New Public Organizing - Towards collaborative innovation in the public sector

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Abstract
In the light of a public dissatisfaction with organizational practices associated with new public management, new organizational forms and processes are sought after. In a Swedish municipality, aiming at establishing new working patterns for achieving social sustainability, a pilot project has been launched in order to challenge existing preferred ways of organizing. Parallel a research project follows this development, where the aim of this paper is to extract insights from the study as well as discuss public organization.

The research follows a participatory action approach, here described as Multi-Level Participatory Action Research (MLPAR), where this paper sums up a period of building relationships and knowledge in a multi-levelled organization. The material has been collected through complementary methods including a longitudinal recorded and transcribed discussion with two project managers, reoccurring discussions with strategists, semi-structured interviews with eight project members as well as document analysis.

The results indicate that there is a movement towards something post NPM that for this project can be labelled as seeking collaborative innovation for social sustainability, but that the municipality’s present organization and processes hinders more profound changes. This movement could be ascribed a current interest in ideas associated with NPG, but as the study reveals that new organizational forms are sought for without any clear directives, a more careful stance towards the NPG label is called for. What instead is most prominent in the study is the explorative movement towards new organizational forms, where an empirical grounded label for what actually can be observed, like New Public Organizing (NPO), would be more accurate. The new label also opens up for new perspectives on public organizations where collaborating for public values is given more attention at the expense of governing issues.

Taking a collaborative approach to building society rests on an idea of reciprocity but also a need to submerge once own interests for common goals that are defined within diverse relationships at the rim of the municipal organization. This does not comply well with central ideas of NPM, such as clarity and control, which for this project creates tension with current structures not to say dominating ideas of what a municipality is and how it should work.

Looking more freely upon the creation of public values, beyond what public organizations can contribute with, the article suggest that we should more carefully study different Coordinators for Public Values (CPV). The search for new organizational forms in building public good
and public values, visible through the project, also raises questions about how we define democracy. Current democratic procedures and power structures might need to adapt to a new ideological landscape where values about e.g. social sustainability is allowed to influence not only elections but maybe even more profoundly guide a reorganization of the role and function of municipalities.

**Keywords (2-5)**

Collaborative innovation, New public organizing (NPO), Coordinators of public values (CPV), Public organizations, Multi-level participatory action research (MLPAR)

**Theoretical background and introduction**

Many public organizations are currently characterized by a strong influence from *New Public Management* (NPM) which is less a clear school but a label for many intertwined ideas revolving around influence from private sector management (Osborne, 2006), e.g. stressing the division of public services, cost control and accountability in public structures (Hood, 1995; Kettl, 1997). However, I would especially put forward the main idea of NPM as that of public organizations are in need of certain management practices in contrast to other possible organizational principles. Today we also recognize a more indirect rule through what has come to been known as *New Public Governance* (NPG), where holistic ideas about society works as a common denominator that guide behaviour inside public organizations.

Osborne (2006) describes this turn as promising as it allows a change of focus from intra-organizational management to more networked based inter-organizational processes. There are several other offsprings too. For example Dunleavy, Margetts, Bastow, and Tinkler (2006) who emphasize that NPG display new opportunities of constructing and organizing public services through *Digital Era Governance* (DEG), where the division and siloing of current public organizations are challenged. They though fear that “managers and political elites, long educated and socialized in NPM approaches” (p. 488) will find it hard to change direction radically (see also Crosby, ‘t Hart, & Torfing, 2017). There are also other critical voices, that fear that the more indirect rule through NPG creates ambiguity in practices as well as problems through the necessary self-disciplination that comes with it.

**Citizens are becoming co-creators of democracy**

Along this development, citizens are viewed differently, from a clientele that are in need of support of public services towards persons “quite capable of engaging in deliberative problem solving”, as Bryson, Crosby, and Bloomberg (2014, p. 446) puts it. In their view citizens now “move beyond their roles as voters, clients, constituents, customers, or poll responders to becoming problem solvers, co-creators, and governors actively engaged in producing what is valued by the public and good for the public”. Problem solving for public value, thus, becomes a most critical aspect of democratic life, which de Souza Briggs (2008) as well as Bryson, Sancino, Benington, and Sørensen (2017) links to John Dewey’s reformist ideas for supporting education in people capable of upholding a functioning society. Expressed almost hundred years ago, Dewey (1937) argue that democracy is best viewed as a way of life. Citizens can thus be seen as resources in the creation of public values, where different actors (not only public) can take on a role to unleash citizen potentials in order to create growth for both the individual and society. How this is to be achieved more practically, is less clear, where current theories do not give much guidance (Bryson et al., 2014).
The demarcation of what can be viewed as public value(s), is also an item for discussion. Public Management Review (2017) focus on this in a special issue with e.g. different adaptations of “the strategic triangle of public value management” by Moore (1995, 2013). The strategic triangle revolves around the relationship between a) Legitimacy and Support, b) Operational capacity and c) Public value, where the triangle challenges the idea of customer satisfaction as the bottom line for public organizations, and instead opens up for other types of organizational missions, quite different from private companies.

Figure 1: Moore’s strategic triangle of public value management (Moore, 1995)

Maybe the most interesting part with the strategic triangle is that it (although designed for public managers) does not dictate that the public organization needs to be at the centre of the creation of public value. Instead any actor can be involved as well as take lead in the creation, which of course also opens up for different kinds of networked based approaches (Bryson et al., 2017). At the same time, there is a need to shift perspective from public value to public values (note the plural), which is more suitable in a complex world but at the same time makes the concept less distinct. For now, we might satisfy ourselves with the definition by Bryson et al. (2014) where public value encompasses that which is valued by the public or is good for the public.

Innovation in the public sector

Criticism of current managerial arrangements in public organizations as well as ideas of alternative ways of organizing is thus spreading (Osborne, 2006), but without any strong alternatives developing (Lindberg, Czarniawska, & Solli, 2015). This is unfortunate as new knowledge and new practices based on the particular logic surrounding public organizations are necessary (Osborne & Brown, 2005; Osborne & Strokosch, 2013). A way of putting it, is that innovation in the structures and processes of the public organization is called for (Crosby et al., 2017).

The public organization is innovatively an exciting unit of study since it on one hand shows a good ability to innovate in terms of, for example, introducing new managerial control structures taken from private organizations (as much of NPM), and, on the other hand, display an inability to innovate through continuously adjusting processes to the changing needs of citizens (Hartman, 2011; Lindberg et al., 2015; Windrum & Koch, 2008). In line with these find-
ings, Andreasson and Winge (2009) state that there are no clear overall objectives, no requirements or incentives to encourage core activities in municipalities and county councils to be innovative except in a small and limited scale. The introduction of what has been known as innovation procurement in several Swedish municipalities can be seen as an process innovation in itself, but at the same time this particular measure also indicate that many public organizations are unable to innovate their own processes or that they purposefully have moved this responsibility to their procurement partners (Andreasson & Winge, 2009; Edquist & Zaba-Itrurriagagoitia, 2012; Georghiou, Edler, Uyarra, & Yeow, 2014; Knutsson & Thomasson, 2014; Uyarra, Edler, Garcia-Estevez, Georghiou, & Yeow, 2014).

Adding to this, in a previous study (Wihlman, Hoppe, Wihlman, & Sandmark, 2016), we concluded that public employees do take several initiatives for innovations, but in the lack of appropriate organizational structures and processes these initiatives often stay local and do not spread systematically. Many public organizations do have added some sort of structured innovation process, but according to our own findings, these usually treat innovation as something that appears as support for explicitly described ideas, outside of normal organizational life, instead of a dimension in the professional civil servants strive for development. This problem is also an indication that the concept of innovation is used quit differently in public practice in comparison to theory. Non the less, we need to find new ways of supporting innovation (Crosby et al., 2017), and in the perspective of NPM critique, as a way of developing new organizational forms and processes that are capable of solving societal problems and delivering what is valued by the public or is good for the public.

Collaborative innovation

A suggestion for how to proceed towards new organizational forms and processes post NPM comes from Bommert (2010) who discusses possibilities to supplement bureaucracies with an innovative, network-based public organization where public officials together with others coordinate mutual resources. In order to reach this state, labelled collaborative innovation by Bommert, a public organization needs to (p. 28):

1. develop the capacity to explore its innovation needs. These needs might be detected inside or outside of the public organization and top-down or bottom-up.
2. build the capability to look across and outside of the organization, in order to identify innovation resources,
3. be able to motivate and enable actors to apply their resources, in order to identify innovation resources, and
4. coordinate the application of resources for the innovation of public value.

A project for moving in this direction, although not framed as innovation, was initiated by The City in 2015, a municipality in Sweden with approx. 150,000 inhabitants. It was the result of a strategic discussion addressing a society in constant change where the increasing complexity was deemed hard to meet with existing organizational structure and means. The municipalities current dependence on the Purchaser-Provider-Model (PPM), implemented in 1993, was also held unsuitable for meeting these new needs. Instead, the municipality wanted to become more flexible and find other ways of quickly coordinating resources from different departments, answering to different temporal local demands where the individual public servant was given coordinating powers. Due to limitations in resources, there was also a pressing

1 The name of the municipality has been exchanged in order to protect the sources for the study.
need for involving other organizations and resources, outside the municipality’s control, in future organizational initiatives. Leading this development, two different pilot groups was formed in the beginning of 2016 with the mission to find new ways of organizing for social sustainability in two different residential areas. In the autumn of 2016 they were moving from planning and structuring towards common action.

Aim
Given this background, the aim of the paper has been phrased to extract insights from the study as well as discuss public organization.

Using the two pilot groups as the foremost reference point the main research question has been phrased: Are these two project groups on their way towards establishing new working patterns together with partners outside the municipal organization, possibly moving towards collaborative innovation in a post NPM organization?

Method – A multi-level participatory action research approach

The research conducted is based on an evolving pragmatic participatory design (Coghlan, 2011; Coghlan & Shani, 2014; Holmstrand, 2006; Johansson & Lindhult, 2008) encompassing already existing groups and processes at different hierarchical levels inside the studied municipality. The design follows the tradition of action research, here explained by Shani and Pasmore (1985, p. 439).

Action research may be defined as an emergent inquiry process in which applied behavioural science knowledge is integrated with existing organizational knowledge and applied to solve real organizational problems. It is simultaneously concerned with bringing about change in organizations, in developing self-help competencies in organizational members and adding to scientific knowledge. Finally, it is an evolving process that is undertaken in a spirit of collaboration and co-inquiry.

Initiation
In the formative stage in 2015 this research was primarily concerned with building trustful relations in order to create a common ground for a mutual beneficial participatory research process. This introductory phase evolved into a more action based phase at three distinct hierarchical levels of the municipality (strategic, middle management and project), each with its specific agenda and participatory depth, but also interlinked as the sought innovation in processes and structures needed close collaboration inside the host organization. This contrast traditional PAR that usually engage with just one specific (usually marginalized) group. In order to highlight the special conditions that comes from a more intertwined approach, I have chosen to call this multi-level participatory action research approach (MLPAR).

The research process can be said to follow the structure of getting in, getting on and getting out, expressed by McArdie (2008), where the research at this moment has reached the state getting on. The method is described quite extensively below, but will be even more thoroughly described in the planned article Layer upon layer for the new Nordic action research journal Forskning og Forandring (Hoppe, forthcoming).

Simultaneously getting in and on at several levels
There is a difference between a point of entrance into a context of a formal organization in search of a unit of study, and later the context of the chosen unit of study; dividing the getting in phase into the two sub phases of 1) boarder-breaking and 2) enrolling. In the boarder-
breaking phase I initially used different contacts at different levels at both my own research institution and the municipality. Through these contacts, I got access to the host organization at strategic level where I through meetings with two strategists identified an emerging development project as suitable for research on collaboration. This development project was designed with the aim of establishing new working patterns for the municipality where actors outside its own control would be enrolled into a mutual work of creating social sustainability. Noticeably, this is also quite in line with ideas related to the NPG development, mentioned in the introduction.

As I judge it, trustful relationships have (June 2017) since the first contacts been built over two years at strategic level, respectively one and a half year at group management level and one year at group level. The slow advance served the purpose of laying a foundation for candid conversations which in turn could function as a base for more joint collaboration on research into how new working patterns can be established. Getting in and on, is thus not something with a concrete start and end, but is an ongoing process where I as a researcher simultaneously was getting in and getting on but with different people at different levels and in different places at the same time.

At the moment (June 2017), for the next phase of the project, new contacts have been built at strategic level inside The City but also new contacts at strategic level at another municipality as part of writing a joint application for funding. These new contacts are the effect of the ongoing research, where ideas of collaboration also are pursued within the research project itself, successively involving more people into the realms of this multi-level participatory design. By working together with the application, we also were forced to gradually synchronize our ideas of what is to be done and how, but also commit ourselves towards establishing new working patterns inside the municipalities involved. By involving people, ideas about collaborative innovation is spreading and gaining momentum.

Knowledge development follows knowledge building

What I experienced was that I needed to actively build knowledge about the host organization at each level I was encountering in order to move towards some type of participatory process. Getting in was thus not only about breaking the boarder of the host organization or enrolling people in the study, it was even more about building knowledge in order to be able to relate better to the specific circumstances of each level I was collaborating with. This was achieved using complementary methods close to more traditional qualitative research.

Six meetings with the group managers during 2016 was recorded and transcribed, as well as a semi structured interview with each of the two group managers in December 2016. This was complemented by attendance to three group meetings (documented through field notes) and recorded and transcribed semi structured interviews with eight of the total of eleven group members (two declined and one was indisposed). In general, an interview lasted between 60 and 90 minutes where all personal interviews revolved around each individual’s present working situation, experiences from change initiatives in the public organization and the project so far, ending with expectations on the future of the project.

The transcribed interviews were coded and initially analysed using the Atlas.ti software. Additional information has been extracted from municipality and group documents (such as web pages, power points and reports), field notes and e-mail conversations. Initial findings were presented, discussed and developed at a complementary meeting with the two groups in February 2017 where after the research now (June 2017) has moved into a more stochastic discussion with managers and group members when and where they express a desire to meet, share and develop experiences and ideas. The last meeting was June 1, 2017, when the groups
gathered in order to reflect upon their work before Summer leave. I have also participated in two general gatherings on the theme of social sustainability with a variety of employees at the municipality. Along with these discussion, during a period of five weeks in March to April, I devoted to the development for a joint application for funds, engaging the strategical level in this specific municipality but also an adjacent municipality, as noted above.

Most interestingly, as I could present my own interpretation of how the development project was progressing innovation wise, it opened up for a more concrete discussion of how to jointly move forward at the strategic level. The interest from the group members is though less outspoken compared from that from group management level not to say the strategic level. This tendency appears to be quite natural, as my ideas of how to proceed is to start changing the existing structures of the host organization, which of course is something that concerns strategic level as this is their responsibility. Through distribution of an academic text, presentations and conversations inside the municipality, new meetings were arranged; this time at director level (for a novel discussion about innovation for the whole municipality) but also at strategist level for a joint application for funds for building support structures for innovation in direct relationship with the studied project.

The participative design in this project is thus more complex than for example a project built on focus groups, but as I am concerned this is necessary in order to create actual action for change inside a complex organization such as a large municipality. Through the research, it is also been clear that most central terms like social sustainability and innovation have different meanings at different levels in the host organization, depending on differences in tasks and working contexts (something we discuss from a translation perspective in Hallin, Hoppe, Guziana, Mörndal, & Åberg, 2017, presented at this conference). What I then need to do as a researcher is to find ways of bridging these divides and help the organization take parallel actions at each level, which in turn will make it possible for moving towards innovation. One might describe it as this type of participatory research is gradually increasing the organizational awareness of the innovativeness problem of the public organization. If our application is successful we plan to move this process from awareness to initiating change in organizational structures and processes and by that successively increase the actual innovativeness of the public organization. An increased innovativeness in processes and services will in turn open up for new organizational forms that may challenge existing ways of delivering public values, and in the end, help the organization leave current NPM ideas behind. The potential time frame for the research project is thus quite long.

Before we leave this section, I would like to take the opportunity to clearly state that an earlier version of this text, although with a different aim and structure, more concerned with inductive themes and language issues, was presented at the IRSPM conference in Budapest in April 2017 (Hoppe, 2017).

**Empirical findings and analysis**

This empirical section starts with a description of the project for social sustainability. It is then followed by an assessment of how The City live up to the four needs for collaborative innovation, expressed by Bommert (2010). The last section moves the text towards discussion as it extract preliminary insights from the study of the two pilot groups, where the empirical material has been used to evoke interesting thoughts in order to theorize (Weick, 1989, 1995) on public organization, in line with the given aim.
A project for Social Sustainability

Social sustainability (Social hållbarhet) has become a most central topic for The City, and is described as one out of four prioritized development areas, where the other three are knowledge and competence, climate and housing development. Social sustainability in turn is communicated as the sum of social trust (tillit), social inclusion (jämlikhet) and social mobility (dynamik), as seen in the figure below. Recently though (May 10, 2017) at a work shop for analysing empirical material collected by two strategists at the municipality, the Swedish term framtidstro (belief in the future) had replaced dynamik (social mobility). It is unclear if this is a permanent change or just an interpretation applied for the work shop, but one can at least say that the concepts used for describing social sustainability are in some state of flux.

In order to move towards the vision of social sustainability, the municipality agreed to form a pilot project with two explicit groups for exploring how this could be done. The project was decided upon in 2015 and run from the beginning of 2016 until the end of 2018 … or longer, which I will come back to later.

The two groups consist of five respectively six members (February 2017). A group manager heads each group, where the two managers work tightly together and share the same office. Noticeably, while forming the two groups the municipality also enforced an unexpected saving program as new calculations had shown with current development the municipality in the closest years to come would run with a deficit of about €10.000.000 (100.000.000 SEK) a year (The City, 2016a). This might have influenced the project in more than one way, as the project also is supposed to find ways of saving money in the long term, according to one of the group managers. Priorities are changing as well as public opinion and political positions, where both group managers and group members are vague when it comes to how durable this project is. Three years is a long time in a public organization, one of the group members said. Beyond that, anything is possible.

Each groups mission is to find new ways of working across formal structures in order to create social sustainability (which can be regarded as something valued by the public or is good for the public), where each group is targeted towards a specific residential area, each with known social problems. It is a task where the departmentalization of present organization is deemed unfit (“silos” and “downpipes” are frequently used as derogative words used for describing the inefficiency of current organization).
The group members come from different departments, both central and local, encompassing e.g. social workers, employment officers, sports and leisure management and cultural workers. They all have been given 8 hours a week to work with the project, which means that the rest of a normal 40 hours working week, they continue to reside in their original workplace. There are no group members with an original workplace outside the municipality.

There is no general reason why these specific employees have been chosen for the project, instead there are several contextual reasons. What can be read into the interviews is that several of those engaged use to participate in these kinds of projects, which also is known at their original work place, according to the interviewees. There are also utterances in the interviews that some of their colleagues were relieved when they in turn did not have to participate, that someone else was chosen. But there are other reasons as well. One person just came back from paternity leave, and thus was available for the project without too much restructuring of other work tasks. Another person is manager of another department, who expressed that he could not spare any of his staff, so he volunteered himself (but also aired concerns that he had problems of prioritizing the project). The two managers of the project were on the other hand deliberately chosen as they had long working experiences within the municipality, had worked with similar questions before and also displayed personal qualities in organizing explorative work.

Interestingly, the home departments of the group members have not been compensated for losing out working capacity. At the same time, according to the interviews, some department managers were not consulted in advance. Consequently, the project draws recourses from existing structures which then has created a bit of tension between the project and some of the departments. This situation, and other incidents, have led one of the group managers to conclude that there is a need to develop greater trust within the organization in order to reach social sustainability. Tension is also building towards more central placed politicians and public servants, where the managers say that they note changing priorities. For example, at a meeting with politicians, they were put last on the agenda and when they finally got their say, some of the members of the congregation had left. They also had to defend the initiation of the project, as if this was their responsibility and not those politicians that they now had to answer to. Afterwards, one of those responsible for the meeting, looked them up and apologized for how the meeting developed and the uncalled critique.

Indications for collaborative innovation

The group members were recruited during the Spring of 2016. In the beginning, they focused on group processes as well as defining their task. More outbound work started in the Autumn of 2016. As this is written, there has just been about a year for new initiatives and work patterns to establish, why the coming analysis might be a bit premature. Non-the less, through the interviews and the interaction with the groups and its managers, there is a clear direction of work done, which in turn makes this first assessment of The City’s move towards collaborative innovation quite valid at this point in time.

To recall the analytical structure from the introduction, in order to build capacity for collaborative innovation, Bommert (2010) express that a public organization has to:

1. develop the capacity to explore its innovation needs. These needs might be detected inside or outside of the public organization and top-down or bottom-up.
2. build the capability to look across and outside of the organization, in order to identify innovation resources,
3. be able to motivate and enable actors to apply their resources, in order to identify innovation resources, and
4. coordinate the application of resources for the innovation of public value.

Assessment

In a way, the initiation of the project itself is the result of an internal explorative discussion on how to make the organization more adaptable to future needs and then especially the need for creating a socially sustainable society. The project members are also given a mission to explore how they in practice can work in order to meet these needs. The project is thus a tool for exploration as well as an indication of an increased capacity to explore innovation needs. There are also complementary actions taken by the strategists, revolving around different gatherings and discussions about social sustainability involving actors both inside and outside the municipality. The process indicates that innovation needs are explored top-down but possibly also bottom-up (the project is still developing so it is too early to be more precise), as well as inside and outside. In these ways innovation needs have been identified and are now explored, so we can conclude that there at least exists some capacity to explore. But there are also several limitations visible in this capacity. To start, the resources given for exploring new ideas and working patterns are very restricted, where both problems and solutions mainly are sought within existing limits of the organization not to say these two “satellite” groups. The group members are also quite concerned with solving already existing problems they have identified prior to joining the project groups. These problems thus can be described as internal (municipal) problems instead of external (societal) problems identified in collaboration with other parties. The easily doable (retrospectively identified as ideas for solutions that at least one of the team members already knows works) has been given priority and is also confined to the two groups. Organizational exploration into more unknown ways of creating social sustainability, as mentioned as their main mission from strategic level, is thus not given specific attention in this phase of the project. Except for a few strategist and investigators, the rest of the organization is at this point neither involved in the exploration nor in the exploitation of new ideas associated with the groups task. Instead, existing organization is mainly set to uphold the existing order, relying on political initiatives for innovation and do not support distributed exploring of new needs; this means that the current organizations path dependency restricts what is possible to explore and act upon. There might be new working patterns developing in between the two project groups and the rest of the organization, but this has not been noted by the study yet. What has been noted is instead a dependency of written reports and presentations, where different descriptions of the progress of the project are distributed from the group managers to strategists, directors and politicians. The strategists, taking the initiative, group managers and group members do have a task of exploring new needs but do not share the same ideas of what to accomplish or how it is to be done. At least in what they express, they do reach out into the unknown, but are not synchronized nor do they engage in actions that diverge very much from their normal working patterns. At the same time, the rest of the organization is not much involved in this endeavour, apart from occasional gatherings where social sustainability as a concept is discussed, arranged by strategists. In this way, there is growing capacity to explore innovation needs at diverging hierarchical levels, but the capacity is mainly restricted to small enclosed groups with no real support from the rest of the organization. What seems to cause this situation is a lack of resources and priority. Group members are torn between project tasks and their ordinary work. With too much to do in too little time, there does not exist any real organizational slack; the precondition for experimentation into the unknown and more genuine initiatives for innovation (Cyert & March, 1963).
On the other hand, several of the group members display a propensity for entrepreneurship in order to muster internal resources in order to solve problems by adapting to their local contexts. In that respect, there exist personal capacity for exploration, but then mainly directed inwards towards the current organization. It is an exploration with the goal of securing resources for upholding services the informants express as important in their professions and work contexts, where they do not really scrutinize between social sustainability pursued in their normal job and social sustainability as part of this specific project. They simply just carry on doing their jobs, regardless of label.

Still, this internal exploration could be viewed as an asset for an organization that do want to explore and stimulate change initiatives for social sustainability derived from employees that have a first-hand contact with citizens. However, there are no indications that this would be the matter in The City as this propensity for internal entrepreneurship is not specifically addressed in the current project. Instead the project groups follow what could be labelled the normal municipality order of putting planning before action; especially noticeable in the early stages of the project. The first months of the project, some of the interviewees described as tedious, as this period was dominated by internal group talk instead of accomplishing more palpable results in the field. Using two terms, coined by Sarasvathy (2001), this explorative project, following the normal public order, is at this moment favouring causation over effectuation. The public organizations structure and processes are built on ideas of analysis and planning, where the knowledge gained not so much is to be used in changing action directly, but instead will be collected and fed back to the planning process at a regular basis. It is not action that leads, but talk and planning. The action competence of the employees is thus not really used as an asset for creating novel exploration into social sustainability as a field of action instead of a more abstract term used in order to influence the planning processes of the municipality.

This set up also has a hampering effect on possible new initiatives for the creation of public values with unknown actors (i.e. those who have not been identified in earlier analytical stages) outside the municipality’s organisation. As the municipalities recourses, already spoken for through planning, are geared towards solving existing problems by existing ideas, it will automatically diminish existing slack and the possibilities of more unprejudiced exploring of new ends and means with whoever wants to join in on a mutual task of creating social sustainability. Current financial constraints make the situation worse where already limited recourses are becoming even scarcer.

It is stated in the guidelines for the two groups that its members should involve civil society and other actors in their work. This has also been done to some respect as the groups locally have met citizens at different occasions in order to extract and develop common ideas of what would build social sustainability. In later stages, the group has also met and involved representatives of e.g. property owners, cultural groups, sports clubs and religious communities. The structuring of the teams, with members from different departments, is also in line with creating a capability of looking across. In this way, there is a mix of people, with different positions, connections, backgrounds and perspectives working together in order to create social sustainability. The work forms are in this way promising. A bit disturbing though is a comment by a group manager who fears that those they have managed to involve outside the municipality are extraordinary people who are looking for different outlets for their engagement. They can be viewed as resources looking for familiar problems that will help them pursue their own agendas. In this way the project display the qualities of garbage-can-theory where the rational between problem and solution is exchanged for a more stochastic rationalization where problems are used to enforce already upheld ideas of organizational development (Co-
hen, March, & Olsen, 1972). An important difference though, is that this garbage can exist between organizations. But, likewise this is a start, where coming steps and involvement of a wider array of outside resources probably will encounter new challenges for engagement and commitment, less prominent in these more adventurous people.

Also, this aspect of looking across suffers from the limitations of priority and internal resources given. As the process was designed to first form internal groups and thereafter work together with others for social sustainability, the external contacts have mainly been used to develop and implement what already has been conceived inside the (planning process of the) public organization and the two groups. External partners have not been able to participate in the formative stages of the two groups and the framing of the problem (making social sustainability a mutual idea instead of an idea presented by one of the parties), which of course limits the innovation potential in whichever collaboration. Any innovation attempt will then also be more focused on solving problems experienced inside the organization of the municipality and less of solving societal problems resting in the spaces in-between the municipality and other actors. One will also tend to look for innovation resources that will help build solutions, instead of innovation resources that will help in building new ideas how society can develop in novel ways. External actors are now mainly chosen and involved on the basis of their productive capacity, instead of their capacity to question and think anew (partly also including me as a researcher participating in the processes as well as writing this text). The actual capability of looking across and outside is thus assessed as very restricted in the project studied.

Non-the-less, the working patterns in the two groups could be a start of creating trustful relationships with external actors which in coming projects could be used to successively move the focus from solving municipality problem towards creating a socially sustainable society where the municipality is just one among many actors, participating in a joint effort of creating what is valued by the public or good for the public.

Assessment summery

The assessment shows that The City through the project for social sustainability is moving towards collaborative innovation, but still have a long way to go before collaborative innovation is integrated as working procedures inside the public organization. The limitation is visible primarily in the following two dimensions.

- Innovation exploration is restricted to the two specific groups with no established structures for supporting and spreading any insights reached.
- Innovation exploration is restricted towards needs experienced by actors inside the municipality instead of more general societal needs.

Despite this, the project does show a move in the direction of collaborative innovation as:

- the project is geared at exploring collaborative innovation possibilities, and represent a capacity in itself,
- the work carried out is done across, inside and outside structures,
- the innovative processes involve actors outside the public organization, and
- external actors have been motivated to apply their resources.

In this respect, there are several lessons learned from the project that can be applied in coming projects building on the experience from this, where the most pressing one seem to be to involve other actors more unconditionally and in earlier stages of the realization process. Along with this change, the municipality must also find ways of more fundamentally implement new
working procedures built around collaborative innovation. But, there is another aspect of collaboration that so far has not been accounted for and also should be taken into consideration, and that is the role of the researcher in this project.

Leading collaboration and the influence from the participatory research design

The participatory research is blurring the border between the researcher and the researched, but is also blurring the management of the project through the influence from the researcher. The collaborative aspects in both the research agenda and the project agenda has given me as a researcher, not only a role as extractor of data but to some extent also a role as co-producer of public values in this particular municipality. The municipality does not only give assess to its processes, but is also willing to exchange ideas and let research influence the development processes. As a researcher, I am not a passive bystander but a collaborative partner and through this position can be viewed as evidence for a move towards collaborative innovation.

To get a perspective of my part in this, we can turn to Crosby et al. (2017) who describe four complementary important leadership roles that they deem necessary for successful orchestration of innovation collaboration. These roles can be viewed in the figure below, together with a shortened explanation from Crosby et al. (2017) as well as my appraisal of the collaborative actors taking part in this project (where I put a less significant role inside brackets). I also added a complementary fifth role as coordinator, which I comment below.

Table 1: Roles in orchestration for innovation collaboration (developed from Crosby et al., 2017)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Collaborative actor</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sponsors</td>
<td>Authorities able to deploy resources</td>
<td>Politicians, Directors, (Strategists)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Champions</td>
<td>(Informal) authorities influencing mobilisation of capacities</td>
<td>Strategists, (Researcher), (Group managers)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Catalysts</td>
<td>People disturbing existing organization, promoting collaboration</td>
<td>Strategists, Researcher, (Group managers)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Implementers</td>
<td>Getting things done in areas without rules and procedures</td>
<td>Group managers, group members, (Strategists)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coordinators</td>
<td>Coordinating organizational activities for collaborative innovation</td>
<td>Strategists, Group managers, (Researcher in the application process)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1. First, one can note that the project does involve all five levels of the public organization, although the director level, not to say the political level, is quite detached from the execution. The pilot project thus fulfils the theoretical foundation for creating successful leadership of collaborative innovation.

2. Second, the strategists as well as the group managers are active in three different leadership roles, but also acts as coordinators mainly between different actors inside the public organization, and as such suggests a necessary fifth leadership role for a public organization building collaborative innovation capacity. Noticeably, the strategist coordination efforts are more concerned with the verbal expressions and interpretations of social sustainability, whereas the group managers focus on coordinating action in the name of social sustainability. Alternative names for this role, building on terms favoured by Crosby et al. (2017), could be orchestrators or conductors. However, these two terms appear more detached from the everyday handling of upcoming issues than
the term coordinators, why the latter appear more appropriate, putting emphasis on coordination of exploration into words and action instead of management of a predefined plan.

3. Third, as a researcher I have come to primarily work as a catalyst for collaborative innovation through knowledge support but also as a visible external interest in the project, disturbing preferred procedures and project demarcations. In later stages of the project, and together with strategist representatives, I also moved towards champion the expansion and elongation of the (research)project, visible in a joint application for funds where we in a shared effort also engaged a complementary municipality.

The main point to be made here, leading over to the discussion that follows, is that researchers (if willing) do not stand free from collaborative innovation in the public sector. Instead, we can position ourselves inside the strategic triangle (Moore, 1995, 2013) and participate in the creation of legitimacy and support, operational capacity as well as public values (beyond share knowledge development). From this perspective, the assessment of the municipality’s move towards collaborative innovation should be more positive than what was mentioned above.

**Discussion**

Three models have been used in the previous sections, giving us three complementary perspectives on the creation of new collaborative actions for public values.

- Moores (1995, 2013) strategic triangle of public value management, displaying three different aspects that need to be coordinated in order to create public values.
- Bonmerts (2010) description of four different parts of the innovation process that a municipality needs to adhere to in order to reach collaborative innovation.
- An extended version of Crosby et al.’s (2017) differentiation between roles in the orchestration for innovation collaboration.

Together they supply us with a prescription of how municipalities and other actors can design new ventures into new organizational forms in order to create public good and public values (Moore, 1995, 2013). At the centre of these kind of municipal efforts are coordinators of words and action. They cannot stand alone though, but are in need of complementary leadership inside their organization (Crosby et al., 2017). Given these premises they will be able to engage in a process for collaborative innovation with external actors (Bommert, 2010), and by that accomplish what is valued by the public or is good for the public (Bryson et al., 2014).

**Going against public organization as usual**

At the moment questions regarding the design of the project and process, the selection of focus areas and participants, earlier experiences and expectations as well as first impressions from the implementation are at the heart of the research. Indicative findings suggest e.g. that all initiatives for intended organizational change are constantly obscured through other priorities and organizing activities, e.g. due to financial constraints and political positioning in addition to the multiple and sometimes conflicting tasks of a municipality. Traditional, sedimented ways of organizing a municipality is ever present, forcing this explorative project to adapt to existing structures and procedures, where we can recall the reflection by Dunleavy et al. (2006) that managers and political elites also are long educated and socialized in NPM approaches. The path dependency, that comes from an effort for upholding an image of a functioning democratic organisation, is ingrained in structures and cultures influencing all efforts
in disturbing “Public services as usual” (to paraphrase the business expression). The premises for collaborative innovation described in the previous paragraph are thus not fulfilled.

New public organizing

To go against the ingrained normality is far from easy, why we could expect several different initiatives and attempts from a variety of public organizations with the outspoken aim to break new ground in order to identify what works. The studied project can be viewed as one of these. The need for experimentation into more unknown ways of creating public values is great (Crosby et al., 2017) and the project shows there is a willingness to move away from new public management, but with no clear idea of how (Lindberg et al., 2015).

Since the beginning of 2000 the most popular term for describing this movement is new public governance, but there has also been other suggestions, like digital era governance (Dunleavy et al., 2006). They both have drawbacks though, as NPG turns our main attention to power and management, whereas DEG turns our attention towards technical tools. They both also seem to take for granted a central position of a public organization in the management of public values; a proposition that we should not at all take for granted as Moore’s strategic triangle opens up for any actor to take lead in these processes.

Instead, I humbly suggest that we should pay more attention to the more practical aspects of how public services and values are created through new organizational forms; a movement that we tentatively can call New Public Organizing (NPO); a term not currently in use and therefor suitable for more unprejudiced research. NPO turns our attention to what actually can be observed; in contrast to NPM and NPG that automatically a) highlight a certain predefined steering principle at the heart of a defining term and b) an unquestioned centre position of a publicly controlled organization upheld by today’s traditional structures of representative democracy. Maybe aspects of management and governance play a less important role in the future as we find new ways of coordinating what is valued by the public or is good for the public? It is also possible that ideas like social sustainability, apparent in this specific project, can function as core ideas for organizing initiatives and thus complement democracy as a parliamentary idea, where successively the meaning of growth changes as citizens enact democracy as a way of life (Dewey, 1897, 1937). Viewing citizens as active problem solvers, co-creators, and governors (Bryson et al., 2017; de Souza Briggs, 2008) appears as quite a step (maybe for Swedes especially) but possibly necessary in the future of a functioning complex society with less distinct geographical and juridical boarders.

Figure 3: Coordinators of Public Values (adaption based on Moore, 1995)
Putting the emphasis on the fact that anyone can take the position as coordinator in the strategic triangle for public values (Moore, 1995, 2013) our attention should turn to organizing. In a world where national and juridical borders are dismantled, values are created in digital networks and currency can be altcoins (such as bitcoins and litecoins) instead of euro, dollars and kronas. In that world, a municipality might have to govern less and coordinate more, not to say champion collaboration for public values where different Coordinators of Public Values (CPVs) come and go depending on issues raised in society. Even though the public organization does not have the operational capacity, it still will be able to give legitimacy and support for others who do, at least as long as we value parliamentary democracy as an organizational principle for society. Interestingly, there are also two emergent CPV positions inside the municipality, visible in the project studied. In my suggested fifth role as coordinators, both group managers and strategist work to orchestrate the creation of new public good and values. Their efforts are, in the studied period, mostly Intra-organizational and inter-departmental, but inter-organizational initiatives are also present. New working patterns for public servants are thus emergent, indicating a growing CPV capacity in the studied municipality.

In this setting, new public organizing might not be much more than a temporary term, but a term that will help us to think more freely about public organizations. At least, it is a term that opens up for a variety of expressions in organizational forms where legitimacy does not necessarily follow a predefined form. NPO is thus more of a question, opening up for new ideas and innovation in all aspects of public organizing, than an answer in need of definition and defence due to some specific delimitation.

Assessing a project in motion

Other practical findings revolve around the deviate nature of all parts of the project; concerning both how people have been chosen for different tasks of the project as well as the project itself. The orchestration of the innovation effort is ongoing, but where the research as mentioned has identified a fifth role in the creation of collaborative innovation, and that is the role of coordinators, complementing the roles of supporters, champions, catalysts and implementers, as described by Crosby et al. (2017). Treading ground with no clear procedures or rules, is difficult but also a necessary in order to allow for experimentation into what works. Of course, it needs coordination where those active in the experimentation take a central role in mediating between interests and perspectives, not to say between talk and action, in the creation of public values.
The project is carried out at the rim of the organization, and possibly must be just there. Nevertheless, in the lack of resources and support (both necessary for creation of public values, according to Moores strategic triangle) the handling of the pilot project groups does not really bear witness to the claim of The City that social sustainability is a prioritized area for development. There are though other activities where strategist coordinate people inside and outside the organization in defining and analysing how social sustainability can be attained. At the moment, the main focus is on talk and knowledge building, with no real visible effects on existing organizational structures and processes. But as mentioned, it is a work in progress, where it is too soon to give a final assessment of the initiatives taken.

We should also bear in mind the lack of clear predefined paths to pursue (Lindberg et al., 2015) and acknowledge that this is a project at the frontier of a public organization. It builds on ideas stemming from a spreading discontent with current managerial practices, associated with NPM, as well as positive beliefs of a more networked society, associated with NPG. In this respect, the case gives a contemporary description of how a municipality, a bit hesitantly, is building knowledge about what could be done, but also have difficulties in moving towards innovation in societal services and public values (de Souza Briggs, 2008) through collaboration due to the constraints of preferred forms of organizing. In this perspective, the collaborative efforts at display here could be just as much one could expect from a Swedish municipality right now. The assessment given might thus not give the municipality the credit it deserves for the steps it has taken for moving towards new public organizing through collaborative innovation.

Limited innovation in public structures

As it stands, closing in on the Summer of 2017, there is not much collaborative innovation taking place in The City according to what has been covered in this study, where the project so far has come to handle social sustainability as an intra-organizational problem rather than a societal problem where many other actors more naturally would be involved. For this to happen, the public organization must take a step back and through novel action appear as an actor amongst other societal actors where they cannot expect to control neither processes nor outcomes. To best manage the strategic triangle for public values (Moore, 1995, 2013) will possibly be to manage less, and also allow others to take the position as CPVs, coordinating the triangle for specific public values and goods. To move in this direction, current preferred managerial models must be adapted to diverging and changing circumstances, making it hard to uphold any predefined procedure as in PPM, putting a pressure on for example existing budgeting and accounting procedures. The departmentalization is already recognised as a problem for a more flexible organization, but the findings from this study does not acknowledge any real steps towards building alternative structures that could replace it more fundamentally.

The work in the two studied groups display some minor movement in this direction though, but these are also detached from the host organization. Even so, group members continue to solve already known problems with already known solutions. The pilot fails in bringing about more fundamental change and collaborative innovation so far, where the group members limit themselves mostly to local coordination across internal structures, which on the other hand in itself is something promising as it challenges existing structures and builds new communication channels inside and outside current formal boarders.

Accomplishing this local coordination across internal structures appear to be quite easy, at least formally. In the public organization, you just need to decide to do it, allocate resources (although limited) and delegate the responsibility to one department and one senior manager.
Thus, you have created a formal project/unit with a specific responsibility. Still, this does not mean that the mission has the necessary action support of those with influence inside the organization. This reminds us that even though there are supporters, champions, catalysts, implementers and coordinators working for a specific change, there are numerous other people with influence and agendas of their own, possibly in their own ways disturbing and counteracting tendencies that do not comply with their preferred public organization as usual. As the project is handled as an add-on, where affected departments must supply personnel but without getting compensation for this, the work load is increasing within the whole organization. The new goal of achieving social sustainable then appears as, at the best, a complementary goal, or worse, a conflicting goal in relation to current structures, traditions and priorities; drawing recourses from others and not seen as achieving much public good.

The study accordingly shows that opportunities for development and novel action is possible to muster through these types of initiatives, but current limitations are far too many in order to claim that this would be a fruitful path towards new organizational forms that are able to meet specific desired ends of social sustainability at strategic level. In order to move in this direction, the number of supporters need to increase as well as the champions internal influence. A complementary measure would be to assign the role of coordinators for public value to certain influential middle managers and strategists as well as give them the legitimacy and support needed in order to succeed. They in turn can then open up for more inter-organizational collaborative processes concerning what issues to address and deal with.

Moving post NPM

Can we then in this project identify something that more fundamentally challenges public organizations dependence on managerial ideas associated with new public management? As argued above, I think this is exactly what this whole case is about. From the start, it has dealt with a dissatisfaction of existing situation where the dependence on e.g. PPM-practices and NPM ideas does not support the functionality of public organizing, especially hindering the development of public action competence and CPV capacity. The expressed goals and ideas of new organizational forms for the creation of common good with other societal actors, also agree with general descriptions of the ideas building up NPG (Dunleavy et al., 2006; Osborne, 2006). Hence, it is a project that indicate a public development post NPM.

If the project is part of a critique, a solution, or both, it is too early to tell, but it complies with the criticism by Osborne and Strokosch (2013). Public organizations are mainly suppliers of common good and in the form of services, which makes them different to private product based companies and thus also need other managerial practices and organizational forms developed for their particular context. The project for social sustainability rests on the idea of co-creation for solving common problems where citizens and other actors in the municipality are moved from receivers of a common good towards a more reciprocal position, as described by Bryson et al. (2014). When people become actors, resources and possible creators in the eyes of public servants, they do not and should not be pacified. Instead, they should be activated as citizens pursuing democracy as part of a life in growth (Dewey, 1937), where all relations open up for the creation of common good.

Given the variety of possible positions, resources and goals, we should not expect one new public organizational form to dominate in the future. Instead, many forms will eventually evolve, where the public competence must be able to not only cope, but handle and initiate a variety of collaborative forms where new public organizing seems fit as a common denominator to describe this change and coordinators of public values a complementary term for the sought for competence. A competence that eventually will change how we understand a more
reciprocal value creation dependency between citizens and public organizations. When we un-
derstand that the common creation of common good is more important than the exact manage-
rial forms, we could be in for a more paradigmatic change in how we recognize the role of
public organizations in a contemporary working society.

What the project over all display is a move in a direction where new solutions are sought in
networks and relationships across structures instead of formal procedures, rules and prede-
flined management models. One of the group managers also calls for the development of com-
plementary structures supporting sustainability as well as trust. Just to give room for experi-
tementation and evolving solutions is in this respect very much in conflict with existing ideas of
the necessity of control and accountability. What projects like these does is to move attention
away from procedures inside the public organization towards solutions that lie outside the for-
mal organization, focused on building something bigger – a working society. The balance of
democracy will then move from a dependence on political processes towards a dialogue on
how we can solve societal problems, such as social sustainability. In that perspective, this pro-
ject shows us that there is no easy path to tread, especially as common structures and mind
sets are fairly ingrained with ideas associated with NPM. The detrimental effect of current or-
ganization on the project supports Dunleavy et al. (2006) fear that change will be hard.

The hardship visible in the project tells us also that we should not expect a grand design or an
easily described management fashion to replace NPM. Instead we should expect a future
where planning successively gives way for experimentation into what works; a process build
on the tenacity among those who engage in this development. These coordinators of public
values will then also function as agents of public innovation (Crosby et al., 2017), found both
inside and outside the formal boarders of the public organization. They will, in projects like
the one studied, appear as diverging members of a movement for a social sustainable society
where they by their coordinative actions contribute to mutual benefits through collaborative
innovation of new public values (Bryson et al., 2014). What restricts us at this time is more in
the minds of people and dominating ideas of how public organizations should be organized
and function, where the planning and control culture makes it hard to allow renewal processes
built on trust and other types of relationships than those that can be planned.

Conclusions

It is most likely too early to assess whether or not the two project groups will succeed in es-
ablishing new working patterns together with partners outside the municipal organization in a
post NPM organization. Never the less, what we can say is that the study indicates that there
is an organizational movement towards collaborative innovation for social sustainability
moving attention away from specific managerial practices towards experimentation in new
public organizing. The lack of a more profound development can in turn be derived from the
municipality’s present organization and processes that hinders changes that challenges these
very same structures and processes.

Taking a collaborative approach to building society rests on an idea of reciprocity but also a
need to submerge once own interests for common goals that are defined within diverse rela-
tionships at the rim of today’s municipal organization. This does not comply well with tradi-
tional Public Administration (PA) ideas for municipal organizing, where a central political
level decides upon what to do and the rest of the organization execute political decisions. It
does not either comply well with NPM’s need for clear boarders and steering through a one-
sided management system. However, it complies quite well with NPG as it aims to find mod-
els for steering complex networks through shared ideas.
Unfortunately, even though the project might have been decided within a discussion based on NPG ideas, it is carried out in an organization dominated by PA and NPM. The development, that runs along with this studied project, thus creates tension with current structures not to say dominating ideas of what a municipality is and how it should work. It also raises questions about how we define democracy, where current democratic procedures and power structures might need to adapt to a new ideological landscape where values about e.g. social sustainability are allowed to influence not only elections but also the continuous organizing of municipalities. Maybe NPG is a way of defining some sort of underlying idea of a path towards a new political landscape and new public organizational forms, but not necessarily the label that will help us defining how these are constructed. This article instead suggest that we use the terms New Public Organizing (NPO) and Coordinators of Public Values (CPV) as they are quite open to more diverse ideas of how a working society can be constructed.

Concluding remarks

One might say that this article stretches the empirical findings to its limits, not to say beyond them. Questioning existing well established terms like new public governance is at the best bold. Non-the less, the article gives an account of my reflections upon several issues raised through my interaction with the unit of study. Yes, research can be a collaborative part, exploring new ways of organizing the creation of public values. At least by disturbing the normality of municipal organizing, researchers will work as critical catalysts for change.

In this perspective, I am quite confident that there are plenty of complementary research aspects that needs to be considered in the future. Still, what I am most concerned with is to learn more about other initiatives that go against what we regard as public organization as usual. There must be patterns in this, where I hope my suggestion to label them new public organizing will help us to hesitate before we contribute them to NPG or other established markers. It is possibly a movement towards something besides governance, where I hope that I at least have touched upon some interesting aspects worth considering in both theory and practice pursuing this quest.

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