Excerpts from Hartje, Steffen:
The local Democracy
and Democratic Network Governances

Introduction

One of the major questions concerning the implementation of the new municipal reform was whether the large, newly merged municipalities would bring about a democratic deficit. With a decrease in the number of politicians and with geographically larger municipalities, it was expected that local politicians would increasingly shift their focus from local matters to more general areas. Also, the influence of the individual community, as it becomes part of a larger municipality, would be relatively reduced.

In order to counter these risks and to avoid a general weakening of participatory democracy, a number of new municipalities have implemented developmental initiatives which are to ensure that, in the wake of the municipal mergers, they would still have a well-functioning local democracy built on widespread public engagement.

This publication describes some of the attempts undertaken to initiate deliberative dialogues between local communities and town councils so as to ensure functional and innovative methods of dealing with the changed conditions caused by the mergers. On the other hand, municipal reforms need not always be seen in negative terms – i.e. as potentially problematic for democracy. They can offer new possibilities insofar as merged municipalities have resources and means to introduce advanced and more appropriate organisational methods, thus countering the "parish mentality" which has characterised many municipalities so far.

Communication and collaboration between citizens and local politicians through different forms of participatory processes are at present necessary to secure a solid democracy. They are also imperative in dealing with the problems of a modern society which can, indeed, only be dealt with by citizens themselves and by their engagement in local affairs. It is, for instance, difficult to imagine solving problems related to the environment, health, or urban regeneration without involving citizens.

It is no longer tolerable for a highly technological and specialised society to have recourse solely to traditional hierarchic (top-bottom) models of political governance. For that very reason, some municipalities are now working on the development of an interactive network governance model for active citizenship, which operates across former administrative boundaries and authority levels.

The first part of this publication deals with a description of the practical aspects involved in the implementation of new organisational forms of local democracy in Varde Kommune. The considerations taken during this process exemplify both the problems and the benefits experienced by a large number of municipalities during the merger process.

The second part deals with a description of the trial runs of other municipalities at renewing their local democracy structure, or in other ways highlighting the citizen involvement issues.

The third and last part consists of interviews with two of the country's leading researchers in network governance and citizen engagement processes, respectively, and the relevance of such processes to the development of democracy.

Steffen Hartje - May 2008, Aarhus
CHAPTER 1

The Development Council in *Varde Kommune*

The developmental work in *Varde Kommune* had already started before the completion of the municipal reform in *Blaabjerg Kommune*. Blaabjerg was until then a small West Jutland municipality in the former Ribe District with 6.500 inhabitants. During the summer, the number of inhabitants multiplies due to its popularity among tourists who flock to the area close to the North Sea, with its many summer houses and natural beauty. Income from the tourist trade and from large agricultural areas were essential sources of income for the local authorities in a municipality which was otherwise considered to be geographically marginal, with a negative population development, low taxation, and somewhat unattractive to businessmen.

These were all factors indicating a need for new initiatives which could counter the adverse development of this municipality.

Seen from a more positive perspective, this municipality had a long tradition of widespread local democracy in its villages, and it controlled many local networks which helped to build up and develop local communities. In addition, local authorities were well supplied with a fast broadband network contributing to new developmental potentials for industrial/commercial growth as well as for that of active co-citizenship.

The most important goal for the project was to establish a forum which might support the democracy development and the development of an active co-citizenship, while simultaneously acting as a catalyst for local engagement and development.

The inspiration for this forum were the village councils - established in many of the municipalities controlling large rural district areas - which, among other things, acted as a communication network between the municipal council and the inhabitants of the rural districts. Besides, the aim of this project was to make use of all the possibilities offered by new information technology for communication purposes between the citizens themselves and politicians.

The new forum contributes towards:
1   the co-ordination and exchange of experience between associations and unions in villages and rural districts, the strengthening of local union life and cultural work in rural districts

2   the participation of agricultural representation in the process of structural adaptation

3   well-grounded tourist activities in villages and rural areas

4   traffic infrastructure in the countryside

5   the promotion of business development in rural districts

6   the proper functioning of private and public services in rural areas

7   the strengthening of neighbour care

8   the improvement of co-existence and living conditions in villages

Thus, developmental work had a twofold vision of its objectives, firstly, to strengthen democracy development and, consequently, to encourage a public engagement towards the municipality and its local authority.

By re-energizing local democracy - often marked by activities contributing towards shared values and cultural contents - the attempt was to try and stimulate public engagement and the people's desire to participate in municipal development. Moreover, the forum was to contribute to the development of a new interplay between the municipal council and local interests, including the improvement of political administration, governance and connection to the local areas in the individual villages and communities. [2]

Blaabjerg Kommune's rural district policy was to constitute an important guideline for the new forum.

PARTNERSHIP WITH *SYDVEST ENERGI*, DANISH BROADBAND AND DANISH AGRICULTURE

One of the aims of the project, while still in its preparatory phase, was that the new local democracy model should be adaptable not only in *Blaabjerg Kommune*, but also in the much larger *Ny Varde Kommune*, eventually becoming a source of inspiration to other municipalities in the process of municipal reform.

In order to ensure the project's impact on both regional and national levels, *Sydvest Energi*, Danish Broadband and Danish Agriculture were invited to participate in the project's administrative committee.

There already existed a partnership and co-operation agreement between *Sydvest Energi* and *Blaabjerg Kommune* in connection with the dissemination of light-conductor cables in the area, which meant that *Blaabjerg* was one of the leading municipalities to offer its citizens a fast internet access. Logically, the new IT technology became an important element in the local democracy development – namely, as a new communication possibility between communities and between citizens and local politicians.

Danish Broadband, which is one of the largest purveyors of broadband services in the country, was interested in developing new types of internet based services, including new forms of communication possibilities between citizens and IT-supported teaching. The company was, in fact, interested in a project which focused on the development of local and municipal networks with local democracy as central theme.

Danish Agriculture was another relevant partner for a project which was to strengthen local democracy in sparsely populated agricultural areas. One of the most important objectives for Danish Agriculture was to ensure that businesses would continue to flourish in rural areas. This development can be brought about by stimulating and building up a dynamic interaction between residents of rural areas. It was of great interest to Danish Agriculture that the development of a democracy model would take into account rural areas in connection with the implementation of a municipal reform, as it otherwise feared that the particular interests of agriculture might be overlooked by the newly merged and much larger municipalities.

'Local Supermarket' Democracy

 Blaabjerg Kommune had, as many other Danish municipalities, a very active and varied union life, supported by a dynamic voluntary work force. In most local areas there existed an active parish which contributed towards a sound co-ordinating effort.

    Also, dialogue between citizens and politicians functioned well. The so-called "gap" between citizens and politicians or civil servants was not enormous. On the contrary, if a problem needed to be presented to the political system, it was quite easy to contact and keep in touch with the mayor and other municipal civil servants. *Blaabjerg Kommune* was therefore a good example of a democratic practice which is characterised as, so to speak, a 'local supermarket' democracy. It can be defined, for instance, as a form of democracy typically practised in small municipalities where people often meet local politicians and other important decision-makers at the cold counter of their supermarkets while considering options for their evening meal. Consequently, a 'local supermarket' democracy gives people the possibility of informal and non-bureaucratic ways of communicating with politicians.

    Close contact between citizens and politicians has a number of advantages:
people can receive almost immediate feedback to some of their problems and queries while politicians gain insight into the nature of the problems stirring in the local community. This ease of communication helps both citizens and the local authorities maintain a constructive on-going dialogue.

    The close social contact between citizens and politicians in small municipalities is usually also reflected in the number of personal votes during municipal elections. A study shows that the smaller the municipality, the higher the personal votes. In 2001, personal votes accounted for 86,8% of votes in municipalities with less than 5.000 inhabitants, and 81% in municipalities with between 5.000 and 9.999 inhabitants. To contrast, personal votes made up only 62,8% of votes in municipalities with over 100.000 inhabitants. [3]

    Local Supermarket democracy can, however, have its disadvantages. It may be difficult for politicians to make unpopular decisions as they can be met by angry reactions during their daily encounters with the people. There may also be a risk of politicians becoming too personally involved in individual cases, ignoring problems at a more general level.

Which organisational possibilities were to be used for local democracy?

The original plan for the developmental work was that the new local forums were to be established as village councils, but before starting on the work it was decided to examine whether there existed other organisational forms for local democracy which would better fit the goals as formulated in the project description. This resulted in further close studies in order to ensure the most suitable organisational form.

    The major reason for the existing organisation of local democracy has been the decentralisation policy which has marked Danish society since the passing of the earlier municipal reform in 1970. The decentralisation policy was, among other things, to contribute to the renewal of the public sector and to help solve the rapid growth of public tasks so as to ensure that the larger municipalities – as a result of the reform – were able to take on more responsibilities.

    It was already feared, as early as 1970 after the municipal reform, that the new and large

municipalities - 1400 parishes were reduced to 275 municipalities - would result in a democratic deficit. Consequently, in order to counteract this tendency, the idea of establishing local councils was developed. These were concentrated around main cities such as Copenhagen, Aarhus, Odense, Aalborg, etc., where the risk of a growing gap between local politicians and citizens was most likely.

In Copenhagen one went as far as establishing a number of local - or perhaps a better name would be *neighbourhood* - councils. These councils were defined as elected organs which were empowered by the town council, and commissioned to act for a geographically limited area of the local community. For instance, the first neighbourhood councils had as goal to secure citizen engagement in the political decision making processes through a formalised competence lay-out.

However, the experiment in Copenhagen was not a success because of insufficient political backing and gradually the neighbourhood council debate died out. It was, however, picked up later, and there have been since then further attempts to set up this type of neighbourhood council.

LOCAL COMMITTEES WITH FORMAL COMPETENCE

With reference to §65 of the municipal statute, it is possible for the municipalities today to set up local committees which are given independent authority in a number of closely defined areas. The set up of the committee is to be decided by the municipal council and need not be representative although it often is. Moreover, such a committee, with reference to §17, point 4 of the statute, can set up a special committee under the municipal council which can, among other things, act as go-between with local politicians.

A local democracy model consisting of formally reduced local committees in accordance with the statute would have the advantage of being an independent authority, but at the same time there may be the disadvantage, that it can very easily become too heavy a bureaucratic system, unlike the usually more ad hoc forms of citizen involvement or participation. It may very well be the reason for the unpopularity of this proposal amongst municipalities. This proposal was actually also rejected by *Blaaberg/Varde Kommune*, who preferred a more flexible model built on voluntary interaction between the local union life, the local institutions and the private sector.

NEIGHBOURHOOD COUNCILS AND JOINT COUNCILS WITHOUT FORMAL AUTHORITY

Instead of giving local committees or neighbourhood councils formal authority in accordance with the statute, contact and communication between town councils and communities could be built upon resources and networks already existing within the communities.
    In most municipalities it is the people themselves who take initiatives to form organisations in an attempt to promote their influence on the town council. By whatever name, be it neighbourhood council or joint council, these organisations are built on a voluntary work force. Typically, their members are local union enthusiasts devoted to a cause or other, their ultimate objective being a local area rich in public institutions, healthy environment and efficient infrastructure.

Contrary to local committees with formal authority, it is obvious that the committee members of neighbourhood councils are representative, elected specifically for the local area that they represent. They are mainly engaged citizens who participate in a number of local matters. Typically, they are active association members. They may participate as individuals if they so wish, without representing others – if conventions otherwise allow it. Citizens participating in local councils should take into

account the fact that committee members of the local council are not necessarily representative of the community's point of view in concrete cases.

JOINT COUNCILS

There are several organisations established by citizens along the same lines as neighbourhood councils, but have other names. In Aarhus Kommune, for instance, associations have established joint councils. These councils represent a union of associations in a number of communities as well as in parts of Aarhus City itself. Having started in a few local areas, the idea of establishing joint councils has now spread to a growing number of areas in an attempt to promote citizen engagement.
   The joint councils are built up as associations with conventions, and they carry out, among other things, the following tasks:
   1   To create an overview of and provide information on the different activities offered in local areas
   2   To be sympathetic towards the needs of citizens for new activities and to offer suggestions
   3   To help local associations in presenting cases to the municipality's judicial system

   The problem with building up a local democracy on a neighbourhood council model or other similar organ is that one cannot expect to find them in all the local areas of a municipality, while, on the other hand, they could be so numerous as to make it practically impossible for the town council to keep in touch with, say, sixty to eighty neighbourhood councils in one municipality.

VILLAGE COUNCILS

The Village Council is a common name for local forums dealing with the shared interests of villages and with promoting co-operation between the local authority and sparsely populated territories. These village councils are found in many of the municipalities which have rural districts.

   They usually consist of two representatives from each village in a municipality. Mostly they are set up by the municipality as part of the rural district policy, but they can also be formed by the inhabitants themselves.

   The following are areas of responsibility for village councils:

   1   to share responsibility for and take initiative to village projects
   2   to work towards the development of the village
   3   to constitute a united front for villages and rural districts, promoting progress
   4   to support the interplay/networks between the villages themselves and between the villages and the local authority
   5   to influence rural district policy
   6   to promote exchange of experience in terms of debates concerning the welfare of the village
   7   to be regularly present at hearings concerning local projects
   8   to preserve village environment
   9   to strengthen the sense of responsibility and to encourage local identity (through events)
   10   to distribute a pool in support of rural district projects

11   to contribute towards the renovation of village halls
12   to contribute towards the development of nature paths, playgrounds, etc.

Village councils are set up primarily in a democratic spirit in that each village elects its representatives. Each village can also establish its own village council which, in turn, sends representatives to a common village council.

Funding

The work undertaken by village councils is financed by membership fees and municipal contributions.

For each village council the level of activity varies. Some are active with an average of a meeting a month, while others have but a few meetings a year.

According to a study made by the National Association of Village Councils there seems to be a tendency towards a growing co-operation between municipalities and villages most likely due to the fact that there has been an increase in the establishment of village councils. Collaborative efforts have been steadily on the rise since 1990 mostly due to the contribution policy of the Ministry of the Interior. These contributions vary in their nature. Some of the village councils work exclusively with the distribution of funds to village projects, while others provide labour for specific work in local areas.

Generally it can be stated that the Village Council model is on the whole efficient without in any way being revolutionary.

The fact that the model was not implemented in *Blaabjerg Kommune* is because the municipality aims towards a local democracy that covers the whole municipality, and not only the rural areas. *Blaabjerg Kommune* thus came to the conclusion that rural areas would benefit by joining the urban community in a common network, rather than by having their own local democracy structure.

A STUDY OF CITIZENS' OPINION ON LOCAL FORUMS

As none of the above-mentioned local democracy models matched the needs of *Blaabjerg Kommune*, it was agreed to try and develop a completely new model. To ensure that citizens had their say in the working out of a new democracy model, meetings were held, including a study through a number of interviews.

During the interviews a number of citizens who are well-known for their active participation in local affairs were asked to express their opinion on:

1   the idea of establishing new local forums
2   which duties and responsibilities should be undertaken by such forums
3   the work distribution and organisation
4   the number of forums to be established and their geographical distribution

The result of the study showed that there was a general backing for the project. It was generally agreed to hold regular meetings between the local associations and their politicians.

The results of the study also showed that it would be imperative to outline clearly the aims and objectives of the new local forum, were they to be of any interest to the public. For example, it would be necessary to indicate whether they could act as hearing partners on specific cases, how would contact between the local forums and the town council be organised, how often would the two parties have to meet, what would their respective responsibilities be and, finally, whether they would be receiving a financial contribution for the administrative work.

Citizens would like, on the one hand, to have a statement from the politicians on their intentions regarding the new local forums while, at the same time, they would like to have a certain influence on the way the project is to be conducted. The interviewees mentioned that they were also looking forward to the fact that the new local forums could promote coordination between the small associations which already exist in the community.

Some of the interviewees indicated that the new local forums could contribute to develop a network between union life and the private business sector, thus encouraging people to settle in the area, as well as investing in an effort to promote tourism. Others expressed the fear that the former intimacy between the citizens and the local politicians would disappear when *Blaabjerg Kommune* became an integral part of the much larger *Varde Kommune*

Moreover, all interviewees indicated that it would be necessary for the new local forums to receive some form of economic support from the municipality, at the very least a minimum amount to cover meetings, photocopying, postage, etc. expenses.

THE NUMBER OF LOCAL FORUMS TO BE ESTABLISHED

One of the difficult tasks which had to be solved in the light of discussions held with the local community was the question of how many local forums were to be established as well as which of the existing parishes were to constitute a new local forum.

The municipality consisted of seven large local areas, *Kvong*, *Outrup*, *Henne*, *Nørre Nebel*, *Lydum*, *Nymindegab* and *Lunde*, and it would not have been appropriate to allow each of these areas to constitute a local forum as this could bring up again old differences between some of the areas concerned. The areas were individually not large enough to make up a suitable unit.

In the light of the investigation a proposal was put forward for the establishment of three local forums but this was never realised as the municipal reform was completed before the local forum structure had been implemented and, consequently, it was no longer of any relevance.

INFORMATION ON THE PROJECT'S ACTIVITIES

A precondition for the establishment of a local democracy was that citizens should consider the project suitable for upholding a dialogue between the municipality and the local communities. Moreover, it was essential for the people concerned to feel part of the whole project. It was therefore important that from the very start information regarding the aims of the new project was communicated in an efficient way, as well as to initiate deliberative debates in the local communities on how it could in practice be carried out.

BLAABJERGNET.DK

In order to ensure communication and propagation of relevant information, collaboration with "BlaabjergNet.dk" began. An internet portal which acted as a rallying point for the citizens of the municipality with links to the local news sites in the area was established. The portal propagated, among other things, news and information to citizens and tourists concerning forthcoming arrangements in the area. The *Blaabjerg* portal was established as an independent association with a start capital provided by the municipality. It was otherwise funded by membership fees and advertising income.

   The portal presented, on a regular basis, the progress in the project's development and offered the possibility of commenting on its various initiatives.

Development Councils: a new organisational form for local democracy

After *Blaabjerg Kommune* merged with the municipalities of *Helle*, *Ølgod*, *Varde* and *Blåvandshukr* to form the *Ny Varde Kommune*, it was once again necessary to reconsider the local democracy project.

   Although it was the intention from the start to apply the local democracy project to the newly merged and much larger municipality, it was not to be taken for granted that the new town council would be in agreement.

   However, it soon became quite clear that members of the new town council were in favour of the new project and agreed to the continuation of the work. It was therefore decided to adjust preliminary preparations to the needs of the much larger municipality both in terms of its population and geographical area.

   Ny Varde Kommune is with its 50.000 inhabitants and an area of 1255 km^2 much larger than *Blaabjerg Kommune*. It was therefore necessary to develop a new local democracy model which would take into account the needs of the new municipality.

 BASIS FOR ESTABLISHING DEVELOPMENT COUNCILS

Instead of maintaining the former parish communities in the new municipality, it was considered more appropriate to form new units which could give a new sense of belonging and shared identity among the citizens. Consequently, the project group took the following action in the development of a local democracy model:

   1   To ensure the organisation of all local areas – all citizens would have equal opportunity to address a local forum and present a case. This would no longer be the exclusive right of a powerful local community.
   2   To strengthen co-operation between the present communities and consequently create a sense of common identity.
   3   To highlight the developmental perspective. The work of the local forums would have to be forward-looking instead of being mired in old conflicts of interest.

4   To ensure dialogue and communication between local communities and politicians in a large municipality where the opposite is often the case.

5   To ensure local influence on the municipality's development, in that forums could support local ideas within a larger context.

6   To be able to work on major tasks that many small local areas would have a hard time handling alone.

7   To help turn, through discussion, local initiatives into a common cause for the whole municipality.

8   To help promote development and encourage initiatives.

9   To publicise the various local initiatives in order to inspire other local areas to follow suit.

LOCAL FORUMS BECOME DEVELOPMENT COUNCILS

The work of the project group resulted in a concrete proposal for a local democracy model for the municipality, which was called "Proposal to establish development councils in Varde".

The proposal had taken into account the above objectives as well as the fact that the number of citizens per politician had risen with the implementation of the merger, and that politicians therefore would have less time to attend to individual cases and would to a greater extent become generalists.

The fact that local politicians would probably have less time to work on individual cases is not necessarily bad for the municipal democracy, but it demands that new ways of organisation be developed. Similarly, as the political level and the governance level are in the process of being re-organised and made more effective via the merger, it was also necessary for the local democracy model to take into account the modified and more central municipal structure.

There would also be a need to intensify development in the *Varde* communities so that they could be made attractive both for the business sector and newcomers. Therefore, civic associations, public institutions and the private sector had to be motivated into establishing new forms of co-operation which would contribute to this purpose.

These considerations resulted in the suggestion that nine to twelve development councils should be established. Each council would have to cover a school district area, or an area of equal size. The new local forums were called development councils, firstly because one wished to signal that their work would be forward-oriented focusing on creating development and, secondly, because they would cover an area and a population which was larger than the existing local forums. The development councils had to be dialogue forums and gather good ideas on how the communities and the municipality as a whole could be developed as well as trying to carry out these ideas in conjunction with the new town council.

The reasons for using large school districts as geographical work arenas for the new councils were that they have a size which ensured that all development councils had the necessary resources. In addition the number of large school districts was appropriate as there were limits to the number of councils that could be established within the new structure if they had to be included in a permanent collaboration with the local politicians and the municipal administration. It would, for instance, be impossible for the town council to be in continuous dialogue with forty to fifty councils.

The division into large school district areas meant furthermore that there would be both efficient and less efficient local areas which could benefit from mutual interaction.

Even though the town council gladly saw the establishment of a development council in each school district area, there were no demands that they be set up. If a local area decided that it was unnecessary to establish a council or could not get citizens to participate in the work, then there was nothing to do about it. The school district area would then have to manage without a council and concentrate instead on co-operating with the existing councils.

Organisation
It was also up to the individual school district area to decide on how the development council was to be organised. However, a proposal on rules and regulations was published relevant to the formation of associations as an inspiration on how one could organise the work. Moreover, there was a recommendation that the membership sphere consist only of representatives of civic associations, private companies and public institutions in the area.

Authority
The councils were to act as local arenas for dialogue. Their authority would consist on being heard and having the possibility of influencing the political decision-making processes for the benefit of the local democracy.

The relationship between development councils and other councils
According to the proposal, the development councils would not be in conflict with neighbourhood councils, local civic associations or similar organs, which were set up by citizens in the communities, but should be seen as complementary to them, focusing on local development.

Contributions
The councils would receive from the municipality minor funding to cover meetings expenses. The municipality would, moreover, be responsible for funding large development projects.

Responsibilities
Apart from the general objectives which were outlined for the development councils - namely that they were to have an open dialogue with the town council, that they were to gather ideas on the further development of communities and the municipality, and that they were to ensure the exchange of experience - the individual council was at liberty to decide for itself the jobs it would undertake. At the beginning, this liberty entailed some uncertainty on which tasks they could handle, but it also started up some good discussions on how to adjust the work to local needs.

The proposal contained a few examples of jobs to be carried out such as:
1   To encourage discussions among citizens on how their local areas could further develop
2   To contribute towards strengthening the co-operation between civic associations, public institutions and the business sector
3   To encourage educated discussions with local politicians on individual cases which could then be seen in a wider perspective.
4   To contribute towards making *Ny Varde Kommune* an attractive place to settle, by developing new activities in the local areas

5   To contribute towards IT-progress
6   To contribute towards the enhancement and visibility of the positive aspects of the various communities of the municipality

JOINT DEVELOPMENT COUNCIL

In an effort to secure a general view on the municipality's development as well as strengthening the dialogue and the exchange of experience between the various councils and the town council, it was suggested to establish a joint development council with representatives from all the development councils.

By giving neighbourhood councils and other councils the opportunity of working out joint priorities, the joint development council would then be able to counteract their tendency to focus only on their own interests.

The organisational model for the development councils

The individual citizen or association would not be obliged to address the development councils, if he/she has an idea or a problem. The development council can be used advantageously if an idea is to be cleared and presented to the decision-makers in the town council, but this form of organisation need not prevent people themselves from contacting the political system.

On the other hand, the development councils decide whether they are willing to deal with a case presented by a citizen. They can, for instance, decide whether a problem is too insignificant for their involvement or, on the contrary, too complicated for their competence.

The individual development councils do not need to bring their cases before the joint development council. In most cases, these will be sent directly to the municipal council or to the local civil servants. The joint development council should be used for cases of a more general character or for tasks that require certain resources for their implementation.

In the political system, development councils refer to the committee for culture and leisure, the reason for this being that the activities of various associations are traditionally supported by the leisure and culture domain.

Experience gained from network governance as used in Holbæk Municipality

The following are excerpts of an interview with Professor Jacob Torfing, Department of Social Sciences, Roskilde University. He is one of the theorists behind the model of network governance used in Holbæk. He is also one of the leading researchers within the field of network governance. Torfing's answers to the author's direct questions are indirectly reported [*Nærdemokrati i udvikling* pp. 78-86].

Steffen Hartje (SH): *Would you explain the basis for the development of the local democracy model used in Holbæk?*

Torfing explained that in *Holbæk Kommune* they have attempted to develop a new model for citizen engagement as the old, traditional method of citizen engagement, based on local council models and characteristic of a so-called 'representative mentality', is considered essentially outdated. Choosing a representative to represent others often leads to a representation monopoly in that the ones sitting on the local council do not encourage others to participate actively. This mentality, according to Torfing, hampers citizen engagement as it does not allow for spontaneity as, for instance, in the occasional burst of anger at some displeasing event such as the shutting down of a school or a library. According to the old model people would have to be first elected for town council representation before they can have their say on local matters.

According to Torfing a network should preferably go beyond the representative mentality and establish, rather, open platforms for dialogue where engaged citizens can participate on an ad hoc basis, if they so wish.

Torfing further explained that in Holbæk local forums operate as platforms from which to introduce and manage local matters. This is based on the fact that having citizens collaborate between themselves is considered to be much more effective than if they have to have the blessing of local politicians or help from the municipality. The municipality is kept informed of the various cases in question. It has, in its turn, devised a system for reporting back on whether the matter in question can be implemented, or taken into further consideration for implementation, or rejected. In this way, one deals with the negotiation and work organisation process. To a certain extent, this principle is similar to the one adopted in the EU in that decisions are to be made as closely as possible to citizen level. A number of cases can actually be solved through self-administration within the network. Others need a certain degree of confrontation with the municipality, while some others have to be taken out of the hands of the local forums to be treated directly by the municipality.

SH: *Would participants in local forums require skills in network governance?*

Torfing stresses the fact that network governance demands a new way of thinking on the part of both politicians and citizens participating in local forums. A great number of associations and institutions are to learn that they can no longer solely bide by their own interests and thereafter present their demands to the municipality. They must accept the fact that they can no longer go directly to the politicians concerned. They will have to run their case through a local forum before the matter can proceed. Torfing adds that this has been mind-boggling to many, especially to the ones with good connections in the local political system, who find it difficult to accept that things had now changed and that it would be necessary in future to argue for one's case with other local participants.
This is one aspect of the matter, explains Torfing. The other is that one can no longer just make

demands, one has to become part of the whole process of finding a solution.

SH: *Can local forums also play a part in the general political development of the municipality?*

Torfing replied in the affirmative, explaining that the municipality commits itself to dealing with all cases from local forums which affect the local area. Furthermore, a contract arrangement between the two parties will give local forums the possibility of carrying out special tasks.

SH: *Would it not be necessary to set up a model for an association, or something similar, if local forums are to become contract partners with the municipality and receive funding?*

Torfing agreed that it is indeed necessary to organise a local control group to act as contract holders.

SH*: Do local forums receive financial support from the municipality to help cover their running costs?*

Torfing replied that they receive a minimal contribution to cover administrative and other minor expenditures. If they need financial help for some concrete project, they have to apply for funds, and the application will figure in the list of priorities worked out for all the proposals sent out from local forums.

SH: *Is it possible for politicians to maintain their engagement with local forums in their busy, everyday life?*

Torfing described Holbæk's so-called 'dialogue committees' where three to four politicians communicate with local forums at least twice a year. The municipality decided to prioritise tasks originating from dialogue committees, rather than from traditional committees. According to Torfing, one cannot make politics in a vacuum. Politicians need input in the form of encouragement, support and the need to meet demands in order to develop and generate new ideas. Dialogue committees seem to serve this purpose. He thinks that this is very exciting because it is precisely the point where classical representative democracy changes into a new participative democracy involving citizens.

SH: *Do you think that the network governance model gives citizens the possibility of exercising major influence on the political decision-making processes?*

Torfing believes it does. He stresses the fact that network governance makes it possible to influence the official management process all the way through. Many of the traditional citizen-involvement work tools – e.g. public hearings, public meetings – occur during the final, decision-making phase. In a network governance system citizen involvement takes place during the whole process, and this gives participants the possibility of following and influencing the case from start to finish.

SH: *Do you believe that network governance has a better chance of attracting young people than the traditional, representative democracy?*

According to Torfing, this would actually promote the involvement of young people precisely because they do not need to be elected to be part of a management committee. Their influence is thus more immediate. He believes that citizens' way of being active has changed pattern in the recent years. Nowadays one talks of an "ordinary, everyday maker" instead of an "expert activist." Everyday makers, numerous among the young, have the possibility through network governance of influencing the decision making processes, which is not the case in classical organisational work.

Torfing goes on to explain that there is much talk regarding the unorganised young people, and how they can take part in democratic processes. This is, he believes, precisely the way they can achieve some influence. There is no demand from local forums that one should represent an organisation or an association. Anyone can simply represent him/herself. He also added that the network governance organisational form, being similar to educational methodologies - namely project work - was familiar and, thus, congenial to young people.

Torfing claims that one can see a change in attitude towards the use of the network. It does not necessarily mean that one has to establish channels for safeguarding one's interests. Networks are not just created because authorities are aware of the fact that there exists out there an enormous interest for gaining influence on politicians and decision making. It is, rather, the case of acknowledging the fact that if one wants to manage society nowadays, one needs to work across various parties of people. One can no longer govern from a centre.

SH*: Can you see a cause-effect connection between the widespread use of objectives and framework systems in both national and municipal domains, and the use of network governance system?*

Torfing thinks there is a connection caused by an increase in fragmentation due to the many new reforms. Some of the contributing factors are the concept of independent management in public institutions as well as the fact that contracts are increasingly given out to the private sector and voluntary organisations. This development, he claims, requires network systems that cut across the various fields of interest, thus ensuring that there is a minimum of co-ordination and overall control.

SH*: Would you mention some examples of where the usage of network governance would be of particular advantage?*

Torfing explains that there are some public functions where one actually cannot do without network governance. These are the so-called "wicked problems", projects or functions that present problems from the very start, such as insufficient insight into a problem and of its solution, or the involvement of different parties with a potential for conflicts of interests or, yet again, when there is need for specialised know-how.

SH: *How do municipal politicians relate to network governance? Are they not afraid of losing some of their authority?*

Torfing agrees that at first many politicians of the more traditional type may be worried about losing their clout, although things change when one enters into a dialogue with them. It turns out that many politicians do see the advantages of network governance, for example, they could be relieved of some of their duties in order to devote themselves to more strategic thinking/planning. Others see it as a source of inspiration on how to achieve their future objectives in developmental work.

Torfing stresses the fact that it is imperative for politicians to gain the necessary insight to be able to influence projects from the very beginning, and network governance gives them the opportunity to do so. In other words, politicians would have a double role in that they could manage the framework from the outside but, at the same time, they would be involved in the network from the inside.

SH: *Do politicians have the necessary qualifications to govern through a network? Does it not demand*

certain skills which they do not possess at present?

Torfing agrees that this form of leadership does, indeed, require know-how in negotiation, communication and strategic thinking. It is a far cry from simply claiming ideological inclinations or solving individual problems. This is the reason for dividing politicians in an A group and a B group. Politicians who have entered politics because they have marked themselves in a few single cases have difficulties in accepting network governance because they do not understand that politics can be a way of getting other people involved and to have them express their opinion. There is the need for developing the strategic and communicative abilities of politicians and civil servants.

SH: *What role would IT technology play in network governance?*

Torfing believes that the very fact that people can get in touch so easily and quickly is a great and unique tool in the development of network governance. It is interesting to note, according to Torfing, that network governance can be found on many levels. The EU is one of the political systems which depends most on network governance. Its committees have networks which include representatives which range from expert or interest organisations to civic organisations.
Torfing insists that the way of thinking which lies behind network governance penetrates all levels of a political system.

Citizen involvement and network governance in relation to the development council model

An interview on citizen involvement with Professor Jens Hoff, Institute for Political Science, University of Copenhagen

SH: *Why have various forms of citizen involvement been the object of considerable attention by political decision-making processes during recent years?*

 One of the reasons is that the way municipalities involve citizens has changed. Fifteen to twenty years ago citizen involvement was a formal affair. It had to go through various stages of the legislative process and citizens had to be heard. They actually had the right to demand to be heard. That was citizen involvement then. Afterwards, things changed when school administrations, senior councils and so forth, were established. Yet even then a very formal way of citizen involvement in well-defined areas was still current.
        Now we find ourselves in a third phase where citizen involvement is not just something one does in order to be democratic, but rather because some problems in society cannot be solved without citizen involvement.
        A good example would be the problem of urban renewal which would be impossible to solve without involving citizens. Moreover, there is a clear advantage in having citizens feel responsible for the decisions that have been made.

SH*: Why is there so much focus on network governance nowadays?*

 It is primarily due to two factors:
Society has become increasingly more complex and consequently more difficult to control.
Citizens put increasingly more demands on the public sector.
Society has functionally specialised itself as the world becomes increasingly more complex. There is an increase in the complexity of both the national and global network systems and new decision-

making centres are established across national borders. For instance, some of the Danish municipalities derive inspiration from global network systems exchanging ideas on new governance models. Network systems cut across former boundaries at all levels.

Another reason for the interest for network governance is that citizens nowadays put increasing demands on municipal institutions as well as on public contributions.

SH: *Do you anticipate problems through the implementation of network governance in political decision-making processes?*

There is a tendency that citizens of weak resources do not participate in networking. It is absolutely essential insofar as they do not take part in network governance that a significant effort be made to ensure that their opinions are also heard and taken into account.