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Local democracy in large municipalities - Co-creating democracy and rural development through multi-level participation structures and local development plans

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Abstract

Municipal amalgamations in Denmark in 2007 led to concern for local rural democracy, as the number of politicians from rural areas dropped after the reform. To preserve rural democracy, local councils at the village level were established in some municipalities, and they have begun to prepare local development plans. Based on a concrete study of plan development by two sub-municipal local councils in two Danish municipalities drawing upon insight from outcome-oriented deliberate democratic theory, this article provides recommendations for a potential structure for sub-municipal democracy in large municipalities.

Introduction

Throughout Europe, the amalgamation of municipalities has become a subject of public discussion due to concerns about professionalism, effectiveness and democratic legitimacy (Denters et al., 2014; EUV, 2014; Kjaer et al., 2010; Razin and Hazan, 2014). Few countries have actually conducted amalgamations as fully as Denmark, where 271 municipalities were reduced to 98 municipalities in January 2007 (ISM, 2006; Vrangbæk, 2010). The average number of inhabitants in a Danish municipality rose from 19,900 before the reform to 55,200 after. This means that in comparison to other Nordic and European municipalities the number of inhabitants per municipality in Denmark is much higher. In other Nordic countries average municipal populations are 16,900 in Finland, 11,700 in Norway and 32,900 in Sweden. The Netherlands has an average share

of inhabitants per municipality of 41,100 inhabitants, while southern European countries such as France, Italy and Spain have 1,700, 7,300 and 5,700 inhabitants per municipality, respectively (EUV, 2014, 27).

Thus many ordinary citizens in Danish rural areas were worried about local democracy and rural development when this reform was introduced because the reform lowered the number of politicians (from approximately 4700 to approximately 2500) and thereby created greater distance between citizens and politicians (Hansen, 2010, 12-13; Sørensen, 2009). Also the expectation that the number of politicians from rural areas would be reduced, which could indicate a risk of future service closures, was seen as a threat. This democratic concern was met first at the national level, by a formulation in the reform text requiring municipalities to consider local democracy, and afterwards at the municipal level by municipalities encouraging the establishment of local councils to prevent democratic decline and offset the loss of influence from the reform. Steps were also taken at the local level, prior to the reform. Many local areas began the process of establishing local councils/village councils to be sure that the reform did not take them unguarded. One concrete materialization of municipality-local councils/village council relationships after the reform has been the local councils' initiation of micro-practices (Healey, 2012) through local development plan (LDP) preparation at the geographical parish level under more or less structured guidance from the municipal administration and politicians.

The question is whether this very practical organizing in local councils at the village level and the subsequent initiation of LDPs can offer a successful strategy for preserving locally embedded forms of democracy within larger municipalities. Based on a concrete study on the development of plans by two sub-municipal local councils in the Danish municipalities of Vejle and Slagelse, this article analyses the co-creation of democracy between local communities and municipal authorities through multi-level participation structures and LDPs and provides a potential model extracted from the Danish context. The term 'co-creation of democracy' is used to emphasise the article's focus on the meeting between locally embedded forms of democracy in the civic sector and formalised local representative democratic institutions in the public sector. The article thus discusses two specific facilitation processes that attempt to enable democratic engagement in the light of the reorganisation of local government. To date, studies of democracy in relation to the Danish municipal amalgamations in 2007 have taken a general view (Agger et al., 2010; Hansen, 2010; ISM, 2009; Kjær and Mouritzen, 2003). This

article adds to the literature by specifically focusing on local councils from rural areas perspective and also on the establishment of LDPs by local councils at the interface between the municipality and the local area. This topic has been studied in the English context by, for example, Gallent (2013), Gallent et al. (2008), Parker (2008), Parker and Murray (2012) and Moseley (2002). There is, however, a gap in the literature as to examples from other countries' experiences with LDP preparation and sub-municipal democratic organization, and here the proposed model makes a contribution that can, for example, feed into current municipal reform processes in Norway (EUV, 2014) and into the last fifteen years of amalgamation processes in Japan (Koike, 2010).

The article proceeds as follows. Section 2 provides additional information on the Danish local government reform and LDPs. Section 3 follows to establish a framework from the main elements of Fung and Wright's (2001, 2003) normative deliberative democratic theory, which has been chosen as an explanatory framework to analyse the empirical material. These authors focus on the importance of concrete and practical work and structures that support democratic outcomes. The qualitative methods used are explained in Section 4. Section 5 presents and analyses the empirical evidence drawn from the case studies of LDP preparation by local councils in Højen in Vejle municipality and Hashøj NW in Slagelse municipality. Subsequently, Section 6 offers a discussion of the appropriateness and contribution of Fung and Wright's deliberative democratic framework in light of the empirical results. Finally, a conclusion and a potential model for co-creation of democracy in large municipalities through multi-level participation structures and LDPs are offered.

Contextualization

The purpose and content of Danish local government reform 2007

Local government reform was introduced in Denmark on the first of January 2007. Prior to the reform, the municipal structure had been unchanged since the 1970s, when the present parishes lost their municipality status, and approximately 1,100 municipalities were reduced to 275. Officially, the 2007 reform was introduced because of a need to review, on the one hand, the size of the municipalities and counties and, on the other hand, the distribution of tasks between the state, the counties and the municipalities (ISM, 2006, 7). From a more scientific perspective, the reform has been described as a window of opportunity emerging as a

combination of many small factors. Topics such as waiting times for patients and coordination problems in the county-based health sector; economic and professional problems with the handling of complex social cases in the municipalities; and the viewpoint that tax levels were being driven upwards because three public sector levels were collecting taxes were all part of the debate (Vrangbæk, 2010, 208-209). The reform decision was also influenced by political rationale, as for many years some parties held the goal of abolishing the counties, and the nationwide business association Danish Industry wanted a reduction in the number of municipalities (Vrangbæk, 2010, 209-213). Christiansen and Klitgaard (2010) have stated that the reform succeeded because the decision was taken under a veil of vagueness with minimum public involvement.

The reform meant that 271 municipalities (a few had merged since the reform in the 1970s) were replaced by 98 new municipalities. At the same time, 14 councils were replaced by five new regions. To locally anchor the merger, the old municipalities had to determine which other municipalities they wanted to merge with. This process proceeded quite smoothly ‘backed by threats of intervention and incentives’ (Vrangbæk, 2010, 217) during autumn 2004. Thus in spring 2005, in only 12 of the 271 municipalities local referendums were held in response to requests from citizens who disagreed with their politician’s local merger decision (ISM, 2006).

As to the distribution of tasks, the municipalities were to undertake most of the citizen-related tasks, whereas the regions were to undertake health care, some areas of social service, regional development plans, etc. Measured by expenditure, the municipalities’ share of public expenditure was to increase from 46% to 48% after the local government reform. The regions’ share of public expenditure was to drop from 14% to 9% (and a region’s right to issue taxes was removed). State expenditure was to increase from 40% to 43% (designated for the police, military defence, the legal system, further education, research, etc.) (ISM, 2006, 22-34; Vrangbæk, 2010, 206-207). These figures indicate that both before and after the local government reform, Danish municipalities were major providers of public services with large financial responsibilities.

Democracy, local councils and local development plans

The reform had a special section on democracy, stating as follows:

Democracy will be strengthened as more political decisions are made locally. Efforts should be made to expand democracy so that citizens can be more actively involved in the decisions. The municipalities of the future should find new ways to involve citizens and users in local decisions (ISM, 2006, 40).

The section on democracy only comprised a very small part of the reform text, which to a much higher degree was concerned with terms such as economic effectiveness and coordination. No overview exists of how many local councils have been established below the level of the municipality since the local government reform. A 2009 questionnaire-based study showed that out of the 50 municipalities, local councils or some similar group have been established at the sub-municipal level in 35 municipalities, corresponding to 70% of the municipalities that answered the questionnaire (Kromann and Just, 2009, 40). The local councils, after the 2007, reform are generally formed by volunteers, organized as associations with an annual general meeting, a set of rules and a board. The resources of the local councils are in most cases limited to funds for meeting activities provided by the municipality (Knudsen, 2012). The local councils cover a geographical territory including one or more parishes because Danish local associations, community life and service offerings - despite the 1970 local government reform - have continued to be strongly concentrated around this smaller geographical and church-related unit, without any broad involvement of a religious aspect.

The development of LDPs in some municipalities is a more concrete materialization of the relationship between municipality and local councils. A LDP in Denmark is a written document expressing the visions and needs of a locality. The plan has no legal status, and there are no rules of citizen involvement. There is, however, often more active public participation in the preparation of LDPs than for other types of municipal plans. The LDP is the local area's plan, and the degree of municipal support varies between municipalities. There is only limited literature on LDPs in Denmark (Vestviden, 2014; Thuesen and Ditlevsen, 2015), but there is much to be learned from the English literature addressing parish plans and neighbourhood plans. The English parish plans most closely correspond to Danish LDPs due to their holistic and often non-statutory role. Moseley (2002) descriptively examined parish plans to extract a model for village action planning. Despite the sketched model's similarity to the processes in Denmark, Moseley's study mainly focused on the plans' capacity building and empowerment elements, while slightly touching upon important critical aspects such as inclusion and

local authority domination. Later, Parker (2008) elucidated the way that parish planning had been promoted by national agencies in England and more critically investigated parish plans as part of an increasing focus on involving citizens in local steering processes. Parker also stressed that parish planning can be exclusionary, and that it is a challenge to avoid double exclusion if inadequate local data collection forms the basis of central planning and policy decisions. He specifically emphasised the 'prerequisites of adequate support, integration and funding' (Parker, 2008, 81) for local-led planning to succeed. In addition, he stated that from a rational choice perspective, the common attempts by local authorities and neighbourhoods to establish broad participation should consider the motives of the participant groups (Parker, 2012). However, integrating LDPs in statutory planning is far from the agenda in the Danish context. Gallent et al. (2008) took a critical stand towards the alignment of parish plans with statutory spatial plans and call for a bridging relationship between the plans rather than a statutory relationship. More recent articles, nevertheless, represent developments in England, where the possibility of developing formally adopted neighbourhood plans has appeared. Several articles articulate a critical view towards the introduction of these plans. Gallent (2013) emphasises that there will be a need for extensive investments in communication and dialogue between authorities and local communities because they have different motives for working with parish plans, and he notes that operational and cultural differences between local councils and local government will continue to exist in relation to neighbourhood plans. Davoudi and Madanipour (2013, 559) interpret neighbourhood plans as part of a Foucauldian localism agenda reanimating the local and 'assigning a distinct scale to the technologies of agency'. They state that technologies of agency are deployed, along with technologies of performance as part of a resilience trend, where people and communities are expected to manage their own development. Technologies of agency are visible when communities are mobilised to take a hand in their own future by preparing neighbourhood plans. Enforcing these neighbourhood plans to fit with the ordinary planning system and government need for more development and home building is seen as enduring technologies of performance. Parker et al. (2015) also show how neighbourhood plans are more or less obliged to follow the script proposed by national and local authorities. Consequently, local ideas are rescripted in a too confirmative way, according to Parker.

All in all, in both England and Denmark, local areas are making practical experiments with small-scale planning. The Danish experiences are, however, much less institutionalized, standardized or studied and are far from the neighbourhood planning processes in England. Further, despite the reform text's appeal that municipalities should experiment with democracy, very little has been demanded from national government. In practice, the appeal's 'duty to promote democracy' (Gallent, 2013, 375), which also is part of the English localism agenda as illustrated by the English Community Empowerment White Paper (DCLG, 2008), has thus in Denmark been left to the municipalities due to advanced municipal autonomy, and no Danish legislation exists that is equivalent to the English neighbourhood planning legislation.

Empowered Deliberative Democracy

Empowered Deliberative Democracy (EDD), developed by Fung and Wright (2001, 2003) has been chosen as the explanatory framework to assess democracy in the local councils' work with LDPs at the sub-municipal level. It was chosen because of its focus on how democracy can be *deepened* (the reform text stated that efforts should be made to *expand* democracy) so that citizens become more actively involved and because of its focus on practical situations. Sørensen and Torfing (2005, 219) label Fung and Wright's approach outcome-oriented democracy, due to its focus on finding better decentralised solutions by involving locals. They present Fung and Wright as part of a group of post-liberal democratic theoreticians and EDD thus stands out as a method for supplementing traditional municipal representative democracy, which from a rural perspective, bears the risk of becoming more distant after the reform. Despite the label 'outcome-oriented', Fung and Wright do not set operationalised objectives for outcomes as is done in parametric governance (Cools et al., 2002).

The following three EDD principles constitute the explanatory framework:

- 1) Democratic governance institutions must be designed and geared towards addressing practical concerns, tangible problems and concrete situations.

2) The ordinary citizens most directly touched by the addressed problems must be involved along with the relevant officials close to them, without reverting to experts as the most important decision makers.

3) Deliberate problem solving should be the central element of local democracy (Fung and Wright, 2001, 18).

In addition, Fung and Wright (2001, 21-24) outline three institutional design features that stabilize and deepen the practice of the principles behind EDD; these features can support the establishment of a type of multi-level participation structure. The first feature is the devolution of public decision authority to empowered local units (neighbourhood councils, personnel in individual workplaces, delineated ecosystem habitats), which could correspond to the local council level in Denmark. The second feature is coordinated decentralization, understood as the creation of formal linkages of responsibility, resource distribution and communication to connect these units to each other and to more centralized authorities. The third feature is the use and generation of new public authority institutions to support and guide decentralized problem-solving efforts rather than leaving them to be informal voluntary affairs. Thus, in terms of the community-authority relations discussed in this article, not only the local levels but also the municipal authorities should reorganize. This recommendation is in line with Dryzek's (2010) emphasis on the importance of supportive government structures and processes to the success of deliberative planning. Legacy et al. (2014) also emphasises this point from an Australian perspective. However, they critically conclude that deliberative planning processes risk being subsumed by mechanisms in the traditional planning system that celebrate status quo; especially if the hybrid role of the planner as both facilitator and planning professional is not embraced.

According to Fung and Wright (2001, 20), empowered deliberative decision-making is in contrast with experts executing command and control, aggregative voting or strategic negotiation. Referring back to the functioning of local councils after the local government reform in Denmark, EDD can be seen as a framework for assessing the democratic contribution of the local council system to the new larger municipalities, and LDP preparation can be seen as a practical democratic experiment. Fung and Wright (2001, 33-38) present criticisms of the model such as a risk of power domination, inequality inside deliberative arenas, and deliberative arenas only being constructed when it suits the powerful. They further explain that certain groups at the expense of others

may capture such arenas and that decision-making may be Balkanized. Finally, they raise the critical concern that the model demands too much citizen engagement, making it difficult to obtain long-term sustainability. The analysis will show the reach of EDD as explanatory model in the two study areas. The following section presents the methodological approach and the empirical material from a case study of two sub-municipal local councils' concrete attempts to develop a LDP at the crossroads between the local community and the municipal authority.

Methodological considerations and study areas

A qualitative approach

The data collection for this article took place from August 2014 until April 2015 through participant observation, personal interviews with local citizens and public administrators, and document studies (Thuesen and Ditlevsen, 2015).

Table 1: Data collection

The qualitative approach taken was characterized by being explorative and flexibly designed (Dahler-Larsen, 2010; Harboe, 2013). In addition to the search for a model for sub-municipal democracy and LDP preparation at the interface between a local area and the municipality, the research design included specific minor elements of action research, as the investigation was coupled to change processes that the researchers were required to address regularly. After the data collection, data were coded and analysed thematically using NVivo10.

The study areas

The municipality of Vejle is 1,000 km² and has a population of 109,000 people, of which 55,000 live in the city of Vejle. Højen Parish, located 8 km south of Vejle Centre, has a stable population of 1,317 people, of which 685 live in the village. There is a school from the 0-6th class, a nursery, a convenience store, a

multifunctional centre, a community hall and approximately 15 associations and institutions. The village of Højen is known for its strong associations related to gymnastics and sports, among other activities.

Slagelse municipality is a municipality on the west coast of the island of Zealand. The municipality covers an area of 571 km² and has a total population of almost 80,000 people. The main city of Slagelse has 32,333 inhabitants. The local area Hashøj NW covers the four parishes Slots Bjergby, Sludstrup, Gerlev and Lundforlund, which are located south of Slagelse. The Hashøj NW area has a total population of 1,655 inhabitants, distributed as 941 persons in Slots Bjergby, 309 people in Sludstrup, 231 people in Gerlev and 173 people in Lundforlund. There has recently been a large population increase in Slots Bjergby, which is located 5 km from Slagelse.

The two cases differ in several ways. The Højen/Vejle case reflects an experienced and to some degree well-proven process and a selected model for the relationship between the municipality and the local area and for the establishment of a LDP. Højen is the 12th LDP developed in the municipality of Vejle since the amalgamations in 2007. The municipality is supported by Asset Based Community Development (ABCD) for their work with LDPs (Velfærdsministeriet, 2008). The Hashøj NW/Slagelse case, in contrast, reflects a testing process because Hashøj NW is the first local area in which Slagelse municipality has experimented with the creation of a LDP via the local council. The method used is citizen-driven innovation and co-creation based on a model from Local Government Denmark's consultancy (LGDK, 2015).

EDD as a framework to assess the empirical data

After a further introduction to the two cases below, the analysis is structured after the concepts established by Fung and Wright.

The Højen/Vejle case

The work on the LDP for Højen started in the community itself but soon fell into the LDP-model that Vejle municipality had used after the amalgamations. Since 2013, there had been various initiatives to start work on

a plan for the village of Højen. The commencement of actual work on the plan was spurred by the municipality's annual meeting for local councils in April 2014. Here, the municipality presented a local village package that the villages could draw upon. After this point, the process unfolded according to Vejle municipality's model for LDPs. According to this model, the local community should prioritize a few items as cornerstones of the plan. At a meeting between the local council and the municipality, they agreed on a vision for Højen focused on growth (more inhabitants and new locations to build houses), beautification, and a warm welcome for new residents. As part of the Vejle model, two planners from the municipality came, took pictures and created a written catalogue of 10-15 pages about the village's central sites. This catalogue was presented, at a village meeting in September 2014 in Højen multi-house with 110 participants. Two municipal administrators and a professional moderator led the meeting along with the Chairman of the local council. After an introduction, where the catalogue was presented, participants were divided into groups on beautification, a warm welcome or other topics they wanted to discuss. There was a desire and interest in discussion, and after a joint presentation of the groups' ideas, seven working groups were established to address Green Areas, A Welcome Pack, Building Sites, Activities for 13-18 Year Olds, Højen's Gardens, Beautification, and Traffic and Landmarks over the next several months. They presented their work at two follow-up meetings (November 2014 and February 2015) in Højen village house. At the meeting in February 2015, the municipal administrator presented his nearly final draft of the LDP for Højen. This plan focused on three themes: beautification, the warm welcome of newcomers, and strengthening Højen's venues. The program was submitted for formal consultation in Højen and local citizens and the local council could comment on it. Then, the municipal council would approve the LDP, after which it would form the basis of the local government priorities in relation to the village of Højen over the next years.

The Hashøj Northwest/Slagelse case

The work on drafting a LDP for Hashøj NW had an almost 10-year history leading back to the formation of the local council for Hashøj NW in 2004. For many years, the local residents had worked towards the very ambitious goal of establishing a common house for day care, a nursing home and a school. The fulfilment of this goal was still an important subject on the LDP agenda in Hashøj and the aim was to better use local

resources and to develop Hashøj into a learning community. Work on the LDP for Hashøj NW was supported by the creation of a § 17.4 committee in spring 2014; this is a temporary political committee that a municipal council can establish to test new initiatives or to act as an advisory or preparatory committee for the municipal council or one of the standing committees (Retsinformation, 2012).

The first public meeting in relation to the plan for Hashøj NW, was held in the care centre in the village of Slots Bjergby on a Saturday morning in August 2014, with approximately 50 adult participants. It began with brunch, and there were activities and care for the children. Five themes served as the starting point for the meeting. The themes had been selected as an outcome from an earlier meeting that included key people from local associations. A poster was prepared for each of the five themes along with a blank poster for brand new ideas. The themes were The Path Group, Engagement of Citizens in Relation to the Care Centre, The Centre for Active Learning (a new school and day-care building), Attractive Settlement Area, Communication Platform, and Completely New Ideas. The participants were asked to position themselves at the posters, debate the poster topic for 10 minutes and then move on to another topic. The meeting ended without a summation of the groups' work. It was announced that the work would be collected and taken up again at another public meeting. The subsequent public meeting was held in October 2014. Between the two public meetings, the project team worked on the proposals. In contrast to the process in the Højen/Vejle case, working groups involving public meeting participants were not created to follow up on the meetings and the further development of the ideas. Also in contrast to the Højen/Vejle case, the concrete writing of the LDP was the project group's responsibility well into the process, although the municipality assisted at the end of spring 2015.

The cases in relation to the institutional design features that stabilize the principles behind EDD

Generally, both municipalities have devolution of authority to local units, coordinated decentralization, and the generation of new public authority institutions to support decentralized problem-solving, though to varying degrees. Vejle municipality has created a local council level where the work of LDP planning takes place, but the degree of power granted to the local areas can be debated because there are restrictions on which topics the local residents can address in their LDPs. In Vejle, the municipality has coordinated decentralization through

the creation of a clear and unified local council structure through which meetings are held across the local councils and clear lines of communication in the municipality are established. In Hashøj NW, the formal structure of democracy at the sub-municipal level is less structured and the organisations at this level that formally have contact with the municipality are very diverse (in some places, it is local councils and in others, it is civic associations). In return, the authority given to the local council for Hashøj NW to prepare the LDP is relatively far reaching due to the citizen-driven innovation method. Vejle municipality has reorganized itself and created a political committee that cuts across the other administrative subject areas to support local council organization. This has happened to a lesser extent in Slagelse Municipality, although the establishment of the § 17.4 committee is to some degree a response to this. Nevertheless, both municipalities experience difficulties working across administrative departments and are aware that communities may experience 'silo problems' when they approach the municipality. These problems however are considered to be difficult to avoid due to demands for professionalism and different legislative demands between the administrative departments.

EDD principle 1: Geared to address practical concerns and concrete situations

As mentioned above, the Højen/Vejle model was rather narrow with respect to the content included in the LDP compared to Hashøj NW/Slagelse. In Højen, it was not possible to include any topics in the LDP that might be the subject of strategic municipal decisions. For example, it was not possible to involve local institutions as part of the plan or to involve parcelling, despite the fact that parcelling was one of the three initial areas that the council of Højen wanted to work on. This theme 'evaporated' before the first public meeting in line with the rescripting process outlined in Parker et al. (2015), but many local citizens wanted to discuss it and a working group was established; however, the theme was not included as part of the LDP. Instead, land-parcelling activities continued in parallel with the plan. A public administrator from the municipality of Vejle explained the situation in relation to local institutions, namely local schools:

There is no point that we go in and take a debate with individual communities about their school. Because everyone has a, well, if you ask them, they all have the strategy [to] preserve the school (...). You cannot do that at the local level.

The quote shows that locals are empowered to work within certain areas but avoid others. It indicates that only 'easy' topics are considered for deliberation and illustrates the balances of power and the limitations to the development potential of LDPs in Vejle; this situation is in line with the criticism by Davoudi and Madanipour (2013) that the localism agenda exists alongside endured restrictions from the ordinary political system. Also, Fung and Wright (2001, 34) mention 'limiting discussion to narrow areas' as a critical concern regarding deliberative arenas.

In the Hashøj NW/Slagelse case, the locals worked broadly on topics related to being an active and learning community. This involved practical and concrete initiatives concerning social activities and path development but also more wide-ranging issues implicating municipal institutions and institution leaders. This broad, strategic focus was not hampered by the municipality of Slagelse, who rather saw this as adding value to both the range of issues considered and the process itself. A public administrator in the municipality of Slagelse explained it as follows:

To make the link between the local communities and the municipal institutions, typically represented by the municipal leaders, promises the possibilities of local councils or for local communities to create some better frameworks for their development on several levels. Both, in fact, at the strategic and long-term plan but also quite close.

Observations at the public meetings revealed that concrete and practical topics should be seen as important, and helped to mobilize people in both local areas. The 'shadow of hierarchy' (Scharpf, 1994) and the public authority meta-governor role (Sørensen, 2006) were different in the two areas in relation to the concrete influence of the plan topics. The strategic elements in Højen/Vejle stayed beneath the surface and outside the plan (although there were working groups addressing these topics), while strategic elements were allowed to remain very visible in Hashøj NW/Slagelse.

EDD principle 2: Involvement of ordinary, affected people and those officials close to them

Citizen involvement and the mobilization of the population in developing a LDP can be seen as a multi-level participation structure in which the municipality involves a local community, and this community, in the form of a local council, involves and mobilizes its local citizens. This can also be viewed as either, the involvement

of individuals locally in relation to work on the LDP or, the involvement of each local community compared to other communities in the municipality. As regards the involvement of individuals locally, which corresponds directly to Fung and Wright's quest for the involvement of ordinary and affected people, in both empirical cases, they tried to mobilize as many local citizens as possible to ensure the initiative's democratic credibility locally and genuine citizen involvement. The project groups in Hashøj NW and Højen were truly delighted when they managed to gain many participants. In both cases, however, it was hard to get citizens involved in long-term and strategic issues rather than specific, practical actions. This supports Fung and Wright's auto-critique that the involvement of ordinary people can be a challenge because citizens can be 'tempted to free ride on the efforts of others' (Fung and Wright, 2001, 37). It also underlines that (double) exclusion (Parker, 2008) is not necessarily intentional. As regards the individual communities in relation to other communities in the municipalities, in the Højen/Vejle case, democratic legitimacy appeared to be more secure by virtue of the very straight and structured approach to all local communities on the part of the municipality. Only the plan's status as an experimental process could justify the use of the many resources on Hashøj NW from an overall municipal equality perspective.

The two municipalities undoubtedly have supported the local areas in different ways and have organized themselves differently to facilitate local processes. The facilitative process used by Vejle municipality was first created through a mapping of the resources in the village performed by municipal planners in cooperation with selected local citizens. Then, a mobilizing local public meeting followed, aiming to create working groups. In Højen a professional moderator, working with two people from the municipality and the local council Chairman facilitated this meeting. The two joint meetings, the first at which the working groups presented their progress and the second at which they presented the LDP, were led by the local council Chairman in cooperation with the municipal employee, who also summarized and wrote the plan. At no point in the process was Højen independently responsible for building momentum in the process of preparing the LDP. This can be interpreted positively. But there were also clear conditions in the dense facilitation of the municipality due to the restrictions imposed in terms of what the locals could work on. The local council was, however, pleased with the close working relationship established with the municipality. A member of the local Council Board

emphasized the municipalities' positive supporting input in the following quote. It does however, also show that power was involved in the relationship with the municipality:

He [the municipal employee] has just pointed out that 'the welcome' theme he is happy with, but 'the beautification' theme we must fill a bit more (...) because it is not enough only to include the cleanliness of the city. So it's really him who puts us into it, and it's really great enough because then we get the beautification started. (...) And then we know that (...) he is having some money (...). That is, do we not have to follow [his] advice? For one thing's what we think. [He] has the (...) eye for what it is that the municipality will support (...). So we cannot do without [him]. (...) He pushes us forward.

The municipal employee, who operates the organizing of the local councils and works with the LDP, was described by a local politician interviewed as 'Mr Rural', as someone who is 'passionate about rural areas' and as a 'fish in the water' in relation to the facilitation of village processes. He embraced the hybrid role of the planner as both professional and facilitator (Legacy et al., 2014). The mentioned local government official should thus be understood as positive; there is, however, power in the relationship, exemplified by the talk about money.

The involvement of ordinary citizens were maintained in the Højen/Vejle model by the establishment of working groups. All the working group leaders were characterized as people who had not been part of ordinary associational life in Højen prior to the plan. There was an apparent focus on the leadership of these processes, where the municipality led the local council and the local council subsequently led the working groups in conjunction with the working group leaders.

Slagelse municipality's facilitation was much more relaxed. The local project team working on the preparation of the LDP did well enough in sparring with the municipality, but because there was no model to work from, the project group in Hashøj NW worked more independently than the local council in Højen. Because of the lack of systematic establishment of working groups in the Hashøj NW process, there was also greater pressure on the few people in the project group. In particular, the actual writing of the LDP was fatiguing for the project group, who at some point were at risk of 'exhaustion and disillusionment' (Fung and Wright, 2001, 37). One member said that the locals should write the plan themselves:

She [a member of the project group] had not imagined that she would have to do as much typing. So I think that you can burn the fingers on this in relation to locals. That if there should be so much typing, that they have to deliver, then they do not bother.

The municipality chose citizen-driven innovation as the method and practiced it by trying not to push or press things through so that the volunteers would have room to develop ideas. A municipal director emphasized this importance of ‘... being humble. For it is volunteers, so it is not for us to come to a decision’. Compared to the very specific typing and layout tasks, there appeared, nevertheless, to be a demand from the project group for more support and intrusive facilitation by the municipality. In relation to the concrete writing tasks, it can thus be a balancing act to establish that adequate municipal support emphasised by Parker (2008).

In both municipalities, the support of local areas was entangled in difficulties establishing cross-disciplinary cooperation in the municipal bureaucracy. Although Vejle municipality had re-structured itself to meet the needs of citizens and to cooperate across different themes in the organization, it was not easy to live up to this goal during daily work. A municipal employee explains this:

It's not possible to claim that it is easy. This is not because there is not anyone who would like to (...), but we have different roles, people have different tasks and different legislation; they have to manage.

The lack of interdisciplinarity was just one of the factors that made it difficult for citizens to work with the municipality. This was the situation in both municipalities, though Vejle had made the strongest organizational changes to counter the problem. A Hashøj NW citizen who was a member of the project team expressed concern that if they

... go into another pillar or another technical centre (...) start from Adam and Eve every time (...). That is what makes it extremely rigid. Then, the organization is a weakness and not a strength.

In summary, Vejle had the most consolidated structure for involving the local councils, and the local council had a rather visible system for involving citizens through working groups. A multilevel structure was in place at Vejle, while in Slagelse, the process was still immature and thus rather unstructured.

EDD principle 3: Deliberative problem solving

Public meetings in the two LUP cases used intense communication; the participants had the opportunity to explore and develop their views in small groups rather than just acting as spectators and listeners. Decision-making was less clear, but tended more towards deliberation than vote, particularly at the local level. Local deliberation at the public meetings was structured within the themes, to a greater or lesser degree.

The observation studies revealed that deliberative problem solving between the locals and the municipalities was hard to establish. Both locals and municipalities engaged in sustaining preconceptions about each other. It appears that the preconceptions were strongest in the Hashøj NW/Slagelse case, due to the lack of a clear model and lack of experience with formal cooperation between municipality and local areas. These led to a less-tested model for communication and dialogue between the municipality and the local community, although this process was highlighted as important by Gallent (2013) to mitigate the different motivations of the parties. During observation studies, the researchers several times experienced prejudices on the part of the locals towards Slagelse municipality because they did not expect the municipality to be open and collaborative. A municipal development consultant expressed how she had often experienced this at meetings:

There is great, great reluctance, in fact, against the municipality, a lot of bad experiences (...) There's just great anger, (...) there is very real anger that it (...) is too bad that the municipality does not ... etc.

Simultaneously, the municipality did not expect the locals to be willingly controlled, not even when it came to practical matters such as who should write the LDP. In the Højen/Vejle case, this type of conflict was not observed, which could be due to the well-established model for the relationship between municipality and local areas. The limitations in the topics included in the plan in Højen, which could be interpreted as a strategic decision taken by the municipality, forced the local council board to act strategically in their approach to the municipality. The structured approach, however, somehow taught the local areas how to approach the municipality of Vejle. A member of the project group in Hashøj NW asked for the dialogue to be a bit more controlled in Slagelse municipality and said that the municipality should: '... set the framework for dialogue or perhaps, how to say, inform, guide, and educate the community to have the qualified dialogue...'. This corresponds well

with Fung and Wright's quest to have officials act as facilitators of popular deliberative decision-making and reflects the emphasis placed on the importance of communication put forward by Gallent (2013).

Overall, a deliberative approach was attempted at the public meetings. There were, however, obstacles to a truly deliberative process, which related to asymmetric power relations and preconceptions, held by locals and the municipality. In both cases, distances between the municipality and the local community in terms of the dialogue established and the structures of the local councils' work and the established work with LDPs were reduced.

How to co-create democracy through LDPs and local councils: Discussion and recommendations

Discussion

The theoretical framework presumes that citizen involvement is good and that there should be cooperation across administrations. This strategy is in line with the characteristics of governance focused on interdependencies between authorities and organisations from different sectors and on the blurring of boundaries and responsibilities (Rhodes, 1996; Stoker, 1998). However, from an aggregative democratic viewpoint (March and Olsen, 1989) emphasising the traditional institutions of representative governance, it could be argued that extended citizen participation to locals at the sub-municipal level results in fragmented and informal municipal decision-making with less transparency. This could mean that those who already possess excellent participatory skills and/or time (Gunn et al., 2015) will gain an even better opportunity to exercise their influence or that the powerful will dominate the deliberative arena as proposed by Fung and Wright's auto-critique (2001, 33-34). From an integrative democratic standpoint, more in line with the deliberative governance stream, it can be argued that new channels of influence are opened so that the most affected people, those who experience the marginalization of rural areas after the reform, gain the opportunity to exercise their influence, while the 'old' channels continue to exist; this therefore increases civic participation skills and expands the role of citizens beyond casting votes in line with Pateman (1970). From an integrative democratic approach, experimenting

with the sub-municipal local council structure and LDP preparation could thus be seen as a way to co-create democracy.

The implementation power of the Hashøj NW plan is characterized as less 'safe' than the implementation of the plan in Højen due to the lack of working groups established in Hashøj NW, which could weaken the plan's long-term sustainability. In turn, the Hashøj NW case aims higher and tries to be transformational and therefore to create radical change. They have more ambitious aims than those prescribed by Fung and Wright, who operate at a very concrete and practical level. The process in Højen/Vejle is characterized by a desire for incremental and every-day changes associated with LDP work. In Højen/Vejle, working groups have been created, the LDP is passing through a consultation process and will be adopted in the municipal council, where the municipal politicians will thus recognize that the plan content can be sustained in the years to come. This will contribute positively to the implementation momentum, despite the narrow focus in content. The organizational complexity of the relationship between local communities and municipalities appears to be reduced in the Højen/Vejle case more than in the Hashøj NW/Slagelse case because there is a more mature, tested and well-defined model in the Højen/Vejle case. There is, however, momentum in the courage and willingness to test new solutions in the Hashøj NW case at the local council, the municipal administrative and the political levels by temporarily setting aside the uneven resource base and testing new approaches. The analysis showed, however, that this attempt at deliberative problem solving is not without its own problems. It thus appears – as Fung and Wright also critically write – that the actual uneven power structures can be a limitation to EDD theory because this theory has very ambitious goals for local-municipal deliberation. There are practical political limitations to the use of the Hashøj NW/Slagelse model if it is going to evolve into a mainstream model for the municipality. The Hashøj NW/Slagelse model tries to make room for innovative deliberations and to capture the learning that they bring. Although this is in line with Fung and Wright's theoretical prescriptions, it could turn into a rather uneven situation in large municipalities when many local areas are making plans, and rent-seeking agendas inside and between 'cramped geographic boundaries' will appear (Fung and Wright, 2001, 36).

A model for how to deepen democracy in large municipalities

Can local councils and LDP creation at the sub-municipal level serve to deepen democracy and to create rural development in large municipalities? There is no national model for organization at the sub municipal level and, as already mentioned, no rules prescribing the creation of LDPs. The plan that comes closest is the local plan, which addresses physical planning and has been created by the municipality. There has however, been a ministerial recommendation to establish rural policies at the municipal level to co-ordinate initiatives that will influence rural areas, and many municipalities have tried to meet this recommendation as well as the recommendation in the reform text that democracy be deepened. The weaker representation of rural areas in municipal democracy is a reality that cannot be underestimated. The two cases show that both municipalities and their associated local rural areas are engaged in initiatives to improve democracy, but they also show that it is happening with the municipality in charge – especially in the Vejle case. This can be seen as curtailing the influence of local areas in line with Parker et al. (2015) and Davoudi and Madanipour (2013) but the municipality is also expected to meet local areas in a somehow uniform manner. Although representative democracy was more inclusive on the part of local rural areas before the reform, establishing institutional structures at the sub-municipal level, as prescribed by the democratic theory of Fung and Wright, and initiating LDPs is a way to mobilize local citizens and establish meeting points between municipal officials/politicians and local rural citizens in the new larger municipalities.

The question is whether a secure process exists to achieve these goals or whether progress should be based on trial and error. Figure 1 illustrates an attempt to define a secure process. Here, a multi-level participation structure is outlined which corresponds well with the institutional setup in Højen/Vejle.

Figure 1: A multi-level participation structure suitable for large municipalities

Currently in Denmark, this type of local council-based structure where local councils generate LDPs in cooperation with the municipality and local citizens does not exist in all municipalities, as was the case in Slagelse.

Final remarks

This article set out to investigate how democracy in large municipalities can be co-created through multi-level participation structures and LDP preparation. Two cases of local council preparation of LDPs were analysed

using Fung and Wright's theory on EDD as an explanatory framework. The analysis showed that multi-level participation structures were established in the two case municipalities at different levels of maturity. Fung and Wright's theory on EDD highlighted key elements to focus on in municipality-local relations – such as specific institutional design features, the solving of concrete and practical problems, the involvement of ordinary people and officials in cooperation, and deliberative problem solving. EDD was, however, ambitious, which means that it did not capture the actual power relations that impact the local-municipality relationship. The extent to which democracy can be co-produced between local communities and municipalities through local councils organizing and preparing LDPs is under the decisive influence of the power, ambitions and restrictions devolved to them by municipalities (Legacy et al., 2014). The above illustration shows how sub-municipal democracy can be co-created by the use of a local council structure and LDP preparation, and national authorities should provide guidelines for possible local democracy models at the sub municipal level when amalgamations are taking place. In addition, three aspects are crucial to discuss at the municipal level before a model for local council organization and LDP preparation can be decided upon. These aspects address 1) identifying which overall municipal democratic structure local council organization and LDP preparation is part of, 2) how to practically organize dialogue between the municipality and the local councils, and 3) whether there are limitations to the goals that local councils can incorporate into their plans. Despite its ambitious scope on the part of both citizens and the system, Fung and Wright's EDD provides important lessons that are reinforced through these cases. Both national authorities and municipalities should understand that activities at the sub-municipal level can be productive arenas of participation, creating understanding between citizens and the system that can counteract the distrust citizens feel towards centralised expert and elite systems.

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