

# Professionalization vs Democratic Control

## *Are They Mutually Exclusive in Collaboration for Local Service Provision?*

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### **Abstract**

The purpose of this study is to investigate how collaboration is perceived as reducing political control and influence thus creating issues of accountability, and to what extent this can be linked to resistance towards collaboration. This will be accomplished by investigating collaboration for joint service delivery as a phenomenon in the water and sewage sector in Sweden. By doing so we will be able to illustrate how there is a tension between on one hand professionals and their interests in providing high quality services and on the other hand political interests to keep control over investments and strategically important decisions. What the study also shows is how policy implementation does not necessarily have to be a result of political initiative, but also can be the result of a process initiated by street-level bureaucrats, especially if they have the support from managers and the board of directors.

## **Introduction**

Collaboration and the formation of governance networks for public service delivery is a widespread reform in the public sector. Research shows how collaboration can help solve research dependency issues, create synergies and gather competence necessary to solve wicked and complex issues (Huxham, 1996; Sullivan & Skelcher, 2002; Osborne, 2006; Hilwert & Swindell, 2013). Even though collaborations and networks are frequently used and regarded as a fruitful way to manage the challenges facing public service provision, not everyone has jumped on the bandwagon and attempts to collaborate are far from always successful.

Previous research shows that even though collaboration has merits, it also has challenges (Huxham, 2003; Emerson et al., 2011) and these challenges are regarded as being more or less similar regardless of the type of collaboration. What especially seems to be an issue is the impact collaboration in networks or

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larger organizations has on political governance and the ability for local politicians to oversee and influence the content of the services provided (Skelcher et al., 2011; Durose et al., 2015). How to secure good governance and accountability in situations where public service is provided by organizations operating at an arm's length from the political governance has been discussed in relation to quangos and hybrid arrangements (Romzek 2000; Mulgan, 2000; Hodge & Coghill, 2007; Greiling & Spraul, 2010; Willems & van Dooren, 2012; Grossi & Thomasson, 2015). Issues of accountability in complex settings and networks have also been recognized by policy implementation scholars and then particularly the challenge of securing goal congruence in horizontal networks (Keiser & Soss, 1998; Meyers et al., 2002). Due to the nature of horizontal networks, street level bureaucrats get more freedom to interpret policies and adapt them to specific situations or conditions in the workplace, leading to more room for what in the literature is referred to discretionary behavior (Lipsky, 1980; Pressman & Wildavsky, 1984; Maynard-Moody & Musheno, 2000; May & Winter, 2007) increasing the discrepancy between policies and practice.

Thus issues of accountability have been addressed in different types horizontal settings, but have, according to Sullivan and Skelcher (2002), been overlooked in studies of various forms of collaboration for public service provision, and the results from the few studies that do exist are inconclusive (Marthur & Skelcher, 2007; Jaffares & Skelcher, 2011; Durose et al, 2015), thus more studies are considered to be necessary (Meerkerk et al., 2015; Durose et al., 2015).

Consequently there is a need to look further into the issue of control and governance in relation to accountability and democratic deficiency in collaborations. The purpose of this study is therefore to investigate how collaboration is perceived as reducing political control and influence and as creating issues of accountability, and to what extent this can be linked to a resistance towards collaboration. This will be accomplished by investigating collaborative joint service delivery in the water and sewage sector in Sweden. By doing so we will be able to illustrate how there is a tension between, on one hand, professionals and their interests in providing high quality services and, on the other hand, politicians and their interest to keep control over investments and strategically important decisions. Further, this study explores how this tension between local politicians and professionals creates an obstacle to collaboration and/or impairs the legitimacy of joint service delivery. Thus while previous studies have recognized the tension between politicians and professionals (Pressman & Wildavsky, 1983 and Lipsky, 1980; May & Winter, 2007), this study expands our knowledge by analyzing this tension in a collaborative setting and by showing how the tension is not the result of a top-down implementation of policy, but rather the result of a policy implementation initiated by professionals with support in national regulations.

In the next section of the article the theoretical back-drop of the study is presented. This is followed by a presentation of the method used for the study and of how the data was analyzed, as well as a presentation of the result of the empirical analysis. The article is concluded with a discussion of the results and the contribution of the study and its implications along with a presentation of suggestions for future research.

## **Governance and governance networks**

The idea that through collaboration wicked and complex problems can be solved is far from a novel one (Kickert, 1997 et al.; Rhodes, 1997: 2010; Lowndes & Skelcher, 1998) and with the spread of the phenomenon we have, during the past decades, seen a growth in the literature concerning governance networks (Klijn & Koppenjan, 2012). The increasing inter-dependency among organizations has created a need to focus more on issues concerning coordination and collaboration in larger networks and to do so from a resource dependency perspective (Lowndes & Skelcher, 1998; Osborne, 2006). Collaborating across organizational boundaries in larger networks has therefore been put forward by scholars as an attractive alternative to the market oriented solutions that emerged in the wake of NPM (Lowndes & Skelcher, 1998; Osborne 2006).

### **THE ISSUE OF CONCEPTUAL AMBIGUITY**

When looking at the literature concerning collaboration through the use of governance network, one soon reaches the conclusion that not only does the field suffer from conceptual ambiguity, but the different concepts used refer to a wide range of different types of collaboration. The definitions range from including almost all types of collaboration (Huxham, 1996) to more exclusive focus on specific types of collaborations (see for example: Ansell & Gash, 2008 p. 544). To provide a more extensive overview would thus be too excruciating and not very fruitful since it would only confirm what many scholars already have concluded: the field suffers from conceptual ambiguity (Lowndes & Skelcher, 1998; Sullivan & Skelcher, 2002; Emerson et al., 2011) which makes it difficult to navigate within the field (Huxham, 2003).

One distinction might however be of importance and that is the one between governance and governance networks (Klijn, 2008). While governance is described as the process of organizing horizontal relationships between governmental organizations and other organizations, governance networks are regarded to be the horizontal relationships between governmental and non-governmental organizations in which public policy making and implementation occurs (Klijn, 2008: 511). To make this distinction between governance and governance networks is of relevance given the focus of this study. Hence the backdrop of this study will be in the distinction between governance and

governance networks provided by Klijn (2008) combined with his more inclusive definition of governance networks.

### **WHAT WE KNOW**

Klijn (2008) as well as Klijn & Koppenjan (2012) provide us with an overview of the research within the field of governance networks. One of the areas that has attracted interest from various scholars is the question of under which conditions collaboration occurs, with a focus on analyzing service delivery processes, co-ordination and efficiency within networks, and in relation to that, organizational forms and structures. Here we find researchers as Huxham (2003), Hilvert and Swindell (2013) and Bryson et al. (2006) who analyze and discuss how to through collaboration it is possible to achieve synergies and advantages that individual organizations are unable to accomplish on their own.

Another area of interest has been to identify and analyze the relations between actors involved in the network and governance processes (Lowndes & Skelcher, 1998; Ansell & Gash, 2008; Emerson et al., 2011; Klijn & Koppenjan, 2012). Here we find studies investigating how the distribution of power influences outcome and organizational processes (Provan et al., 2009) as well as studies focusing on issues concerning accountability and democracy in horizontal networks (Skelcher et al., 2011; Klijn & Koppenjan, 2012; Durose et al., 2015).

Yet other researchers have focused on the role of the manager. Focus within this field has mainly been to analyze the complexity of networks, as well as how value and content (different actors in the networks have different interests and focuses) can be secured and improved in horizontal collaborations (Klijn, 2008). Here we find for example research by Vangen and Huxham (2003) focusing on trust building in collaborations as well as research focusing on how through managerial efforts outcomes of collaboration can be improved (Johnston et al., 2010; Klijn et al., 2010; Jeffares & Skelcher, 2011; Edelenbos et al., 2012; Verweij et al., 2013).

One needs to bear in mind that the areas identified above are not mutually exclusive, rather they overlap. Besides overlapping, there are also tendencies of convergence between the fields (Klijn, 2008; Klijn & Koppenjan, 2012). Given the purpose of this article the focus of interest will be governance processes and issues concerning how accountability and democratic values are secured in horizontal collaborations. Therefore, a more in depth description of these areas will be provided in the next section.

### **ACCOUNTABILITY IN GOVERNANCE NETWORKS**

The issue at hand is how democracy can be secured in governance networks where relationships and policy making occurs on a horizontal level, while established democratic systems rest upon the notion that accountability is claimed

in hierarchical relationships. Networks thus challenge the power of the elected body as networks are regarded as self-organizing and autonomous entities (Mathur & Skelcher, 2007; Skelcher et al., 2011; Durose et al., 2015). Other researchers are of the opinion that due to extensive stakeholder involvement in networks, policy making and service delivery occurs closer to the users and the society (Skelcher et al., 2011). In other words, networks are regarded by these scholars not as eroding democracy but as improving it. Yet others regard networks as strengthening the ability of political governance and democratic institutions to solve and implement solutions to complex issues (Skelcher et al., 2011). There could thus be advantages with delegating power and responsibility to professionals, and delegation of power could mean that a more long-term focus on complex issues can be secured as the exposure to political terms decreases (Durose et al., 2015). Mathur & Skelcher (2007) as well as Meerkerk et al. (2015) therefore call for further studies of how governance networks influence democracy as well as the relationship between citizens and governance networks.

On the other hand, if we turn our focus to research on policy implementation we can see how discretionary behavior among street-level bureaucrats, as employees working in the front-line of public services are referred to, might have a negative influence on compliance with policy and regulations (Lipsky, 1980; Meyers et al., 2001; May & Winter, 2007). There is a debate as to what extent discretionary behavior among street-level bureaucrats is to be regarded as positive or negative. From a positive stand-point discretionary behavior improves client service as employees use their experience and expertise and adapt decision-making to current situations (Lipsky, 1980; Keiser & Soss, 1998; May & Winter, 2007). On the other hand, deviation and lack of compliance with policy and regulation creates a gap between politically decided policies and goals and risk unequal treatment of clients between – as well as within – organizations (Lipsky, 1980). This might create issues of accountability, lack of legitimacy for policies and organizations and also lead to geographical differences in service provision (Keiser & Soss, 1998; Maynard-Moody & Musheno, 2000). Hence, there seems to be a tension between on one hand the policy level and on the other hand the level of street-level bureaucrats already within a hierarchical organizational setting. The question is how the relationship between these two levels develops in a horizontal collaboration where the autonomy of the street level bureaucrats is increased. This question is far from resolved and due to the potential impact the nature of this relationship can have on accountability it deserves to be further investigated.

## Method

The sector chosen for this study is the water and sewage sector in Sweden. The reason for choosing this sector is the challenges the sector faces today, challenges that can be described as complex issues that could potentially be solved through collaboration. Collaboration has also, according to the Swedish Water and Waste Water Association (SWWA), been investigated by many municipalities as a potential way forward. In several cases these investigations have, according to SWWA, led to the formation of joint organizations for service production, however equally common is it that collaborations never are realized. Also, there is a large group of municipalities that are more hesitant towards collaboration and joint service provision. The sector thus seems to be, in many ways, divided. On one hand we have the advocators of collaboration and on the other we have the ones reluctant to or resisting the solution. The sector therefore contains examples of collaboration as well as examples of municipalities that have decided not to collaborate.

Due to the explorative nature of the study combined with the comparative approach taken, a multiple case-study approach was chosen (Yin, 2013). Including several different cases with different characteristics (size, geography, and political governance) was considered to be an adequate approach in order to generate through a case comparison what Yin (2013) refers to as theoretical replication and increase our understanding of collaboration as a phenomenon. Due to the comparative nature of the study the aim is not to go in-depth into one or two cases, but to capture the situation in several municipalities and then to compare them with each other. Consequently, this study is based on a study of the situation in several different municipalities. All in all six cases of collaboration and seven cases of non-collaboration have been studied.

In focus for the comparison is how the political governance and top management assesses the situation and status of the service in question, and the ability to live up to service delivery requirements and quality standards. The focus is thus on the interface between political governance and accountability and democracy in relation to organizations created for joint service delivery (Klijn, 2008; Klijn & Koppenjan, 2012). More precisely, two types of collaboration for joint service delivery are in focus for the study and their characteristics correspond with what Sullivan & Skelcher (2002) refers to as joint committees and partnerships organized as companies (some precautions are necessary here due to the differences between the Swedish and UK systems).

Joint committees are created by local governments voluntarily with the purpose of delegating certain functions to these committees. The members of the committee are appointed by the partners. In Sweden the appointment follows the result of general elections. Also limited companies are created voluntarily by the local governments and, as in the case of joint committees, the partners appoint members to the board. Usually boardmembers are selected among local politicians and mirror the results of general elections. The main

differences between the types of collaborations are the legislation and governance mechanisms. In both cases however, the services are provided by organizations operating at an arm's length from the political power. The political influence is limited to appointment of members of the board/committee, the type of services and to what extent those services are delegated to the organizations created.

The cases selected were selected mainly by using data and information from SWWA. The information regarding the cases has mainly been collected through interviews with local politicians and people in managerial positions within the water and sewage services in municipalities and network organizations. Besides interviews, focus groups with representatives from the sector have been conducted on five different occasions. The intention with the focus groups was to discuss the challenges facing the sector as well as the advantages and disadvantages of collaboration and how collaboration can be used as one way to manage future challenges. Interviews as well as focus groups were conducted during the years 2013–2015.

The analysis of the data from the case studies has been conducted in the following three steps. As a *first step* the interviews were transcribed and thereafter the information was organized along the following themes: challenges facing the services, analysis of the situation, the assessment of the situation made by civil servant and local politicians, and finally advantages and disadvantages associated with collaboration. In this first step the municipalities were divided into two different groups, one group consisting of municipalities advocating collaboration and another group consisting of municipalities resisting collaboration. As a *second step* a cross-case analysis was conducted within the two groups of cases. Finally, as a *third step* the two groups were compared and analyzed in a cross-case comparison focusing on challenges facing the municipalities as well as motives behind the decision to collaborate or not to collaborate.

In parallel, and as a supplement to the case studies, a survey comprising all 291 municipalities in Sweden was conducted in 2015. The purpose of the survey was to map how Swedish municipalities organize their water and sewage services. The response rate was 86% and the questions asked were:

1. Do you collaborate with other municipalities?
2. What services are included in the collaboration?
3. How is the collaboration organized?
4. How many municipalities are included in the collaboration?

After the survey was conducted, we were also able to, with data from SWWA and the homepage of municipalities, gather information regarding the municipalities that had not responded to the survey, thus the data consists of information regarding all 291 municipalities in Sweden. The data from the survey has been used as a backdrop for this study.

## Collaboration in the Swedish water sector

### INDUSTRY CHARACTERISTICS

Water and sewage services in Sweden are controlled by a municipal monopoly and private ownership of infrastructure is not allowed. Further, the services are subjected to the so called “cost based principle” meaning that municipalities are not allowed to generate a profit from water and sewage services or build up a capital. Consequently, due to the regulation the involvement from the private sector in the water sector in Sweden is limited. The decision to raise or lower a fee is a political one taken by the general assembly in a municipality.

Sweden has in total 291 municipalities. Approximately 210 of those 291 municipalities have less than 30 000 inhabitants and as many as 80 municipalities have fewer than 10 000 inhabitants (Statistics Sweden). Municipalities in Sweden are thus in general small. Also, large parts of Sweden are sparsely populated and thus even though a municipality has few inhabitants the municipalities are geographically vast with large distances to cover. The large distances are a factor that increases the cost of service provision and also makes it difficult to attract employees with necessary and sufficient competence. Another challenge is a large turnover of staff, especially when it comes to attractive positions and positions that require a specific degree. This applies also to the water and sewage sector.

Adding to these more general challenges are the ones more specific to water and sewage services. One being the fact that service provision is fragmented since the responsibility is divided between 291 municipalities, all with their own specific prerequisites. As a consequence, the level of fees for water and sewage services differ between municipalities, ranging from an estimated cost of 247 Swedish crowns per household and month in the municipality with the lowest cost to an estimated cost of 1230 Swedish crowns per household and month in the most expensive municipality (SWSA).

Combined, the above identified challenges have had the consequence that water and sewage services in smaller municipalities generally lack the resources necessary to manage strategic planning, investments or unforeseen events. There are thus several challenges that especially small municipalities are struggling with which makes these organizations vulnerable and unable to secure the quality of the service delivery in the future.

Besides the local challenges, there are challenges that are of a more regional or national character that all municipalities, regardless of size, are facing. These challenges consist of a need to adapt to climate changes, to comply with environmental regulation and to adapt new techniques.



## Types of collaboration

As a response to the challenges facing municipalities, particularly smaller municipalities, there has been during the last fifteen years a gradual increase in the number of municipalities initiating inter-municipal collaboration for joint service delivery either through joint committees or as partnerships organized as companies. The main differences between the judicial forms relates to how the organizations are governed. Limited companies are governed by a board appointed by the owners and in Sweden these are normally selected among local politicians. Joint statutory arrangements on the other hand are governed as a municipality with an assembly and a board composed by local politicians. In both cases however, the joint organization operates at an arm's length from the political governance of the municipality.

### PERCEIVED EFFECTS OF COLLABORATION

According to the results from the cases studied, managers who have been a part of the transition from working in a small municipality to being a part of an organization for joint service delivery report about how collaboration improves working conditions. Having colleagues and being able to specialize within one's field of interest is regarded as one important benefit. The fact that the organization is more professional and specialized in water and sewage related issues and legislation is another. Other advantages mentioned by CEOs and top managers are that a larger organization is less vulnerable and that collaboration has improved access to critical resources and enabled them to focus on long term goals and plans for how to improve the infrastructure.

Having a board or assembly composed of local politicians whose only focus is water and water related issues is another of the advantages that was brought up in previous studies (Thomasson, 2013). The tendency for local politicians in Sweden is to focus more on high profile issues such as childcare, elderly care and schools, and less on technical infrastructural services. To have a board or an assembly in this political climate focusing only on water related issues and to operate in an organization separated from the municipal bureaucracy is considered by managers to be a privilege, especially as it tends to give water related issues more room on the political agenda. The increase in political attention and focus on water and sewage related issues are a likely explanation to why the level of investments has been reported to increase in municipalities that collaborate when a joint service organization is formed.

An increase in the level of investments does, however, require an increase of fees due to the cost based principle. As mentioned, the fee is decided by local politicians in the municipal assembly and those are likely to be less acquainted with water related issues. Despite a general assumption that collaboration generates economies of scale and thus a more efficient use of resources, when there is a request to raise fees suspicions are raised. That collaboration leads to a more

efficient use of resources might also be the case. However, when at the same time the level of ambition increases it is likely that initial effects from collaborative advantages are evened out. A request to raise the fee for water and sewage services is therefore often reported to meet resistance followed by questions regarding how efficient the collaboration really is.

Local politicians on the boards and assemblies of the joint organizations however tend to support suggestions made by the management of the joint organization and, in several of the organizations studied, have been lobbying among their political peers in the municipal assembly for a vote for an increase of fees. That might be a result of the fact that they have a more in-depth knowledge about the services since they get first-hand information. It could also be a consequence of them being unable to question the often technically advanced calculations made by managers and engineers employed by the organization.

To sum up: the perceived and reported benefits from collaboration are several and several of the benefits perceived are related and can thus be regarded as a possible way to face several of the challenges municipalities are facing, local as well as regional. The latter since joint organization enables a regional focus to be taken on climate change. Resistance does however exist, especially at the political level and the source of that resistance is the topic of the next section.

## **RESISTANCE TOWARDS COLLABORATION**

When talking with people with experience from collaboration it is easy to believe that collaboration is the one solution that will fix all the problems that the water and sewage sector in Sweden is facing. In spite of this, a survey conducted for this study showed that only 115 of a total of 291 municipalities collaborate on water related issues with other municipalities. That is fewer than those 210 municipalities that have less than 30 000 inhabitants. Why don't all municipalities jump on the collaboration bandwagon given its perceived effects and the challenges the sector is facing?

When managers and engineers in the smaller municipalities participating in the case studies were asked about collaboration, the majority of them expressed an interest in collaborating with neighboring municipalities through a joint service organization. The few that hesitated or showed reluctance argued that smaller organizations have advantages in terms of shorter lines of communication and easier access to other areas of the municipal organization. They also state that they feel that the governance level is perceptive and understanding of their needs.

The opposite is reported from those organizations where managers and engineers are advocating collaboration. In these municipalities the situation is regarded as critical. Lack of resources combined with the challenges they face have generated a situation where the staff feel that they barely manage daily

operation. It is not only the financial resources that are lacking, but also human resources. The main problem seems to be that responsible local politicians do not recognize the needs of the organization and thus not understand the need to collaborate. Rather, in these cases local politicians regard the services to be well functioning (they have clean water in the tap) and thus see no need for organizational change or to raise fees. This in spite of the fact that employees of the organizations claim that they have problems complying with national legislation due to lack of resources.

There are also examples of when local politicians are reluctant to initiate collaboration due to a fear of losing control over the services to a larger organization lead by a strong profession. Also, there is an issue of trust. Trust among involved actors at the governance level seems to be crucial for collaboration to be initiated. On several occasions during focus groups and interviews stories were told about collaborations that were realized after five or ten years of discussions among local politicians at the governance level. Surprisingly, the explanation given to why collaboration suddenly occurs after years of discussion is often that there are new people in leading positions in the municipalities and that the new people in leading positions have a good relationship while the former leaders did not. Personal relations and trust building thus seems to be another critical factor for collaboration to take place in the sector studied.

## Discussion

In the Swedish water and sewage sector collaboration is used as a means to get access to resources necessary to solve complex issues. Organizations in the sector see how, through the pooling of resources, they can increase quality and provide a more sustainable service in a way that corresponds with previous research (Lowndes & Skelcher, 1998; Osborne, 2006; Huxham, 2003; Bryson, 2006; Crosby et al., 2010; Hilvert & Swindell, 2013). One can even argue, in the light of the challenges facing the sector, that collaboration is the more responsible solution. Yet it is currently not the most salient issue in the ongoing collaboration debate. Instead what appears to be more important, when deciding whether to collaborate or not, is the issue of political control and influence. These issues were not only raised by municipalities that resist collaboration, but also by municipalities that have entered into a collaboration and feel skeptical towards the strong position a large organization led by professionals has in relation to local politicians.

The distance between the joint service organization and the political governance renders civil servants and top managers more power over service provision at the expense of local politicians. To make a decision that decreases your own power and influence is never easy, especially considering that the

responsibility for service provision remains at the political governance level. The suspicion among local politicians reported in the case studies and during focus groups can accordingly be regarded as a consequence of how collaboration alters the chain of command as also discussed in previous studies (see for example: Klijn, 2008).

The contributions of this study thus tap into more recent research on governance network focusing on issues concerning accountability and democracy in relation to governance processes (Jeffares & Skelcher, 2011; Skelcher et al., 2011; Durose et al., 2012; Meerkerk et al., 2015). However – and contrary to what some scholars have argued – that accountability might not be an issue in governance networks (Skelcher et al., 2011; Durose et al., 2015), this study shows that it can be. Especially when joint organizations operating at an arm's length are the means through which collaboration occurs. In that situation, compared to more loosely coupled networks, strong and large organizations are created and these organizations do not include a variety of stakeholders (Skelcher et al., 2011). On the contrary, the distance between stakeholders and service providing organizations increases as the production and delivery of services are moved from smaller municipalities to larger organization.

Related to the issue of accountability in network research are issues raised regarding lack of goal congruence networks addressed by scholars within the field of policy implementation (Keiser & Soss, 1998; Meyers et al., 2001). Within policy implementation, research deviations between the policy developed by politicians and what is actually implemented are that as policies cascade through the organization they are at each level interpreted and adapted to those interpretations. Finally, when policies reach street-level bureaucrats they are subjected to what is referred to as the discretionary behavior of these bureaucrats: how they adapt policies to fit with their current working conditions, their view of their role as professionals, and how they regard the need of individual citizens/group of citizens (Lipsky, 1980; Meyers et al., 2001; May & Winter, 2007). There is thus a tension between the interest of politicians at different levels of the system and professions working within that system and this tension have a negative impact on goal congruence, especially in more complex organizational settings like networks (Meyers et al., 2001).

It is however not only in relation to accountability and goal congruence that this study builds on previous research on policy implementation, but also in relation to the nature of the tension between politicians and street-level bureaucrats. Previous research on policy implementation takes its point of departure in the notion that new strategies and policies are developed based on political initiative (Lipsky, 1980; Maynard-Moody & Mushero, 2000; May & Winter, 2007). The result from this study however shows another trajectory for the development and implementation of strategic goals and policies. The focus groups, case studies as well as previous studies on collaboration in the Swedish

water and sewage sector (Thomasson, 2013) show how policy and strategic development does not originate from politicians or cascade down through the different levels of the system. Rather it is initiated by managers and street-level bureaucrats in municipalities. It is the professions that advocate collaboration and it is also the professionals supported by managers that advocate collaboration and that push for an increase in the level of investment. For the profession to argue in support of the services they are responsible for is in line with the interest among street-level bureaucrats to protect the service they provide and to rely on their expertise when it comes to deciding what citizens need as identified in previous research (Lipsky, 1980; Maynard-Moody & Musheno, 2000; May & Winter, 2007). What is novel is that this is what spurs policy and strategic change and not political ambitions or goals.

Also interesting is that when they do this they use national guidelines and regulations as leverage with local politicians, saying that without these changes they won't be able to comply with the regulative framework without an increase in the level of investment. Here local politicians, according to information gathered during focus groups and interviews, often feel like they are taken hostage as they find it difficult to argue against what is proposed by the profession due to the nature of water and sewage services as being technically advanced. This is the root of the tension between the two groups.

That the profession uses national regulation as leverage is interesting, especially as previous research on policy implementation provides us with another story. Previous research instead shows how the tendency for street-level bureaucrats is to oppose national guidelines and are how they are more likely to adhere to goals and guidelines developed by local politicians, especially if these oppose national regulation (Maynard-Moody & Musheno, 2000).

The tension between professionals and local politicians leads us to the issue of trust in collaboration. Part of the resistance against collaboration reported in this study can be translated to lack of trust for potential partners as well as professionals. The issue of trust can be traced also in the material from the case studies, especially considering how in several cases collaboration was reported to have failed due to the fact that leading politicians were unable to come to an agreement. The issue of trust in collaboration is not new and has been studied by scholars over the years (see for example Sullivan & Skelcher, 2002; Huxham & Vangen, 2005; Klijn, 2010). Lack of trust has its roots in the fact that when entering into collaboration one takes a risk and that risk is related to uncertainty, and the fact that control of service provision is delegated to an external organization (Huxham & Vangen, 2005). Trust is thus something that needs to be managed for collaboration to succeed. One way to mitigate the risk and to start building trust suggested by previous research is to gradually increase the extent of the collaboration (Huxham & Vangen, 2005). In that way the risk in the beginning, when trust is not yet established, is lower and gradually, as

trust emerges among the collaborating partners, the degree of collaboration can increase.

To sum up: what seems to be needed is to find a balance between on one hand political control and on the other hand professionalization in joint service organization, much as described in research on policy implementation (Lipsky, 1980; May & Winter, 2007). This study does not provide any specific answers to how to achieve such a balance and it was not the purpose to do so. Nevertheless, one possible way forward seems to be improving accountability processes together with finding ways to improve trust between professionals and politicians

## Concluding remarks

The purpose of this study was to investigate how collaboration is perceived as reducing political control and influence and to what extent this creates resistance towards collaboration within governments. The result of the study shows a tension between on one hand professionals and their interest in providing high quality services and on the other hand the political interest to keep control over service provision and the level of investments in order to secure room to maneuver politically. This tension creates a resistance among local politicians towards collaboration in joint service production in spite of the fact that collaboration in several cases has proven to be successful. The resistance towards collaboration could be problematic since it might result in differences between municipalities regarding the level of quality of service received by clients as well as the fees paid (Keiser & Soss, 1998; Maynard-Moody & Musheno, 2000).

That there is a tension between professionals and politicians is not new – it has been discussed previously in literature concerning policy implementation (Lipsky, 1980; Maynard-Moody & Musheno, 2000; May & Winter, 2007). What is new is that in this study it is put into the context of governance networks and collaboration for joint service delivery and how it, in this context, helps us understand issues of accountability and trust in governance networks. Also new is the discovery that policy implementation is not necessarily the result of political initiative and how these policies then are implemented through the levels of the system. Rather, the results from this study show an opposite trajectory as policy and strategic goals can originate also from street-level bureaucrats, through the support from managers and board members and by using their expertise and national guidelines and regulations as leverage with local politicians. This adds to the tension between professionals and local politicians as the latter feel that they don't have the knowledge to oppose strategies proposed by professionals and thus end up being taken hostage. Consequently, local politicians either oppose collaboration or question the legitimacy of joint service organizations. The tension between politicians and professionals thus

acts as a hindrance towards collaboration. The result of this study therefore culminates in another question: how to reduce the tension and the resistance against collaboration in order to facilitate collaborations when they are needed?

One possible way to do so could be to work on ways to secure accountability and mitigate risk for democratic deficiency in horizontal relations. This is not only relevant for joint service production and collaboration between public sector organizations which was the focus of this study, but is probably also likely to be of relevance in all types of horizontal relations. The result of this study thus contributes to more recent research within the field of governance networks (Jeffares & Skelcher, 2011; Skelcher et al, 2011; Durose et al, 2012; Meerkerk et al, 2015).

One does however needs to bear in mind that the results presented here are based on a study conducted in one specific sector and with focus on one specific type of collaboration. More studies investigating the issues of accountability by focusing on other types of collaborations as well as other sectors and contexts are thus called for. Especially interesting would it be if these studies focused on the tension between politicians and professionals.

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