duty and part of what it is to be a citizen. Active citizens also reclaim the role of principal in the practice of public policy. In fact there is an emerging gap between citizens that get engaged in public policy to search legitimate solutions to real world problems and who are prepared to think in new ways about democratic accountability and share responsibility for success and failure in public policy, and citizens that think it is sufficient to just act as principal in elections. In addition, there are citizens that turn their back against politics and do not care about performing its democratic accountability role at all.

referring both to a new analytic framework for analysing different modes of steering and coordination, and a concept referring to different modes of governing where public and private institutions and actors are involved (Pierre and Peters, 2000; Björk, Bostedt and Johansson, 2003). In this paper, governance refers to the second meaning, i.e., an empirical phenomenon that can appear in various forms.
Illuminating an existing or new governance model’s accountability condition includes clarifying the accountability holdees and holders, the accounts applied for collecting information and knowledge about policy implementation and outcomes, and the mechanisms for accountability (Ahlbäck, 1999).

Democratic accountability in four models of decentralized governance

This paper is not discussing all forms and aspects of decentralised governance. The focus is on public policy and the discussion is limited to conditions for democratic accountability in four models or ideal types of decentralised governance.

Compared with Pierre and Peters’ classification of governance, the EU-, state- and the local-regional government model, the first three models discussed below, can be understood as three subtypes of hierarchies, whereas the fourth, the multi-actor model, is a model that takes into account both governance through networks and governance through communities. To be clear, these models are ideal types developed for analytical purpose. In practice decentralized governance can have most in common with one or more models. All four models could be recognized in decentralized governance if a region is eligible for EU grants, if not the EU-model is not applicable.

What then are the most important characteristics of the four models? The first form of decentralized governance refers to policies and programmes initiated by the European Union. Although the entire EU project consists of a broad range of collaboration and policy making at different levels of governance, one can also delineate a decentralized EU governance model. Public policy, in the European context, is made and implemented by a number of actors and agencies both from the member states, at different levels, and from the EU. Policy and programme processes follow multiple procedures and trajectories.

“The preparatory, decision making and implementing institutions supplement and rely upon each other, but they also have relative autonomy and are unable to control each other.” (Sand, 1997)

The EU model synthesised in this paper refers to EU policies, programs or projects targeting the local/regional level. The first principal in this model is the citizen and the elected representatives in the member states’ parliaments and the EU parliament are the second principals. However, it is not clear who is the second principal. Citizens have delegated the principal role to their elected representatives (in the EU parliament and member states’ parliaments) who in turn have, after negotiation, delegated the principal role to a specific EU institution responsible for the policy or program. Whether the responsible EU institution should be conceived as a third principal or an agent could be discussed. In contrast to the state and the local/regional model, EU does not have an administration in the member states and is therefore dependent on the member states’ administration for implementing policies and programmes. The agents in the EU model could be a central, regional or local

---

5 In this paper markets are not discussed as such because the focus is on governance settings where at least some level of government is involved. Governance settings where “hierarchies” and “markets” interact are covered with the fourth model. Public-Private Partnerships (PPP), for example, can be conceived as one form of governance included in the multi-actor coordinated model (cf. Wettenhall, 2003).
government/administration, and organisations/actors outside the public sector. The actors and institutions that receive EU grants are agents with a responsibility to keep track on and report how the resources have been used according to agreements and stated goals.

Citizens can not hold the elected representatives accountable directly in elections for a negotiated EU policy or program. However, citizen organisations could undertake issue-focused reviews of the same, but they can not hold anyone formally to account. Reviews and assessments of EU policies and programmes could be used to put pressure on the elected representatives and impact decision making between elections, and used by citizens when they vote on EU and national candidates. However, the current accountability system is still problematic, mainly because EU policies and programs can not be controlled by citizens. Representative democracy assumes that power and accountability should be clear and embraced by the same actors. When public policy is based on non-accountable actors some kind of transnational state with a weak democratic accountability function is maintained. Citizens can appeal against decisions that affect individual citizens to the court of justice of the European communities to probe if a decision is in accordance with laws and regulations, but not appeal against policy performance failures.

The state model refines elements from traditional government and represents one of the most common types of decentralized governance in democratic nation-states. In this model governance starts with a state decision or program, taken by the elected representatives or the administrative elite. The local/regional level is in this model an implementation level. The democratic orientation has most in common with elitist democracy because citizens are not given an active role in the policy process. The state model is linked to the national citizenship which implies that citizens, the first principal, can hold national representatives to account and influence the general direction of public policy in national elections. The elected representatives are the second principal and lower levels of government, administration and non-governmental organisations are agents or implementing actors. What about the model’s suitability to deal with real world problems? Policy problems that are “tame” and rather uncomplicated can be dealt with reasonably this way (cf. Hanberger, 2003). The implementation process is top-down and demands strong management control to work well.

An advantage with this model is that the conditions for accountability are clear and undivided, that is, national representatives can be held accountable for state policies and programs implemented by agents at lower levels. But in practice there is often a gap between the national steering level and the local implementation level, in particular when the implementation level has a significant amount of freedom of choice. Although citizens often meet street-level bureaucrats, it is only the elected representative which can be held to account for public policy. Democratic control is assumed to take place when citizens vote for the elected representatives to stay in power or for candidates from the opposition parties. But the public control of state policies in decentralized governance is weak. Referenda are sometimes

---

6 Scharpf (1988) and Hooghe & Marks (2001), for example, have followed how the EU institutions interact with institutions at lower levels, first and foremost with the state and regional level. Anders Lidström (2004) refers to this perspective as an EU-down perspective and contrasts this perspective to a city up perspective on multilevel-governance.

7 The classification of democracy is based on three models of democracy: representative or elitist, participatory, and deliberative or discursive democracy (cf. Dryzek, 1996; Hanberger, 2001).
initiated to fill an accountability function. The indirect accountability way consists of two ways in this model. Citizen organisations can undertake issue-focused reviews and then act as accountability holders on behalf of certain citizens’ groups or the general public. State inspectors, auditors, evaluators and media can undertake reviews and compile accounts on state policy performance on behalf of the elected. Such accounts could be helpful to citizens when they act as principals in elections. If an official has made the wrong decision, according to an individual citizen, there is a possibility to appeal against the decision, in order to probe if it is in accordance with laws and regulations. Citizen rights to appeal against decisions belong to the state model and can be described as a legal way of accountability.

The local-regional model summarized in Table 1 is a model representing decentralised governance emerging from local-regional government. It is founded on a certain amount of freedom of choice at the local/regional level. The discretion for local/regional policy has been delegated downwards and can be more or less confined by the state, and also varies between policy sectors. The legal ground is first of all decisions taken by local/regional government and thus related to the legal power and the mandate for these two levels of government. In countries where local or regional governments have more power and freedom of choice, the scope for local policies and programmes is extended (cf. Lidström 2004; Montin, 2002). The democratic orientation of this model is basically that of representative democracy and has most in common with a local-regional version of elitist democracy (cf. Farazmand, 1999a; b). In elections citizens can chose between competing elites and in the period between elections policies and programmes should be legitimatized through the formal representative democratic institutions. However, the democratic course can also be oriented towards discursive (or deliberative) democracy but this orientation is put in brackets in the Table because it is not defined as the core democratic orientation. The bracket indicates that the existing democratic order could move in different directions and that it is a political choice to decide democratic orientation. This model seems appropriate for dealing with social problems that are complex and where local conditions vary.

The first principal is citizens and the second the local/regional representatives to which citizens have delegated the accountability function between elections. Different public and private organisations and actors are the model’s agents. Citizens can control the local and regional government directly in elections in a similar way as in the state model, and citizens’ organisations could also undertake issue-focused reviews for the purpose holding those in power accountable for local-regional polices. Local-regional auditors have an audit commission to control local government. In the Swedish case they act as agents to the local-regional assembly and as public reviewers for citizens. Similar to the state model, individual citizens can appeal against local and regional government decisions if they think that these violate with the mandate given to local government.

The multi-actor model represents governance situations where national and local government share power with other actors. It refers to governance situations where public actors and

---

8 This model may well include delegation of power and freedom of choice to sublevels of local government, a matter which is not discussed in this paper and not indicated in the Table.

9 In federal states, as well as in states with a high degree of autonomy and self-determination for local governments, the division of power between the levels is constitutionally regulated.
institutions join networks and partnerships to resolve pressing problems and challenges. This model also includes multilevel governance where the division of power is shared between levels of government and between non governmental actors or institutions. Thus it also captures governance in the civil and private sphere. The legal ground for this governance model is agreements and contracts between participating actors and institutions. In addition, the legitimacy for a public actor’s participation could also be a formal political decision. Depending on the type, scope and depth of the governance, the democratic orientation can head in different direction, that is, towards elitist, participatory or discursive (deliberative) democracy. If the ideal type, as in this paper, is synthesised as an open ended model of governance the democratic orientation is that of participatory or discursive (deliberative) democracy. The citizen is in contrast to the other models also one of the second principals in this model. There are many (second) principals in a partnership or network. However, the notion of principal-agent relations is not quite appropriate because the network participants can be both principals and agents, i.e., a policy or programme could be developed and implemented in collaboration among the network participants. The principal-agent roles changes as the policy process proceeds and all participants share some responsibility. The model is appropriate to use in situations where problems are complex or wicked and where actors need to discuss the problem situation thoroughly and learn from different experiences.

Concerning the conditions for accountability this is a weak point in this model (cf. Weber, 1999:482), at least if assessed against the pre-requisites of accountability in a representative democracy. But if the conditions for accountability are interpreted from a discursive democratic perspective, this model is the only one that embraces new forms of democratic accountability. All participants are responsible for joint action or inaction, failure and success, in relation to the network/partnership endeavours. At the same time each actor has some kind of responsibility to the organization he or she belongs. Politicians are still accountable to citizens. But in a worst case scenario, nobody takes responsibility and no one be held accountable. It can serve as an ideal type for empirical analysis without bias to public institutions and actors. The direct way of accountability open to citizens is that of democratic dialogue. The active citizen can in this model scrutinize a partnership policy or program underway and in an authentic way. Accountability in this model does not promote scapegoat thinking but collective responsibility and learning. Citizen organizations can initiate accountability action themselves or join network inspections in a spirit of shared responsibility. Edward Weber, concerned with accountability in Grassroots Ecosystems Management, pays attention to the need for bridging public review to the place: “Walking tours” reinforces the connection to place and an appreciation for the importance of nature to the entire community, while focusing discussion on the actual problems of the ecosystem in question to better match problems and solutions” (ibid: 460). Thus, accountability is here thought of as an integrated component of participatory policy.

The four models are not synthesised to match all prevailing models of governance. Real governance can share elements of different models. Currently, local governments try out new

---

10 This model is, if viewed from a governmental perspective, one where both national and local government authority is distributed up, down or out. Pierre and Peters (ibid. chapter 4) talk about moving up (international level), moving down (regional, local and community level) and moving out (civil society and market level) state power.
modes of policy making with different democratic orientations as a complement to representative democracy, and this could best be captured by a hybrid model of governance based on the last two models.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Democratic orientation</th>
<th>EU</th>
<th>State</th>
<th>Local/regional</th>
<th>Multi-actor</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Democratic orientation</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>Representative, elitist</td>
<td>Representative, elitist, (discursive)</td>
<td>Participatory or discursive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First principal</td>
<td>Citizens, nation states</td>
<td>Citizens</td>
<td>Citizens</td>
<td>Citizens</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Second/third principal</td>
<td>EU and member states’ government, the responsible EU institution</td>
<td>State</td>
<td>Local, regional government</td>
<td>Participating actors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agents</td>
<td>State, regional and local government administration, firms, organizations</td>
<td>EU*, regional and local government administration, firms, organizations</td>
<td>EU*, state administration, firms, organizations</td>
<td>Participating actors, external actors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conditions for democratic accountability</td>
<td>Divided responsibility</td>
<td>Undivided responsibility</td>
<td>Divided responsibility</td>
<td>Divided responsibility</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accountable persons</td>
<td>EU and national politicians, EU administrators</td>
<td>National politicians</td>
<td>Local, regional politicians</td>
<td>Partnership, network members</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indirect accountability (the elected representatives)</td>
<td>EU and national parliament (based on EU and member state inspections and audits/evaluations)</td>
<td>National parliament (based on state inspections and audits/evaluations)</td>
<td>Local, regional parliament (based on local and regional audits/evaluations)</td>
<td>Local, and regional parliament (based on audits/ partnership evaluations, media reviews)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indirect accountability (citizen organisations)</td>
<td>issue-focused assessments for specific citizen groups</td>
<td>issue-focused assessments for specific citizen groups</td>
<td>issue-focused assessments for specific citizen groups</td>
<td>issue-focused assessments for specific citizen groups or all citizens in an area</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Direct accountability (citizens themselves)</td>
<td>Vote on EU and national candidates</td>
<td>Vote on national candidates, (referenda)</td>
<td>Vote on regional, local candidates, (referenda, democratic dialogue)</td>
<td>Democratic dialogue; citizens’ own inquiry</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: EU conceptualized as an agent (*) refers to the financing body.
What would an effective system of democratic accountability look like in decentralized governance?

This question could, after the four models have been specified, be discussed in a more comprehensive way. As indicated the answer is related to the purpose of, and intended function of accountability in, the four models. The governance models have different functions, and an effective overall accountability system must include all models. To improve the democratic accountability function in the state model there is a need to strengthen state audits/inspections of state policies implemented through local and regional government and make these reviews accessible to citizens. Developing democratic accountability to improve the local/regional model would include strengthening municipality auditors’ reviews of local policies and programs and adjust audits and reports to citizens’ needs.

Democratic accountability in the multi-actor model could be improved by strengthening evaluation of partnership and network policies and make clear the participants individual and joint responsibility. A distinction should also be made between multi-actor governance with and without citizen participation. Partnerships without citizen participation would need more democratic control and better information concerning policy performance. Mainly, citizens can hold the representatives to account for entering into an open-ended policy process, and to some extent for what comes out from partnership policy. Both the partnership as such and the outcomes need democratic control. However, the condition for democratic accountability appears in a different light when active citizens are engaged. The active citizen can, as indicated, hold all “responsibility holdees” to account through democratic dialogue. Citizens not engaged in a network or partnership could have expectations on the active citizens, and even feel a need to hold them to account.

Besides elections at least five direct accountability actions seem open to citizens. Citizens can try to get first hand access to information on how public policies and programs work by visiting schools, hospitals, through “walking tours” to observe if action has been taken and whether their expectations have been met. Citizens’ organisations can also take the role of evaluator and put together questionnaires, organize site visits etcetera. Second, citizen can bring attention to bad conditions by writing an article in the local newspaper or contact the elected representatives directly. Third, citizens can contact auditors, state inspectors or the media and try to get them interested in undertaking reviews for democratic control. If this leads to a report or article, citizens can use it in dialogue with those in power. A fourth option would be to enter the archives and use finalized public review reports and accounts in dialogue with those in power. A fifth option would be to collect enough votes for a referendum for the purpose of holding policy makers accountable for experimental work or current policies.¹¹

Implications of public review for local policy and democracy

Democratic accountability is dependent on how a local review system works. To find out how the current accountability system works there is a need to identify public reviewers, their commissions and tasks. The empirical analysis in this section is based on five public

¹¹ The direct and indirect ways are discussed more in another paper (Hanberger, 2006b).
reviewers’ work in Sweden studied in an interdisciplinary research project (Hanberger et al., 2005). Five external reviewers undertake public reviews of the execution of power and local government policies in Sweden. These five operate in most decentralized governance systems in modern democracies. Three are authorized reviewers, that are, state inspectors/auditors, local auditors and external evaluators, and two are self-authorized reviewers: the media and individual citizens and citizens’ organisations. The centre of attention is here on democratic accountability of public policy performance. Hence accountability for finances and fairness will not be discussed.  

Media’s unique and multi-purpose role related to public review should be recognized. Media is expected to scrutinize those in power, ongoing programs, current policies, but also report on reviews made by other reviewers, and to provide a forum for public debate. The two additional roles can impact the influence of other reviewers work and in turn impact the elected representatives’ and citizens’ accountability decisions.

The term public review is here used for various kinds of inquiry of public policies and programs, and the control of those in power. ‘Review’ implies some kind of systematic and thorough inquiry and assessment.

So far few empirical studies of public review in decentralized governance have been reported (Johnsen, 2001; Foss Hansen, 2002; Hanberger et al, 2005). It is remarkable because local government has an important role in decentralized governance in many countries, especially in the Nordic. Although mass media researchers study the role, function and significance of local media, not much research has been carried out concerning how the entire review system works in decentralized governance (Dahler-Larsen, 2000; Jonsen, 2001).

Five public reviewers
The five reviewers paid attention to in this paper have different centre of attention. Local auditors’ commission is to investigate internal control and the efficiency of local government. Media pays attention to power execution and how local governments live up to their promises and policies. In contrast, state inspectors’ centre of attention is laid on the implementation of state policies/programs. In case an external evaluator is given a commission this concerns a specific policy, program or project. NGOs and citizens are generally most concerned with how power is being executed, the general direction of local government policies, and issues related to specific policies.

Figure 1 illustrates the five external reviewers and their relations to local government. The double-edged arrows indicate the relations between the reviewers and local government and the broken arrows illustrate media’s further roles and tasks (cf. Hanberger et al, 2005).

Basically, a policy can be affected in four major ways by public reviewing: policy innovation, succession, maintenance and termination (Hogwood and Peters 1983; cf. Dahler-Larsen, 2000). The influence can also be searched for in terms of whether reviews introduce new perspectives to existing problems and solutions and whether reviews bring problems and

12 For a discussion on conditions, similarities and differences between the three types of accountability see Behn (2001).
current problem solutions to public debate. Concerning the implications of public review for democracy it should be recalled that reviews could either promote the existing order or give way to new modes of governance and strengthen one or the other type of democratisation (cf. Hanberger, 2006a).

Figure 1: Local reviewers’ significance for local policy and democracy

Implications for local policy
If democratic accountability works well one could assume that the reviewers impact municipality policy. If public reviews have no effect on local policy it indicates that the review system does not work or that the accountability holdees are outstanding and do not deserve critique. From the referred study and a majority of public reviews we know that this is not the case. What then are the implications of local reviewers for municipality policy? These implications have been studied in two municipalities in Northern Sweden (called in this paper ‘Big North’ and ‘Little North’) and two municipalities in Southern Sweden (called ‘Big South’ and ‘Little South’). An overall assessment of their implications and effect, based on interviews with decision makers and reviewers, is summarised in Table 2. As indicated local auditors and media impact municipality policy the most in all four municipalities whereas the other reviewers had rather low effect on local policy. Although the significance of the various reviewers point in the same direction, there are differences between the four municipalities indicating that individual reviewers can have more or less significance for local policy.

The reviewers’ significance and impact vary between policy sectors as well. State inspectors, for example, are more important in the policy sectors where the municipality has the role of implementation level in the state (school, social and environment policy) compared with local industrial policy where local governments in Sweden have more freedom of choice.
Table 2 Reviewers effect on municipality policy

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Big South $^{13}$</th>
<th>Little South</th>
<th>Big North</th>
<th>Little South</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>State inspectors</td>
<td>Small</td>
<td>Small</td>
<td>Small</td>
<td>Small</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local auditors</td>
<td>Large</td>
<td>Large</td>
<td>Large</td>
<td>Large</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Media</td>
<td>Large/some</td>
<td>Large</td>
<td>Large/some</td>
<td>Large/some</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evaluators</td>
<td>Small</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Some</td>
<td>Small</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NGOs/citizens</td>
<td>Small</td>
<td>Small/no</td>
<td>Small</td>
<td>Small</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Key: $\text{Large} = \text{many}$ decision makers and/or reviewers tell that decision makers and persons at lower levels spend considerable resources on responding to and resolving the deficiencies called attention to. $\text{Some} = \text{some}$ decision makers and/or reviewers tell that decision makers and persons at lower levels occasionally spend considerable resources on responding to and resolving deficiencies called attention to. $\text{Small} = \text{a few}$ decision makers and/or reviewers tell that decision makers and persons at lower levels spend limited resources on responding to and resolving deficiencies called attention to.

Implications for democracy

If the review system works well it should maintain or promote democracy and democratic control. The reviewers have different tasks and they could have different implications for democracy. To find out the reviewers’ implications for democracy were assessed in relation to democratic values and the supported democratic orientation. Our study indicates that ‘implementation of decision’, a core democratic value in representative democracy, is first and foremost maintained by local auditors. Municipality auditors in Sweden scrutinize the internal control system and the procedures for monitoring and follow up goal achievements. But one could question whether internal control systems for monitoring and goal achievements really improve democracy. The assumption is that the goal-result paradigm is an effective way of democratic steering, but this assumption has limited empirical support. Media’s implication for democracy is manifold. To support and maintain freedom of speech, opinion etc., is the prime democratic value that media supports through its reviews. But media also scrutinises implementation of decisions, and is also a support for the general public’s democratic participation by providing a forum for public debate concerning findings from their own and other reviews. Although NGOs and citizens reviews are scarce in our material, those that do exist have implications for democracy. More than anything else citizens’ reviews strengthen the democratic values participation, and deliberation/justification.

Assessing the reviewers’ implications against models of democracy makes the democratic implications even more visible. Both local auditors and media pay most attention to formal decisions and decision makers when scrutinizing local governments. The centre of attention is on stated goals and goal achievements. Hence, these two reviewers support an elitist orientation of representative democracy. In contrast, when citizens participate in public policy, another direction of democracy is being promoted. Depending on the policy and governance setting either a participatory or discursive democracy can be supported. Example of institutionalised collaboration between citizen organisations and local government indicate a support for participatory democracy or local corporatism, depending on the organisation-elite’s mandate and how well it represents the members. Very few citizens were actually involved in undertaking systematic reviews in these four municipalities. However, citizens do participate in policymaking and there are a few examples of more direct forms of democratic

$^{13}$ The four municipalities differ in size, geographic location, industrial structure, political majority and other conditions.
accountability embedded in participatory policy. Mainly, citizens in small villages mobilized resources and developed civil society policies as a complement to municipality policy. Apparently, citizens both take responsibility and undertake some kind of review function continuously. The participatory citizen can observe the resource allocation and public policy performance with own eyes, and deliberate about past and future action. Direct inspections of public policy partly include action taken by citizens themselves. Thus the role of accountability holder and holdee is mixed in accountability as democratic dialogue.

Conclusion
This paper has paid attention to a growing need for discussing democratic accountability in traditional and new modes of decentralized governance. The paper has recognized that democratic accountability can and need to be considered from more than one accountability perspective. The traditional accountability perspective is linked to representative democracy and is applied in decentralized governance where the state and the local state govern. However, it does not give justices to how accountability appear in new models of decentralized governance, in particular in the format of networks, partnerships and participatory policy making settings oriented towards discursive democracy.

When democratic accountability is considered from different accountability perspectives it becomes visible that the conditions for, and purpose of, accountability differ in various types of decentralized governance. When citizens take an active role in public policy its role as accountability holder partly changes. The active and informed citizen can act both as accountability holder and accountability holdee which implies a transformation of roles. The traditional accountability system, based on principal-agent relations specified in laws and regulations, do not represent all prevailing relations of responsibility in decentralized governance. In practice, there are many legitimate accountability and responsibility holders, not only those formally given this role, that try to influence governance through democratic control.

A study of the significance of public reviewers operating in decentralized governance indicates that local auditors have the greatest impact on municipality policy among five local review-groups in Sweden. Local newspapers also influence municipality policy but first and foremost by setting the agenda. The democratic implications of public review differ between public reviewers. The Swedish case also indicates that how citizens carry out the function of accountability is highly associated with what roles citizens are prepared to play in public policy and democratic governance. In a sense how active citizens perform the direct accountability function today is a step back to direct forms of evaluation and control once practiced before democracy was introduced. For more than hundred years, the local community made authentic inspections of how social aid recipients were dressed and fed by those responsible for social policy implementation every Sunday in front of the church (Hanberger, 1997) which is similar to today’s “walking tours”.

Democratic accountability should also be considered in relation to how to obtain a sustainable future. What function shall accountability have in a sustainable society and the process towards an envisioned society? Would a sustainable society be a society in which
accountability holders are looking for scapegoats or would it be a society of building trust and mutual responsibility?

The analysis implies that citizens today have a weak instrument to hold those in power to account for public policy in the current system of accountability in decentralised governance in Sweden. From a citizen perspective there is a democratic accountability deficit. They now rely heavily on public reviewers and the elected representatives. However, the current accountability system is not sufficient to meet the needs of active and informed citizens. But citizens can improve the situation by getting engaged in public policy. This gives them a chance to participate in democratic governance and in the assessment and justification of today’s and tomorrow’s policies. The accountability function is then embedded in a democratic dialogue. But would this be an attractive alternative for a majority of citizens, and does it resolve the need for developing the current institutions for democratic accountability?

How an authentic and legitimate system of democratic accountability can look like in decentralized governance, that is, a system that can inform the general public and facilitate deliberation concerning current practice and future action which all legitimate accountability holders and holdees can find valid, need further discussion. Examples of innovation of the accountability system can be found in decentralized governance, but the advantages and disadvantages of different accountability systems and functions, such as democratic dialogue for example, need more empirical research.
References:


SOU:2005, Annex 5


