

Explaining the Democratic Performance of Governance Networks for Neighbourhood Renewal in Denmark, England and The Netherlands

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ABSTRACTS

This paper is concerned with questions of whether and how democratic imperatives are incorporated in the design and operation of neighbourhood governance institutions. The paper develops a line of research that is investigating ‘democratic performance’ in new governance settings – in other words, how questions of legitimacy, consent and accountability are negotiated and evolve in public policy institutions that operate beyond representative government (Skelcher 2007).

The paper’s focus on neighbourhood institutions reflects a policy agenda now common across many European countries. This policy agenda is of relatively long standing in some countries and a more recent priority in others but in either case it identifies the ‘neighbourhood’ as an important site, space or sphere for urban revitalisation and/or democratic renewal (Lepine et al, 2008).

Neighbourhood institutions offer an important opportunity for researchers interested in explaining the design and democratic performance of governance institutions as they operate across the boundary between representative and participative democracy, combining a concern for democratic discourses with those of managerialism, and identifying new and important roles for neighbourhood residents as co-governors and co-producers of policies and services (Sullivan, 2001).

This paper reports research on the design and evolution of neighbourhood governance networks in three contrasting European cities – Birmingham, Copenhagen and Rotterdam. Each is home to neighbourhood governance networks, but with different designs and forms of democratic performance.

The paper explores various explanations for the way in which legitimacy, consent and accountability are resolved in these neighbourhood institutions. We begin by drawing on Dryzek’s work (1996). He argues that institutional designs are largely pre-determined by the prevailing discourse. We refine this to focus on the policy discourse in relation to each city, responding to Kriesi, Adam and Jochum’s (2006) conclusions about the lack of consideration of the relationship between policy field

and governance design. We then elaborate this analysis by reference to the work of Lowndes and Sullivan (2008) who identify four 'ideal types' of neighbourhood governance, each with its own institutional shape and form. Finally, we draw on the work of Barnes et al (2007) who suggest that state and non-state actors may draw on/give preference to different discourses and institutional forms and that these differences are played out in the processes of deliberation and contestation that occur between these actors as neighbourhood institutions are developed.

The paper draws on in-depth qualitative research combined with criteria-based assessments of governance institutions using the 'governance assessment' methodology (Mathur and Skelcher 2007). It may also include Q methodology analysis, subject to data availability.

Key Words: democratic performance, neighbourhoods, governance networks