Enhancing democracy through inter-demos governance networks

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Abstract

The fact that traditional theories of liberal democracy take an intra-demos view of democratic participation and deliberation means that they offer little in the way of how to democratically regulate governance processes that involve more than one democratically organized governance unit; that is, a demos. Discussions about how to ensure democracy in an increasingly pluricentric political system tend to downplay both the political character of inter-demos governance processes and the need for democratic regulation of such processes. This article argues for the need to develop an inter-demos perspective on democracy and points out how governance networks, seen from this perspective, can become a valuable element in institutionalizing a strong pluricentric democracy.
Introduction

Although traditional liberal theories of democracy tend to view political participation and deliberation as being central to democracy, they vary in their perceptions of how and why this is the case. Some theories favor direct participation while others advocate different forms of representation; and some consider democratic deliberation to be political bargaining while others view it as a process of consensus making (MacPherson, 1977; March & Olsen, 1989). Despite these differences, traditional theories of liberal democracy generally agree on one key point: those people who are affected by collective decisions must be able to participate in making these decisions and express their views about these decisions in free public debate.

Traditional theories of liberal democracy offer important advice regarding how to organize a strong democracy within a particular governance unit. Although the primary focus of these theories has been on territorially demarcated governance units such as nation-states and local communities, it is easy to apply this line of thinking to organizations (Dryzek, 2002). However, the theories offer less in terms of how to democratize governance processes that involve more than one governance unit. In short, traditional theories of liberal democracy offer an intra-demos perspective on democracy that overlooks the need for democratic regulation of inter-demos governance.

The need to consider how inter-demos participation and deliberation can be institutionalized is becoming increasingly apparent. This is largely due to the gradual transformation of the political systems in advanced liberal democracies from nation-state rule to pluricentric governance (Kersbergen & Warden, 2004). Nation-state rule is founded on references to a united ‘People’ separated from other People by territorial borders. Pluricentric governance, on the other hand, sees governance as involving a variety of territorially and functionally demarcated People, consisting of citizens in a given territory (region, nation-state, municipality) or stakeholders who are particularly affected by the outcomes of specific governance areas; for example, users of public service agencies in areas such as education, health, and employment. In a pluricentric context, democracy is promoted by ensuring that as many of these situated and partly overlapping People as possible are organized as demoi, in which the affected citizens and stakeholders can participate and deliberate. Pluricentric democracy also calls for the institutionalization of mechanisms that ensure democratic regulation of the interaction between the many territorially and functionally demarcated demoi though various forms of democratic participation and deliberation. Hence, in a pluricentric political system, governance processes tend to
involve more than one governance unit. Municipalities collaborate more than ever (Sørensen, Sehested & Reff, 2011); metropolitan cities work together (Kern & Bulkeley, 2009); regional political institutions such as the EU interact intensely with national and local governments (Slaughter, 2003; Bogason & Zølner, 2007); and governments at all levels form partnerships with stakeholder organizations and agencies within different policy areas such as environmental policies, employment and education (Ørberg & Wright, 2009; Baker, Justice & Skelcher, 2009; Hedmo & Sahlin-Anderson, 2007). While traditional theories of liberal democracy can offer advice on how to ensure democratic participation and deliberation within a governance unit, they have little to say about how to do the same in governance processes involving more than one democratically organized governance unit.

The surge of pluricentric political systems in recent years has triggered debate among governance researchers and students of democracy regarding the possible implications of inter-demos decision-making. For good reasons, many of these people have highlighted the considerable democratic problems that spring from governance processes that involve more than one governance unit (Pierre & Peters, 2005; Benz & Papadopoulos, 2006). This article aims to show that growth in inter-demos governance not only raises problems, but may also trigger a democratization process by widening the realm of democratic regulation and by making democracy more inclusive.

Moreover, I aim to show that governance networks represent a valuable means with which to institutionalize inter-demos governance because they provide a promising and much needed supplement to traditional political institutions and organizations. The particular value of governance networks is tied to the fact that they provide a specific kind of weak institutional tie between institutions that are constituted on strong ties. As such, these networks provide some order, albeit a flexible and fragile order that destabilizes the closure and softens the patterns of inclusion and exclusion that are inherent to institutions and, thus, also to a demos. A great deal of attention in recent years has been paid to the potential role of inter-organizational governance networks in providing effective governance (Kickert, Klijn & Koppenjan, 1997; Rhodes, 1997; Jessop, 1998; Goldsmith & Eggers, 2002; Kettl, 2002; Pierre & Peters, 2000; Sørensen & Torfing, 2007). It has been said that the strength of governance networks is their ability to provide flexible coordination between different actors in today’s fragmented political systems. There has been less focus on the problems and potentials of networks as a means to enhance democratic governance. Most of the governance researchers that have discussed the democratic
implications of governance networks, in light of their growing role in governance processes, have mainly focused on the dangers that governance networks pose to democracy and the question of how to deal with these dangers (Sørensen and Torfing, 2005; Klijn and Skelcher, 2007; Pierre and Peters, 2005). In this debate, it has among other things been pointed out that governance networks are difficult to hold to account tend to be exclusive.

Governance networks do unquestionably pose such dangers to democracy, but the main aim of this article is to argue that governance networks do not only pose dangers to democracy. They can also function as a much needed means to facilitate democratic inter-demos participation and deliberation, and that this kind of participation and deliberation has a positive impact on the quality of intra-demos participation and deliberation. In making this argument, the first step is to show how traditional liberal theories of democracy have tended to focus on intra-demos participation and deliberation, while paying little or no attention to the democratic quality of the interplay between demoi. Then, I describe the recent growth in pluricentric forms of governance in advanced liberal democracies. The article goes on to describe, evaluate, and criticize the strategies used to cope with the democratic implications of pluricentrism. Finally, the article shows how governance networks can contribute to the development of a strong pluricentric democracy.

**Traditional theoretical approaches to participation and deliberation**

Traditional theories of liberal democracy share the view that participation and deliberation are core features of democracy. Some theories have celebrated the ability of these features to ensure public control with decision makers (Mill, 1820/1937: 45; Bentham, 1776/1948: 143; Dahl, 1989: 113), while others have highlighted their importance for the creation of shared identity and a strong communality between the members of the demos (Mill, 1861/1946: 254; Tocqueville, 1835/1968: 25; Almond & Verba, 1963: 88–9; Pateman, 1970: 105). Democratic control exists when citizens deliberate in a free public debate and participate in general elections. A strong sense of communality is obtained by visualizing the interrelatedness between individual and collective interests and developing shared understandings, which are provided by participation and deliberation.

This theoretical framework has produced different theoretical tensions, some of which are internal to the demos and others that relate to the relationship with other demoi. Table 1 summarizes these tensions.
Table 1: Democratic tensions

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<th>Internal to demos</th>
<th>External relation to other demoi</th>
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<td><strong>Democratic control</strong></td>
<td>Effectiveness versus control</td>
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When viewed from the perspective of traditional theories of liberal democracy, the tensions related to ensuring *democratic control* through participation and deliberation are inherently considered to be caused by a trade-off between democracy and effectiveness. *Internally*, it is a matter of ensuring that the control wielded by the members of a demos over the decision makers does not prevent necessary and wise decisions being made in the interest of the citizens. This dilemma is the subject matter of ongoing debates between democratic elite theorists (Schumpeter, 1942; Sartori, 1989) and theorists of participatory democracy (Pateman, 1970; Barber, 1984). *Externally*, the trade-off is apparent in relation to foreign policy (Connolly, 1995: 141), where secrecy is considered necessary and acceptable, despite the lack of publicity, accountability, and open public debate about the form and content of the interaction between governments reduces the citizens’ ability to control those who represent them.

The call for a *sense of communality* among the members of a demos also involves certain tensions. These tensions derive from a desire to both include and exclude actors and viewpoints from the democratic process. On one hand, democracy calls for the inclusion of all affected actors and viewpoints. On the other hand, the idea that a demos is constituted on communality sentiments makes it necessary to exclude those who do not subscribe to the prevailing understanding of the content of this communality. It can be new comers in a society, different subcultures or people who do not master or wish to adjust to dominating codes of conduct (Young, 2000). Furthermore, creating a strong ‘we’ unavoidably involves constructing an excluded outside; in other words, that which ‘we’ are not. *Internally*, the line is drawn between those who express and act in accordance with certain
hegemonic communality sentiments and those who do not. This behavior can be a point of reference for including some members of the demos in participation and deliberation and excluding others. A case in point is the question of how to deal with those who speak against democracy or express racist viewpoints. Should it be allowed to advance such sentiments through political participation and deliberation?

Externally, the constitutive outside of the unitary community consists of those who do not belong to the community, regardless of whether they are affected by the decisions made by that community. A question that has been the subject of increasing discussion, not least in the wake of global warming and other cross-border policy problems, is how to deal with situations in which the impact of decisions made by a demos affects members of other demoi.

Clearly, traditional theories of democracy perceive democracy as a way of ensuring participation and deliberation within a governance unit. This intra-demos perspective on democracy produces sharp demarcation lines between the inside and the outside of democracy. These lines exist between that which is to be democratically regulated and that which is not, as well as between those who are allowed to participate and deliberate and those who are not.

From neat theory to complex institutional models

There is a sizeable gap between the images of democracy offered by traditional liberal theories of democracy and the complexity of the institutional models of liberal democracy that have actually seen the light of the day in last 200 years. This gap is particularly evident in federal democracies that have experienced persistent difficulties in terms of theoretically conceptualizing and institutionalizing the relationship between the federal government and the states (Dahl, 1986: 114). These conceptual difficulties have materialized in the ongoing battle between federalists and confederalists (Deleon, 1997: 14ff), as well as in theorizing about consociationalism (Lijphart, 1977), which seeks to deal with the question of intra-demos heterogeneity within multi-leveled and/or socially pillarised societies (Jessop, 2004). The distance between simple theories and complex models is also well known in unitary states, which usually involve a degree of autonomy for self-regulating communities and a degree of involvement in transnational political institutions such as the European Union. In other words, actual models of democracy usually consist of several interlinked demoi. In addition to the many territorial demoi at national, regional, and municipal levels, there is often a plurality of functional demoi, such as public schools.
governed by elected school boards and a variety of democratically organized committees, councils, and associations that enable intensely affected groups to have influence on particular governance issues (Dahl, 1961, 1989).

Considering the complexity of contemporary models of democracy, surprisingly few attempts have been made to develop a theory of democracy that deals explicitly with heterogeneity; not between members of a demos, but between different demoi. William Connolly (1995: 317) argued that the reluctance to deal with this heterogeneity is a result of the hegemonic idea that politics is a matter for the sovereign nation-state. In Connolly’s view, people ignore the distance between this idea and the messy reality in order to maintain the safe perception that politics is an orderly and controlled process, played out within the confines of a given territory conceptualized as a ‘community’, ‘nation’, or ‘people’, which in a democracy constituted a ‘demos’. However, the emergence of a pluricentric model of governance has made it more and more difficult to maintain this image of one unitary political order.

Towards pluricentrism

While they might quarrel over the details, governance theorists agree that advanced liberal democracies are becoming more and more pluricentric (Rhodes, 1997; Kickert, Klijn & Koppenjan, 1997; Goldsmith & Eggers, 2002; Ansell, 2000; Kettle, 2002; Kersbergen & Waarden, 2004; Pierre & Peters, 2005; Skelcher, 2005; Sørensen & Torfing, 2007). This pluricentrism is, among other things, a result of increased political globalization and administrative fragmentation.

A gradually accelerated process of political globalization has intensified the level of governance processes that involve more than one demos. Governments are governing in unison, metropolitan cities are collaborating across borders, and stakeholder groups from different countries are joining forces. This development has intensified the need to set standards for ensuring democratic participation and deliberation in inter-demos governance processes. As part of this globalization process, new and old transnational political institutions, as well as courts and organizations, have sought to gain status and momentum as strong transnational demoi capable of setting the rules of the game in the transnational governance arena. One of the central objectives is to define, hegemonize, and enforce transnational standards for how nation-states and other public authorities may treat
each other and their populations (Greven, 2000; Greven & Pauly, 2000; Bache & Flinders, 2004; Larner & Walters, 2004; Van Heffen, Kickert & Thomassen, 2000).

Simultaneously, a series of administrative reforms in many advanced liberal democracies have fragmented the political systems by dividing them into a plurality of self-regulating governance units: public agencies, partnerships, and private businesses on contract. The balance between the different kinds of self-regulating governance units varies from country to country. Such governance units count as demoï to the extent that they allow affected stakeholders to exert influence through exit- and voice-based forms of participation and deliberation. Governance units that rely exclusively on exit options do little to promote the formation of communality sentiments; therefore, they should be regarded as weak demoï (Hirschman, 1970; Sørensen, 1997; Hirst, 1994, 2000). At the same, the administrative reforms have changed the role of elected politicians from sovereign rulers to members of political ‘Boards of Directors’ who govern at a distance and leave the actual governing to public and private stakeholders (Milward & Provan, 1993: 222ff; Rhodes, 2000: 345f; Kettl, 2002: 119; Pollitt & Bouckaert, 2004: 175; Bogason, 2004: 27 f; Sørensen, 2006). Representative democracy has been pushed back.

The aggregated outcome of political globalization and administrative reform is a pluricentric political system that divides the capacity to govern between a plurality of multi-leveled and mutually overlapping territorially and functionally demarcated units of governance. In a pluricentric political system, democracy is a result of the degree to which each of these individual units of governance is democratically regulated, and the extent to which the relationship and interaction between these demoï is democratically regulated. Traditional theories of democracy offer advice about how to ensure the former, but not the latter.

While most governance theorists agree on some version of the globalization and fragmentation diagnosis, there has been a great deal of debate about the consequences of pluricentrism on the role of the state. Some researchers have insisted that the position of the state has not really changed (Hirst & Thompson, 1996; Kersbergen, Lieshout & Verbeek, 2000), while others have claimed that the powers of the state have been reduced considerably (Rosenau, 1992; Milward & Provan, 1993: Rhodes, 2007). A third group of governance theorists, with whom I agree, have argued that the role of the state has changed, insofar as it has become a metagovernor of interactive governance arenas rather than a sovereign ruler (Jessop, 2003; Kooiman, 1993, 2003; Sørensen & Torfing, 2007: chapter 9). While sovereign rule is exercised through detailed bureaucratic control and regulation, both
within and beyond the state apparatus, metagovernance is exercised by shaping and regulating self-regulating actors. As such, it can be seen as an extended and strategically facilitated form of delegation and decentralization, which functions by constructing capable autonomous governance units. The most powerful members of a pluricentric society are those that can metagovern other self-regulating actors. Although state actors tend to be in a strong position to do this, no single public authority, agency, or private organization can monopolize the role of metagovernor.

In sum, the age of pluricentric governance has destabilized the image of public governance and politics as a unitary process in which a People make collective decisions and act on them and in which the state is an expression of this unity. What emerges instead is an image of a decentered governance process in which a variety of relatively autonomous territorially and functionally organized governance units seek to govern and metagovern themselves and others.

**Depoliticization as a response to pluricentrism**

When viewed from a traditional perspective on democracy, pluricentrism deepens the above-mentioned tensions related to balancing effectiveness against control and communality versus heterogeneity. The strategies that are available for dealing with these tensions are problematic because they tend to relocate the boundary between the inside and the outside of democracy in ways that diminish the democratic realm.

Political globalization deepens the tension between effectiveness and control because it produces more ‘foreign policy’, while administrative reforms leave governance tasks in the hands of stakeholders rather than citizens. Traditional theories of democracy have responded to these tensions by inspiring two depoliticization strategies. The first strategy proposes establishing a world government and court of law that regulates governments as well as intergovernmental affairs by referring to a constitution that determines certain ‘rules of the game’ (Held, 1987). This strategy is problematic, partly because the chances of establishing such a world government appear slim, and partly because it reduces the regulatory ambitions to a set of constitutive rules. The second strategy consists in defining a large part of the transnational and de-centered governance processes out of the realm of democratic regulation. This de-politicization strategy is pursued by those who claim that EU is a regulatory rather than a political one (Majone, 1998; Dahl, 1999; Scharpf, 2001; Moravcsik, 2004) and is advocated in the New Public Management reform program,
which defines the considerable amount of governance performed by actors other than politicians as production (Pollitt & Bouckaert, 2004; Hood, 1991).

Pluricentrism is also viewed as problematic for democracy because it increases the heterogeneities that must be overcome in order to promote the sense of communality that constitutes a strong democracy. Hence, political globalization and institutional fragmentation cause growth in the governance processes that involve actors with different territorially and functionally defined ‘we’ identities. Again, two strategies are available. The first strategy involves canonizing a universal sense of communality that can serve as a common point of identification for all demoi. An example is the current efforts to give this pre-political status to a set of human rights and to consolidate international courts that can enforce them (Held, 1995; Habermas, 2001). This strategy is insufficient for solving the inter-demos problem because it presumes that such universal rights can be established as a pre-political fact and because it says little about how to provide the necessary degree of communality to govern policy issues that are largely unrelated to human rights (Bohman, 2005). Another strategy is to insist that democratic communality sentiments are, by definition, territorial in orientation because functionally founded communalities engage in governance from a particularistic perspective rather than a communal perspective (Hansen, 2007). Consequently, functionally organized governance units should be considered to be outside the realm of democratic politics and kept at a safe distance from the political participation and deliberation that takes place at different levels in territorially defined demoi. The problem with this strategy is that it overlooks the fact that all references to a ‘we’, regardless of whether they are territorially or functionally oriented, are particularistic in the sense that they are an outcome of political power games and produce exclusions (Dryzek, 2007). Rather than excluding forms of participation and deliberation from the democratic realm, efforts should be made to set standards for the democratic interaction and institutionalization of the interaction between different types of communality sentiments.

Governance networks as providers of weak ties

The above-mentioned strategies for ensuring democracy in a pluricentric political system are unsatisfactory. They all, in their own particular way, depoliticize significant parts of the governance processes that form their members’ lives, and, thereby, legitimize the fact that these processes are not democratically regulated. A better
option is to recognize the political character of this interaction and find ways to democratically regulate inter-demoi governance. When addressing these issues, it is essential to look for forms of participation and deliberation other than those suggested by traditional theories of liberal democracy.

The search for inter-demoi forms of participation and deliberation is complicated. No single institutional mechanism can do the job, so what is needed is a mixture of new and old forms of democratic regulation. Rather than attempting to comment on the nature of this mix, which I have done elsewhere (Sørensen and Torfing, 2005), the present article focuses exclusively on the role that governance networks might play in enhancing democratic participation and deliberation in a pluricentric political system. The purpose is to show that governance networks provide a promising institutional framework for inter-demos participation and deliberation between the many territorially and functionally demarcated demoi involved in pluricentric governance. The specific contribution of governance networks is that they are different than institutions and organizations. While institutions and organizations provide what Mark Granovetter (1973) describes as ‘strong ties’ within a group of actors, governance networks establish ‘weak ties’ between such groups. This kind of democratic tie is needed for governance processes that involve more than one demos.

So what, then, is a governance network? Governance networks are not institutions or organizations. Although they do provide some sort of temporal order and pattern of action between different actors, their temporal, situated, and fragile character makes it more appropriate to view them as institutionalizations. The temporality, situatedness, and fragility of governance networks are related to the fact that they rely on interdependence between the involved actors. The extensive literature on the subject has defined governance networks as (1) relatively stable articulations of interdependent, but operationally autonomous actors who (2) interact with one another through negotiations, which (3) take place within a regulative, normative, cognitive, and imaginary framework that is (4) self-regulating within limits set by external forces, and (5) contributes to the production of public purpose (Sørensen & Torfing, 2007: 8).

Governance network theorists argue that the growth in governance networks can be explained by the ability of these networks to provide inter-organizational coordination, which is essential for the production of efficient and effective public governance under pluricentric conditions (Milward & Provan, 2000; Pierre & Peters, 2005; Sørensen & Torfing, 2007: 15ff). As Jan Kooiman argued, the fragmented and
differentiated nature of pluricentric societies (or, as Kooiman calls them, socio-political systems of governance) produces long cross-organizational lines of interdependency. This is because efforts to solve concrete governance problems usually demand cross-organizational coordination, cooperation, and communication (Kooiman, 2000: 139). Governance networks provide an institutional framework for enhancing negotiated coordination between such ‘long lines’ of interdependent but operationally autonomous actors.

Empirical studies have found that governance networks take many forms. Some are loose, inclusive, and short-lived, while others are tight, exclusive, and long-lived (Rhodes & Marsh, 1992). Some governance networks are ambitious and target positive coordination by formulating shared objectives, while others are less ambitious and settle for negative coordination; that is, seeking to avoid externalities (Scharpf, 1994). Finally, some governance networks seek to enhance vertical coordination between actors at different levels of governance, while others target horizontal coordination between different governance units placed at the same level of governance (Markussen & Torfing, 2007).

With these differences in mind, governance networks do generally establish control and communality ties that are ‘weaker’ than those that characterize governance institutions and organizations, such as governments and agencies. Issue networks establish weaker ties than policy communities (Rhodes & March, 1992). The ties that bind network actors together can be characterized as weak because they are driven by temporal and situated interdependencies rather than codified rules and procedures. This makes them more brief and less repetitive and sedimented than ties than intra-organizational ties. However, as Granovetter argued, this weakness does not make the network ties less valuable than strong ties. On the contrary, weak ties are important because they provide patterns of interaction and communication that reach beyond the narrow confines of a group bound together by strong ties. Although Granovetter is interested more in effectiveness than democracy, the ‘strength of weak ties’ argument is just as relevant for considerations of the relationship between patterns of control and communality within a demos and between different demois.

This raises the question of the specific contribution that weak ties make in relation to democracy. According to Granovetter, the presence of weak ties between groups bound together by strong ties is crucial for ensuring effective governance. This is because weak ties stimulate an effective diffusion of influence and information and a certain level of social cohesion in contexts that are characterized by
differentiation. From a democratic perspective, this is interesting because the kind of
democratic control and communality sentiments that democratic participation and
deliberation are meant to produce is basically a function of the level of diffusion of
political influence and information in society and the presence of some degree of
social cohesion. Diffusion of political influence between demoi can help ensure that
everyone affected by a political decision has access to influence that decision.
Diffusion of information across demoi can help prevent the kind of secrecy that
makes it difficult to hold decision makers to account and produces the kind of
disturbance of sedimented political positions and beliefs that trigger a vibrant public
debate. The promotion of a certain level of social cohesion between demoi can pave
the way for developing political identities that can participate and deliberate with
actors that belong to other demoi. In this context, weak ties provide a level of
democratization of inter-demos governance processes, and they also reduce
exclusionary tendencies within the individual demos.

Enhancing democratic control and communality by means of inter-demos
governance networks

Having argued that weak ties are important for democracy and that governance
networks provide such ties, the next step is to consider how governance networks
can promote democratic participation and deliberation in ways that enhance inter-
demos control and communality. This is achieved by firstly discussing the role of
governance networks in providing inter-demos control, and then analyzing their
possible contribution to inter-demos communality.

Enhancing democratic control through inter-demos governance networks

In a pluricentric context, the fact that governance processes often involve more than
one demos makes it insufficient to view democratic control as an intra-demos affair. It
is uncontroversial to argue that ensuring democratic control calls for the
institutionalization of both vertical and horizontal control mechanisms. Vertical control
mechanisms provide the affected actors with the information and sanctioning powers
they need to hold the decision makers to account. Horizontal control mechanisms
that separate powers between different political elites enable different elites to hold
each other to account (O'Donnell, 1998; Kenney, 2000). Inter-demoi governance
networks can help enforce both forms of control by establishing weak ties between
demoi. Vertical patterns of accountability within a demos are enforced when other
Demoi diffuse information about the content and consequences of intra-demos decision making. Horizontal accountability is further strengthened when elites hold each other to account in an attempt to ensure that none of them overstep their democratically sanctioned authorization, not only within the individual demos but also from different demoi. Following Charles Montesquieu’s line of thinking, Eva Ezioni-Halevy (1993, 2000) argued that an extension of the separation of powers between political elites and sub-elites, like the one accommodated by pluricentrism, is positive for democracy. This is because pluricentrism accommodates an intensive political competition and contestation between a plurality of political actors, both within and beyond the individual demos. The separation of powers and influence channels available to ordinary citizens and stakeholders within the individual demos guarantee some level of democratic control and political contestation. Nevertheless, the contestation provided by other functionally and territorially demarcated demoi can upgrade this control because it produces an independent and informed opposition. The opposition is more independent than within a demos because of the weak ties, while the opposition is more informed than the larger public because it includes different political elites, sub-elites, and mini-publics with specialized knowledge about the territorial or functional implications of various policy decisions.

However, the activation of inter-demoi control mechanisms calls for the institutionalization of governance arenas and publics in which autonomous political elites and sub-elites can hold each other to account and negotiate (Lijphart, 1977; Føllesdal & Hix, 2005). This is where governance networks enter the stage as an important instrument for ensuring an ongoing situated contestation and negotiated cooperation between democratically authorized demoi (Esmark, 2002, 2007). Networks fit this task so well because they provide weak ties that are dynamic and short-lived enough that they do not ossify in ways that reduce their capacity to keep political debates open and vibrant, while also constructing temporal interdependencies that motivate interaction and negotiated co-governance (Fung & Wright, 2003: 23).

Enhancing inter-demoi communality sentiments through governance networks

As well as promoting democratic control, inter-demoi governance networks also institutionalize patterns of political participation and deliberation that promote communality sentiments that can deal with heterogeneity without producing systematic exclusions of affected actors. In seeking to make democracy more
inclusive, the promotion of strong unitary communality sentiments within the individual demos should be pursued with caution. Although such communality sentiments are an important motor for shared decision making, they can be problematic if they become so sedimented and narrow that they cause the systematic exclusion of affected actors. Affectedness often cuts across institutional borderlines and patterns of affectedness change over time. Accordingly, it is crucial to pursue the development of communality sentiments that do not block inter-demos decision making or the dynamic reconstruction of communalities in light of shifting patterns of affectedness. The first task is to ensure that the outside of a demos is not perceived as an outside to democracy as such. This can be done by developing a cross-demos communality based on agonist communality sentiments that set out democratic conducts for inter-demos decision making (Connolly, 1995; Mouffe, 1993; Tully, 2000). The next task is to highlight the contingent and overlapping character of demoi and to pursue the construction of political identities that are capable of identifying with shifting communalities. As Michael Sandel put it:

The civic virtue distinctive to our time is the capacity to negotiate our way among sometimes overlapping, sometimes conflicting obligations that claim us, and to live with the tension to which multiple loyalties give rise. This capacity is difficult to sustain, for it is easier to live with the plurality between persons than within them (Sandel, 1996: 350).

In a pluricentric political system, democratic communality sentiments involve dealing with heterogeneity and difference and multiple belongings rather than being loyal to one overarching and stable political ‘we’.

Recognizing the open and contingent character of political communities is important because it promotes accepting difference as something that is to be dealt with within the realm of democratic decision making rather than through internal and/or external exclusions. Exclusions are intrinsically political and must, therefore, be outcomes of democratically regulated decisions.

This leads to the question of how to produce antagonistic sentiments between demoi and political identities that can relate to multiple communalities. The answer is through shaping arenas for political decision making that involve actors from more than one demos. By spurring political debate and communication between demoi, such arenas encourage the perception of members of other demoi not as enemies,
but as adversaries with legitimate democratic rights to their own opinions that can be
pursued in political contestations (Mouffe, 1993). This idea is along the same lines as
Robert Putnam’s (2002) claim that networks provide societal trust by establishing
bridges between groups that bond.

Governance networks present themselves as arenas for this kind of debate
and communication because they institutionalize weak ties between participants
rather than strong ones. In doing so, they pave the way for the construction of a
sense of communality that is driven by stories of interdependency and is weak in the
sense that it does not aim to remove difference but to exploit it. In doing so,
governance networks not only promote the construction of agonistic sentiments, but
they also contribute to developing pluricentric political identities that view the ability to
identify with multiple and shifting communities as a democratic virtue. In this way,
governance networks contribute to the development of a more inclusive pluricentric
democracy, both externally and internally.

Metagoverning inter-demos governance networks

Governance networks offer themselves essentially as a promising institutional frame
for inter-demos governance, although there is no guarantee that they will serve this
democratic function in practice. As several empirical studies have shown (Hendrics
and Musso, 2005; Bogason & Zølner, 2007; Markussen, 2007; Aasæther et al, 2009),
many inter-demos governance networks operate in seclusion. Although these
networks might serve as arenas for political contestation and for promoting a sense
of inter-demos communality between participants, their opacity makes it difficult for
the larger group of affected constituencies to hold them to account and to develop
the same kind of dynamic and cross-cutting political identities. As such, inter-demos
governance networks must be metagoverned if they are to add to the development of
a strong pluricentric democracy, rather than move political decision making out of the
realm of democratic regulation (Sørensen and Torfing, 2005).

Within this context, one of the most important tasks for metagovernors is to
bring inter-demos governance networks into the open as political arenas that must
legitimize their actions in the eyes of the affected constituencies. The objective of
these metagovernors is to change the hegemonic perception of inter-demos
governance as apolitical regulatory arenas, and then to push for the development of
a plurality of inter-demos publics. The public of each inter-demos governance network
keeps a close eye on the behavior of the various political elites and sub-elites that
participate in governance networks. In some cases, the issues at stake in a governance network are such that the internal network proceedings call for some level of privacy (Torfing et al., 2011). The task of a network public in such cases is to hold the networks collectively accountable for the governance outcomes they produce.

Although there are many problems related to holding inter-demos governance networks accountable, it is possible if many actors attempt to metagovern them using some of the new forms of democratic participation and deliberation. Hence, efforts to establish network publics can come from many directions. They can be initiated from the ‘top down’ by political authorities at higher levels of governance through various legal, political, institutional, and financial regulatory measures; they can come from the ‘outside in’ from other governance networks through acts of contestation or infiltration; and they can come the ‘bottom up’, from affected citizens through the activation of the many new internet passed media. The metagoverning powers of these new media have already proved to be effective means to shape ad hoc publics around shifting inter-demos governance networks.

**Conclusion**

Political decision making is an intra-demos activity and an inter-demos activity. As envisaged by the complex institutional models of democracy that were developed in the 19th and 20th centuries, the need for inter-demos governance is not a new phenomenon. Each of these models has found ways to deal with the tensions between effectiveness and democratic control and between heterogeneity and communality that are inherent to traditional theories of liberal democracy. The hegemonic status of these theories has hindered the much-needed debate about how to democratically regulate inter-demos governance processes.

However, growing political globalization and administrative fragmentation has made the political system more pluricentric. It has also brought the need for such a theory into full view, both because pluricentrism has deepened the above-mentioned tensions and because attempts to deal with these tensions from a traditional inter-demos perspective on democracy have resulted in a democratically unsatisfactory de-politicization of a growing proportion of the governance process.

This article has sought to show that there is an attractive alternative to the de-politicization strategies that extend rather than diminish the realm of democratic decision making. Moreover, the article has argued that governance networks offer
themselves as an important institutional frame with which to promote inter-demos participation and deliberation, because networks provide the kind of weak ties between demoi constituted on strong ties that are needed to develop a strong pluricentric democracy. It could be argued that governance networks are problematic because they offer a weaker form of control and communality than that provided by traditional political institutions and organizations. However, the argument presented here is that the value of governance networks is that the forms of control and communality they provide represent an important supplement to institutions and organizations. The linkages between strong and weak ties ensure a strong pluricentric democracy because they mutually enforce one another. The individual demoi have an important role to play in metagoverning inter-demos governance networks, and these networks have an important role to play in making democracy more inclusive (partly by reducing tendencies to intra-demos closure) and in providing arenas for inter-demos participation and deliberation. Although inter-demos governance networks are no democratic panacea, they do represent a promising contribution to the development of a pluricentric democracy.
References


