

The two faces of consensus-steering

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1. Introduction

In this article we present and reflect upon a recent study of municipal experiences with the organisation of the Danish urban regeneration programme *kvarterløft* (“neighbourhood uplift”) (Engberg, Bayer & Tarnø 2000). Analysing experiences with public-private co-operation in 4 of the initial 7 districts in the *kvarterløft* programme from a governance-perspective, we suggest that the term *consensus-steering* is the most adequate concept describing the governance strategy employed in the first phase of the implementation of the programme.

First a general introduction to the *kvarterløft* programme is provided in section 2. In section 3 the research strategy is presented, to guide the empirical analyses we adopted a governance perspective as heuristic framework structuring questions and analytical themes to be dealt with in the research. In section 4 we summarise key findings from the 4 area studies with a particular focus on the negotiation of the emerging partnership arrangements in the early phases of the programme. In section 5 we analyse how consensus-steering as analytical concept describes and explains governance in *kvarterløft*, and we scrutinise the ambivalence of the concept as both strategy and metaphor. In the final section 6 we argue that consensus-steering is a governance strategy that reinstalls government in governance relations.

By referring to “the two faces of consensus-steering” we wish to point to the ambivalent relationship between the epistemological and the ontological dimensions of concept. In itself the term consensus-steering is ambivalent when viewed both as a governance strategy and as a metaphor. But also, as governance strategy consensus-steering provokes a substantial discussion to the extent that it both legitimises the strategic role of corporate networks and contributes to a framework for ‘consensus building’ in the collaborative public-private effort to generate trust and a capacity to carry forward the urban regeneration processes.

2. Network management in community building – the case of *kvarterløft*

The Danish Urban Regeneration Programme *kvarterløft*

The Governmental Urban Affairs Committee has initiated the urban regeneration programme *kvarterløft* (“neighbourhood uplift”) in order to improve the quality of life in distressed urban neighbourhoods. The Urban Affairs Committee works to secure and heighten quality of life in residential areas characterised by social distress, and in 1995 the Committee decided to set up the urban regeneration programme inspired by previous Danish and international experiences with comprehensive, area-based community development projects. A first generation (1997-2001) of pilot projects has been established in 7 urban communities in 5 municipalities: *the Northwest District*, the *Holmbladsgade District* and *Kongens Enghave* in Copenhagen, *Aalborg East* in Aalborg, *Tøjhushavekvarteret* in Randers, the *Southwest District* in Kolding and *Avedøre Stationsby* in Hvidovre. A second generation (2001-2007) of projects has been initiated in 5 new neighbourhoods: *The Inner Bispebjerg* and *Outer Nørrebro Districts* in Copenhagen, the *Brøndby Strand area* in Brøndby, the *Vollsmose area* in Odense and *Vestbyen* in Horsens.

Programme objectives

The overall purpose of the urban regeneration programme is to improve residents’ quality of life by means of a targeted, comprehensive and project-based intervention in the neighbourhood, organised within the context of public-private partnerships. The aim of the policy is pursued through the cooperation of local residents and officials of the municipal administration. Ideally, the projects originate from the residents’ own ideas and touch upon a broad range of different topics, e.g. physical renewal of dwellings, job creation, traffic planning, environmental improvements, and various third sector activities aimed at the social integration of residents. The *kvarterløft* programme is also intended to explore possible contents of future urban policies. From a Danish perspective the programme is novel in that it addresses entire urban neighbourhoods, and not only specific groups of citizens or single housing estates, and because it combines a holistic multidimensional approach to the needs of the community with a long-term partnership and coalition building strategy.

Funding

For the first generation of *kvarterløft* the appropriation comprises a total investment framework of DKK 623,5 mill. (ECU 84 mill.) while the second generation projects appropriate DKK 585 mill. (ECU 78 mill.). It is an objective in itself to increase the overall influx of resources in each district, and other funds and state subsidies contribute in this respect. The total appropriation is divided into three parts covering a) the process of establishing *kvarterløft*, a)

experimental developments, projects and research, and c) physical renewal. Physical renewal pre-empts most of the funding, and municipalities are required to contribute proportionally in this area. The nucleus of *kvarterløft* is the many citizens' initiated local projects primarily. These projects are financed through each *kvarterløft* agency that negotiates funding with the National *Kvarterløft* Secretariat, but also apply for additional funding in various Danish and EU funds. Also, a special fund controlled by The National Secretariat for Urban Regeneration has been set up targeted at so-called "small, guaranteed and visible successes" and at projects that are multidimensional in character by e.g. combining environmental improvements, job creation and traffic planning.

State control through co-operation contracts

Prioritisation and administration of projects on a day to day basis is in the hands of citizens, the *kvarterløft* agencies and the municipal administration. As a starting platform, citizens have to formulate a strategic development plan for the district that outlines development themes to be dealt with as well as specific project activities. The development plans constitute framework agreements and further specifications of projects are negotiated as the programme proceeds. On the basis of these plans contracts of co-operation are set up between The National Secretariat for Urban Regeneration under the Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs and the municipalities. These contracts allow for state control of the programme, and renegotiations and revision of the contracts takes place annually. Further, The National Secretariat for Urban Regeneration assists *kvarterløft* areas with fundraising and support with respect to exchange of information and strategy development.

Programme strategy and organisation in *kvarterløft*

Specific success-criteria for the process of "lifting the neighbourhood" are formulated in accordance with local development plans and specified in the agreements of co-operation negotiated between the national, municipal and local level. The substantial goal for achieving a sense of a "neighbourhood lift" is the realisation of projects. But also, the National Secretariat for Urban Regeneration has formulated a *kvarterløft* strategy emphasising the combination of partnerships, citizens' participation and a comprehensive and holistic area-based approach.

The process of implementing projects goes through the *kvarterløft* agencies, local community agencies are set up in each district and staffed with municipal employees, whose job essentially is to seek the co-ordination, organising and realising of the residents' project ideas in co-operation with the residents. In some areas, these agencies are situated at the Town Hall as a part of the municipal administration. In other areas, the *kvarterløft* agencies are located in the district with formal citizens' representation. The local community agencies embody an alliance between municipalities and distressed urban neighbourhoods based on co-operation between the municipal administration and the active citizenry of the community.

3. Governance as a sense-making¹ perspective

In the analysis of the municipal experiences with organising the *kvarterløft* processes we decided to focus on 4 out of the 7 areas, and to carry out an analysis inspired by the governance theme and adopt this as theoretical framework in the analysis (Rhodes 1997; Jessop 1998a; 1998b; Stoker 1998). The four areas were the *Holmbladsgade District* in Copenhagen, *Avedøre Stationsby* in Hvidovre, the *Tøjhushave District* in Randers, and *East Aalborg* in Aalborg. The study focused on two overall questions: 1) How are the public-private partnerships governed? 2) How does a comprehensive and participatory programme like *Kvarterløft* influence the municipal administration? (Engberg, Bayer & Tarnø 2000: 12).

The study set out to capture the experiences of the municipal administration and the neighbourhood based secretariats of *kvarterløft* with respect to the organisation and management of the public-private partnerships as frameworks for the implementation of citizens' projects and activities. Theoretically we assumed that the processes of organising the public-private partnerships could be analysed from a governance perspective, the point being that organising *is* governing. Therefore, we approached the *kvarterløft* partnerships as governance-constellations, working on the assumption that this conceptualisation would reflect experiences with organising the processes in all areas (p. 9).

Governance terminology

The governance perspective is based on the notion that we are witnessing a shift in co-ordination-relations going from a government-oriented fashion to a governance-oriented fashion (Jessop 1998a: 30). Government is related to organisations and institutions that are legally sanctioned with official authority to make decisions and seek the implementing of them, and governing describes the management performed by authorities (Jessop 1998a: 30). The notions of government and governing are usually associated with the idea of the parliamentary line of governing and the authorities' right to exercise their mandate and make authoritative decisions in the interest of the public.

The governance terminology articulates a theoretical discourse on a broad range of concepts like citizens' participation, networks, negotiated responsibility, partnerships, public-private co-operation, local democracy, empowerment etc. (Stoker 1998) and it is a theoretical framework that is loosely structured around a multitude of other concepts. Governance refers to new trends and developments in public administration and politics on decision-making, organising, leadership, governing, and democracy, and can be used to describe the way or the form in which actors lead, supervise, control, co-operate, act, or manage. All forms of co-ordination between and in mutually dependent relations in network can be denoted as governance (Jessop 1998a: 29; Rhodes 1997: 53). In principle, the governance perspective gives an indefinite variation in management and co-ordination relations.

¹ The phrase is associated with the theorising of Weick (1995; 2001), where he uses the term as general perspective in the study of organisations focusing on the construction, enactment and use of meaning in organisational contexts.

Network management as analytical framework

To narrow down the theory we focused on the concept of network management (Kickert et. al. (ed.) 1999). Analysing the processes of building public-private co-operation, the hypothesis was that these relations were potentially subject to problems of co-operation due to the lack of an authoritative centre, and managing interaction between actors, including removing obstacles to co-operation, would be a key function in the network. Following Kickert et.al we identified three analytical dimensions in relation to this: 1) an instrumental dimension of strategic goal-formulation and –attainment. 2) An interactive dimension of dialogue, negotiation and strategic ‘games’, and 3) an institutional dimension reflecting that relations are influenced by institutionally derived rationales, routines, roles and norms (Engberg, Bayer & Tarnø 2000: 10-11; Kickert et al. (ed.) 1999: 167-191).

Forming the research strategy our goal was to balance between specific accounts and generalised analysis constructing and analysing the 4 area studies while focusing on a number of themes derived from the governance terminology and the concept of network management. By post rationalising this process, four stages in the unfolding of the research strategy become discernible:

1. First we formulated a number of questions to guide the analysis and structure the dialogue with municipal officials and key personnel in the *kvarterløft* agencies. An open-ended questionnaire was formulated incorporating themes derived from the theoretical framework; these included issues of co-ordination, citizens’ participation, cross-sector co-operation, roles and strategies of public officials, conflict-handling etc. (Engberg, Bayer & Tarnø 2000: 98).
2. On the basis of qualitative data from the *kvarterløft* districts four “structured narratives” were made. In these area studies specific experiences relating to the process of organising the co-operative structures were accounted for, and emphasis was put on the ‘games’ or events that influenced how relations of authority and co-operation were negotiated between actors in the initial phase of the programme.
3. The area studies were analysed with reference to the governance terminology in a transverse and theory based summarisation of the experiences with a particular focus on alliance-formation (Ferguson 1999) and consensus-steering (Engberg, Bayer & Tarnø 2000: 22ff).
4. A preliminary report was presented and debated at a seminar with interviewees and other representatives of the *kvarterløft* agencies. In addition, all interviewed respondents made written comments to the same preliminary edition, and oral and written comments were considered in the process of writing the final report.

The study was based on interviews with 4 persons from each of the areas (in total 16 interviews). Secondary data consisted of 12 interviews with citizens, administrators and project managers previously carried out in a parallel study (Norvig Larsen et al. 2001, forthcoming) the *kvarterløft* agencies’ own descriptions of partnership arrangements, formal framework agreements, project plans, organisation charts, agreements of co-operation, project descriptions, statement of affairs etc.

Reflections on research strategy: how, not why

Our beliefs are socially produced, transient and fallible, and “there is no way in which we can look at the world and then at a sentence and ask whether they fit. There is just the expression (of the world) in speech (or thought)” (Bhaskar, 1997 (1975): 249). The process of analytical interpretation and sense making is a two way process in which the interpreter and the inter-

puted enter language games to define perceptions of reality. This they do by reading into things “the meanings they wish to see; they vest objects, utterances, actions and so forth with subjective meaning which helps make their world intelligible to themselves” (Frost & Morgan 1983: 207 in Weick 1995:14). Following on from this point we agree that individuals should not be seen as “living in, and acting out their lives in relation to, a wider reality, so much as creating and sustaining images of a wider reality, in part to rationalize what they are doing. They realize their reality by ‘reading into’ their situation patterns of significant meaning” (Morgan, Frost & Pondy 1984: 24 in Weick 1995: 14).

Developing the study of the *kvarterløft*-cases the governance terminology was used as a heuristic framework inspiring questions asked as well as the general analysis of local experiences. In short – the governance perspective made sense. We did not conceive it as a perfect fit or a theory to be tested or validated against empirical evidence, and no positivistic criteria of correspondence for validating were ascribed to the study (Kvale 1994).

As theoretical idea and analytical framework the concept of network management has an ontological and an epistemological dimension. The ontological dimension is the realist view that network management depicts a reality of managing networks by negotiating relations of co-ordination and co-operation, detectable in specific contexts like e.g. neighbourhoods. The epistemological dimension is that network management conveys a specific conceptual frame of meaning for analysing governance strategies.

The two dimensions can be logically disentangled, but forming a research strategy they necessarily overlap. Building upon this view we did not perceive our research strategy in terms of a clear-cut method enabling us to look for answers to problems or hypotheses but as an approach in which we asked how we might look at the phenomenon of investigation. To ask why denotes a position of asking that already includes the how in the constructing of the method and asks why it is that the phenomenon is as it is. To ask how instead of why is to accept perspectivism (Farmer 1995) where the research objective is to examine the lenses through which the object – in this case *kvarterløft* – is seen (analysed). This is done by scrutinising the socially constructed assumptions that constitutes each specific lens and to explore possible alternative lenses and their interpretative impacts on or consequences to the subject matter at hand. Lens is a metaphor for the underlying assumptions or grid of meaning that implicitly and explicitly constitutes a perspective. So this kind of reflexive interpretation is concerned with the epistemology of understanding; with how we see what we are seeing and with the possibility of changing lens in order to see something different (Farmer 1995: 13).

From network management to consensus-steering

Applying these reflections on our methodological approach the first theoretical lens was conceptualised in terms of network management, which was then replaced by consensus-steering. We started off with a deductive-hypothetical and open-ended perspective, assuming the empirical existence of local governance processes perceivable in terms of network-management. This initial position was translated into a number of specific but open-ended questions, used as a frame of reference for the inductive investigation of local experiences, a process in which we used both primary and secondary sources. On the basis of this material, the 4 area-studies were constructed with a focus on the context but also with a reference to analytical themes derived from the governance-perspective. Going through the local experiences in an abductive exercise of re-interpreting the 4 accounts in the light of the governance theme, we ended up by suggesting the concept of consensus-steering as a new and better perspective on the governance relations in the *kvarterløft* programme.

In the following we account for this analytical movement presenting a synthesis of the four area-studies in section 4, followed by an analysis in which we explore the strategic and metaphorical dimensions of consensus-steering in section 5.

4. Developing public-private co-operation in 4 *kvarterløft* districts

The study of municipal experiences with the organisation of *kvarterløft* focused on 4 areas, the *Holmbladsgade District* in Copenhagen, *Avedøre Stationsby* in the municipality of Hvidovre, the *Aalborg East District* in the municipality of Aalborg, and the *Tøjhushave District* in the municipality of Randers. In our analysis of the 4 processes we suggest 4 different labels intended to highlight organisational characteristics: the partnership model, the contract model, the administrative model and the “tug-of-war” model. These headlines are tentative only; aspects of each of the models can be located in all of the areas.

The Holmbladsgade District - A Partnership Model

On the initiative of the Municipality of Copenhagen a proposal for the organisation of the Holmbladsgade *kvarterløft* was presented to the community in which leading officials of the municipality were to constitute the steering committee. The local neighbourhood council opposed the idea and mobilised various local interest groups suggesting a structure in which local representatives would have a decisive vote on matters related to *kvarterløft*. The initiative was presented to the City Council of Copenhagen and accepted as a feasible alternative (p. 33). While the Municipality of Copenhagen has a central *kvarterløft* agency supporting all *kvarterløft* districts in the municipality, the Holmbladsgade *kvarterløft* agency was moved out of city hall and situated in the area. As a project manager stated: “It was important to move out in the neighbourhood to have the steering committee as the real decision maker in *kvarterløft*” (p. 34, own translation).

The Holmbladsgade project leader underlines that a primary objective of the steering committee was to negotiate compromises and develop reciprocity among the partners for the model to function, a process that was facilitated by the fact that all partners shared an interest in developing the district. The *kvarterløft* secretariat works to secure the alliance in the partnership, serving as the steering committee's administrative support and including using unofficial relations to municipal employees. With 25 members² the steering committee needs to co-operate and negotiate all the time, and the size of the forum makes it difficult for the committee to take on a detailed management function in relation to the secretariat. Developing the model, it has been clear to all participants that compromise is the only feasible approach since conflicts denoting permanent trenches would hamper the functioning of the partnership making it impossible to agree on joint projects (p. 34-35).

Municipal employees take part at all levels of the *Kvarterløft* organisation, from individual working groups, various committees to the steering committee. This direct involvement of civil servants allows the municipality to assert some control in the process of developing and implementing projects and ideally, the dialogue about complex project-development is continuously co-

² The steering committee is made up by 17 local representatives, who represents local organisations, businesses, associations, clubs, public institutions, themselves, whereof 5 are from the 5 working groups, and 8 officials representing different branches of the municipal administration. *None are from the kvarterløft secretaries.*

ordinated with the administrative branches of the municipality. However, the partnership model has its limitations, as the leader of the central *kvarterløft* secretary says: “We have an organisational model that can’t hold conflicts. You can only do, what you can agree to” (p. 52). Yet, conflicts have not been absent in the process of establishing *kvarterløft*, but up until the moment of investigation all conflicts had been related to specific projects or administrative disagreements with respect to internal relations among branches of the administration or case administration. Typical conflicts in the administration touch upon problems with respect to cross-divisional co-ordination, citizens’ involvement in administrative procedures, budget constraints and different public-private time frames. In one instance, a majority group of residents in a street opposed an environmental renovation project in this street and the project was therefore cancelled though it had received funding and was sanctioned by the political and administrative levels. Neither the *kvarterløft* secretariat nor the municipality would overrule the opposition (p. 53).

The local members of the steering committee seeks to capitalise on their channels of influence using the partnership model in their efforts to promote their mutual interests. The steering committee has contacted the political committee supervising the three *kvarterløft* projects in Copenhagen on several occasions when it considered that an administrative branch did not support the decisions of the steering committee by e.g. delaying the consideration of a project case. This has been done on the initiative of the local members even though it potentially compromises the public officials of the steering committee placing them in a loyalty dilemma and compromising their role as neutral, impartial officials. In this manner, local consensus and unity has been used as an instrument to obtain political influence using the political support as a leverage for getting projects through the administration going against the bureaucratic hierarchy. In the Holmbladsgade District co-operation in *kvarterløft* is organised as a partnership model that combines two somewhat conflicting partnerships; one between local interests in the district and one between the district and the municipality of Copenhagen.

Avedøre Stationsby: A Contract Model

Avedøre Stationsby, in the municipality of Hvidovre, is a social housing area from the 1970s with almost 6000 residents. The residents have a long-standing tradition of self-governance organised in the social housing system of tenants’ representation, and in many respects *Avedøre Stationsby* function as a small town district. The municipality and the tenants’ associations have a long history of co-operation but also of conflict, and from the municipal perspective the *kvarterløft* project was initially perceived as a means of “integrating *Avedøre Stationsby* further in the municipality of Hvidovre” as phrased by the chief executive of the municipality (Engberg, Bayer & Tarnø 2000: 62).

In practical terms, the municipality interpreted this perspective in terms of establishing a co-operative platform in relation to *kvarterløft* that was outside the direct control of the three tenants’ associations in the area. By going around the existing power base in the neighbourhood, the municipality wished to attract residents who had no prior history of political involvement, making sure that project-activities reflected all possible preferences in the community, and not only those articulated by the tenants representatives. This approach caused an initial conflict with the executive committees of the tenants’ associations which were not pushed out of the *kvarterløft* project but had to accept the role of being just one of many partners in the process (p. 24, 62-63). From the municipality’s point of view new partners were hereby included in the co-operation between the municipality and the neighbourhood, and a co-ordination group, a steering committee and a Dialogue Fo-

rum with local and municipal partners were established (p. 59). The municipal provocation contributed to an internal conflict amongst tenants' representatives, which caused a turnover amongst the electorate (p. 64).

The initial confrontation between tenants' representatives and the municipality contributed to a somewhat tense working climate between the partners, a climate that however never threatened to undermine the *kvarterløft* programme in Avedøre Stationsby as such. As one of the employees of the *kvarterløft* secretary said:

“Conflicts unavoidably occur in the project groups. When it happens, we try to handle them and uncover the problems. They never surface as pure politics – it’s always something concrete that ignites them, and when it happens we hold a meeting about it. There’s a lot of trouble in the area for the moment, and it has a rub-off effect on my job, working with the tenants’ associations and the citizens.... You have to be very careful with respect to the political dimension in Avedøre Stationsby, more than with the political system of the municipality (p. 64, own translation).

The conflicts have all been kept within the project groups except for one. The Mayor of Hvidovre put forward a proposal for a community centre in a park area outside of *Avedøre Stationsby*. Strong local opposition for various reasons faced the initiative. Especially the overruling of the principle of community based initiatives caused resistance. The tenants' associations made an alliance with tenants active in *kvarterløft* and formed a new forum - *Fælles Fodslaw* ('United Front') - to oppose the project, which was hereafter withdrawn. Hereby, the elected tenants' representatives “stroke back” at the municipality forming a new platform for increasing their say in relation to the project groups in the *kvarterløft* programme (p. 64).

The above mentioned conflict made the municipality introduce *citizens' contracts* to co-ordinate *kvarterløft* projects. These contracts are signed by the mayor and the chief executive of the municipality to signal mutual commitment between the partners in the programme, They are not legally binding but of symbolic importance only. Nonetheless, the citizens' contracts function as management tools in that they clarify and quantify project objectives, a feature that facilitates political debate and necessary approval of projects in the City Council. Further, contracts ensure relatively stable relations of co-operation, since any quarrels, for the most part, can be discussed with reference to the wording of a contract. In addition, the contracts commit the partners to see their fulfilment, putting the focus on the realisation of projects rather than political turf fights allowing both public and private partners a sense of control (p: 60, 65-66). The naming of *kvarterløft* in Avedøre Stationsby as a contract model comes from this practice.

East Aalborg: An Administrative Model

The East Aalborg (c. 14.500 residents) area is a heterogeneous neighbourhood in *kvarterløft* when it comes to types of housing, as it comprises large areas of both social housing and homeowner districts. Both social housing and homeowner housing is organised in representative associations. In East Aalborg, the *kvarterløft* programme ran into conflicts in the initial phase of establishing a public-private partnership (p. 72). A co-ordination committee was established with representatives of homeowners' and tenants' associations, individual residents, and municipal civil servants. From the outset, the partners disagreed on a number of accounts: One issue was whether the association-representatives should have a larger say than individual persons joining the partnership. Another disagreement related to the substantial development strategy to be pursued: Should the co-ordination committee in-

involve citizens in the sketching of project proposals or should they sketch projects themselves and mobilise citizens afterwards. Finally, some residential members saw the co-ordination committee as a precursor for a formal decentralisation of political power, a policy not supported by the majority of the City Council of Aalborg.

The incident that provoked the disagreements into a substantial conflict was a proposal made by the Technical department and the homeowners' associations to make a former co-op in a small village-area of East Aalborg into a community centre. Representatives from the social housing districts went against the proposal, arguing that the first major *kvarterløft* initiative should be directed towards a social housing area, since the majority of residents and most social problems were located there. Contrary to this notion, the Technical department wished to invite the homeowners into the partnership by placing the first project in their area, as most public projects previously had been directed at the social housing areas. The project was approved by a majority of homeowner representatives and civil servants in the committee. Disagreeing with this outcome, the tenants' representatives dispatched a letter to the political committee of *kvarterløft* voicing their critic. This move that caused the political committee to overrule the decision of co-ordination group, the committee also felt that the decision would favour a well-off part of the neighbourhood on behalf of the social housing residents (p. 72-73). As an official at the Social Services Department describes the incidence:

"In the controversy between tenants and homeowners the social housing representatives felt that they were not represented in the co-ordination group. In a co-ordination group it is no good to vote on matters – you need to have consensus in order not to divide the citizens. Conflicts can not be present if kvarterløft has to work. Nevertheless, the first project, the Øster Uttrup-case, triggered the "trench warfare". The project stroke at the heart of a conflict between renters and owners, where the social housing associations felt slighted. Social housing representatives are elected and thereby political, and that's why they have to bring home gains. Therefor it was impossible to start with the Øster Uttrup-project, as it favoured only the interest of the homeowners" (p. 73).

Adding to the tension, the different branches of the municipal administration fought over the issue of citizens' participation and how to handle the various disagreements. Especially, the initiating Technical Department was criticised for being too inexperienced and naive trying to orchestra the initial partnership process. The Technical Department on its side emphasised an activist and less corporate oriented strategy wishing to play down political turf fights and allow space for individual activities. In contrast to this, the Social Department had a tradition of working closely with the organised tenants of the social housing sector, and the department opted for a continuation of this approach. The Technical Department tried to overrule all disagreements in *kvarterløft* by asserting its position as responsible for the programme, but the other partners refused to co-operate bringing the whole project of *Kvarterløft* into a two-year long stalemate (p. 73-76).

Eventually, one more conflict brought the *kvarterløft* project out of its stalemate. The local representatives in the co-ordination group worked to make the co-ordination group an official democratic assembly in East Aalborg. This push for decentralisation of political power had previously surfaced in East Aalborg, as an official in the Department of Culture and Education explains:

"There is a firm awareness among politicians that political power in the municipality should be in the hands of the City Council. They are not ready to decentralise power or delegate authority to a local council, but

the ambition was there in the co-ordination group. That's the way politics will always be when a platform is created for political action. But when the limits of the platforms' size are not defined, there will always be somebody who tries to push until they reach a limit. Because the limit was not defined there was conflicts in kvarterløft. As a civil servant you have to be attentive to the political system and have a feeling for politically controversial issues, e.g. the ambition of a political local council, as in kvarterløft – even though the discussion previously had been sealed. In kvarterløft there is this democratic intention that brought out the discussion of a local council for East Aalborg again, the issue of democracy was not defined at the outset. That's why the citizens took up the discussion again" (p. 75).

Provoked by the demand for political decentralisation and in response to the various conflicts, the municipal political committee of *kvarterløft* decided to abolish the co-ordination committee and the original idea of forming a partnership was abandoned. Instead, project activities were anchored to the relevant branches of the municipal administration, which took on the co-operation with individual groups of residents on a case-to-case basis, organising the *kvarterløft* process in a way appropriately described as an administrative model.

The Tøjhushave District: “Tug-of-War-Model”

In the *Tøjhushaven District* in Randers, the process of organising '*kvarterløft*' went through a number of conflicts before an organisational model and rules of co-operation were established. The conflicts were located inside the municipal administration, in the relationship between the administration and the politicians and they occurred in the process of negotiating relations of co-operation between the administration and the neighbourhood (Engberg, Bayer & Tarnø 2000: 81).

In the initial phase of the process, different administrative departments disagreed on the issue of formal anchoring of the *kvarterløft* secretariat and the overall distribution of responsibility. A decision was made to establish the *kvarterløft* secretariat as a separate unit under a cross-departmental director's committee, the secretariat was to co-ordinate all departments 'holding the ropes that tie the relations between departments together' and presenting a single administrative access point to the citizens. Also, the secretariat was seen as the neighbourhoods advocate in relation to the administration. However, it soon became apparent that the new unit had problems getting the departments to co-operate and officials to work with projects demanding interdisciplinary co-operation and citizens' participation. According to the staff of the '*kvarterløft*' unit, being a persistent advocate of '*kvarterløft*' eased this problem over time and the '*kvarterløft*-virus' was let loose in the organisation (p. 81-84).

A second problematic relationship emerged with respect to the relations between the political and the administrative levels. From the administrative point of view there was a lack of political support to *kvarterløft*. This absence of political support frustrated the officials working with the process, when they lack firmer ideas of how the political level assessed specific projects and potential conflict issues, not knowing whether these issues would later be politicised or overruled in the political committees. The officials working in the *kvarterløft* secretariat however felt that this deficiency in practice was compensated by co-operation with citizens; when a citizen-initiated idea for a project was supported by the administration the partners relied on this consensus as enough to get projects accepted politically (p. 84).

The first organisation of *kvarterløft* included a forum for the co-operation between the municipality and the citizens of *Tøjhushavekvarteret* called the co-ordination group. The directors of the administrative departments attended this co-ordination group, but they did not participate in the actual work with the projects but sat there to check on their subordinated officials. This caused a lot of distress among citizens and officials who felt that the municipality did not trust them with the responsibility of running *kvarterløft*, and in addition the citizens felt that the municipality tried to control and govern the process. The *kvarterløft* secretariat solved this problem by setting up a new co-ordination group without the directors reflecting an equal number of officials and citizens (p. 85).

The last conflict almost jeopardised the process in the Tøjhushave District. For more than 20 years the local residents' association has represented the district vis-a-vis the municipality. The association saw itself as being in opposition to the municipality fighting for political influence as a body representing the whole district. In the community, this notion was strongly opposed by other parties in the neighbourhood, who felt that the residents' association politicised the relation to the municipality and took advantage of the *kvarterløft* project. The residents' association on the other hand tried to create a political forum as a counterweight to the municipality and the *kvarterløft* secretariat, they basically approached the process of developing *kvarterløft* as a political turf fight.

During a negotiation of the neighbourhood development plan the conflict escalated threatening to jeopardise the *kvarterløft* project. The conflict began with the residents' association felt overruled by the *kvarterløft* secretary in a preliminary negotiation of co-operation agreements and the allocation of funds, the association accused the *Kvarterløft* secretariat of deviating from a reached agreement in its interpretation of the negotiations (P. 86). The *kvarterløft* secretary saw itself as having the mandate for prioritising the funds but the residents' association felt overruled and that the whole set-up of co-operation agreements had been in vain. The residents' association then took the conflict to the political level and criticised the municipal decisions publicly in the local media. The *kvarterløft* secretariat could not accept this politicising that undermined the trust necessary to sustain the organisational model of *kvarterløft*.

None of the partners were capable of solving the conflict within their mandate, so the chief executive of the municipality called for a hearing of all the involved partners of *kvarterløft* stating that "they either develop or shut down the *kvarterløft* project". Faced with this "take it or leave it"-option the partners got together again, even though the chairman of the residents' association protested: "with this forced consensus, there is no consensus" (p. 87). Finally, after a long process of negotiation and with the aid of professional consultants all the conflicting partners agreed on a new model for *kvarterløft* as a solution to the problems. The main problem-solving factor was the setting up of a purely resident committee, called *Kvartellet*, for negotiating the residents' own ideas giving the neighbourhood a singular voice when confronting the officials of the *kvarterløft* secretary (p. 88-91). As an official in the *kvarterløft* secretariat states:

"The residents with a positive attitude made the critical residents toe the line. The establishing of Kvartellet caused the residents' association to accept that this was the forum for discussions in kvarterløft among the residents. The co-ordination group has been closed down in its' old form, and Kvartellet is a kind of miniature district council where the residents take their political negotiations without the officials. The residents feel that they are taken seriously with this new organisational model. Our main objective was to see that the area could speak for itself with one voice, so there would be no war between fractions of residents. They had to know in the administration what the neighbour-

hood stood for as a singular unit. That Kvartellet turned into a miniature district council was a secondary outcome. Kvartellet is based on consensus – all participants accept the forum as the representative of the neighbourhood. Kvartellet know that they have to stick together, that is their strength – they have to” (p. 89, own translation).

The administrations pragmatic demand for project-realisation and co-operation clashed with the political approach of the residents association. The making of a new model re-established the relations of co-operation for all partners and silenced the residents' association when it accepted to go along with the new partnership model. This model created a similar role for *Kvartellet* regarding holding together the network relations of the residents and representing one of the sides in the partnership between district and municipality. This model therefore is based on having “a centralistic ‘eye of a needle’, but it is a necessary tool for keeping consensus in the area” as an employee in the *kvarterløft* secretariat puts it. The model is labelled a “tug-of-war model” with the *kvarterløft* secretary and *Kvartellet* at each their end of the rope gathering all relations of the partners in these two institutions. As an official in the *kvarterløft* secretary summarised the organising of *kvarterløft*: “The organisation has been adapted to the context. The existing residents' relations and networks were maintained, and the new structures adjusted accordingly” (p. 79).

Consensus-steering

The 4 accounts reflect substantial experiences that we in turn re-interpret by suggesting the concept of consensus-steering; the key governance mechanism employed in the 4 areas can be labelled as consensus-steering. This argument we develop in the following, exploring the concept by using it as a lens through which we analyse these experiences retrospectively.

5. Consensus-steering as appropriate governance strategy and ambivalent metaphor

Initially we turned our choice of theoretical perspective - network management - into a number of questions as well as an organising principle in the analytical construction of the case studies. Working with the network management perspective as the structuring logic of our research strategy, the perspective was substantiated when consensus-steering surfaced mirroring local efforts to organise public-private collaboration in the context of the *Kvarterløft* programme. Though we articulated consensus-steering as an essential analytical perspective on these organising activities in the study, the concept was implicitly present in the vocabularies of actors in the programme when they referred to a 'consensus-model' or emphasised the positive aspects of a consensus-oriented strategy. The results of our analysis have been presented at seminars and distributed amongst persons associated with the programme, and the general response has been one of recognition and affirmation.

As a concept, consensus-steering has two sides to it. It is a theoretical notion of strategy (mandatory consensus for the process to proceed) implying a causal connection between steering and consensus. And it is a metaphor, a container of meaning, that embraces the ambivalence and paradoxes associated with the organisational aspects of governance relations in a programme like *kvarterløft*. On the face of it the concept is easily associated with positive connotations when public-private co-operation and municipal steering is associated with 'consensus.' A further scrutiny however points to a paradox: By constructing the word consensus-steering, we created an oxymoron that addressed the basic dilemma between control and autonomy in governance relations: If the process is characterised by consensus why should there be a need for steering? And the other way around, if relations are subject to steering, why a need for consensus?

In this section, we analyse the concept as a governance strategy and as a metaphor. Initially, the concept was developed abductively when we re-interpreted our material in the light of what we saw as the most meaningful theoretical interpretation. At this stage, we wish to further scrutinise the concept by focusing on its strategic and metaphorical characteristics, and for this end we approach the concept analytically from two different perspectives:

1. The causal, realistic perspective: Firstly we approach consensus-steering as a concept signifying a governance strategy by showing how the concept makes sense considering a number of institutional preconditions in relation to the organisational aspects of the *kvarterløft* programme. By strategy, we do not primarily refer to the concept in its narrow sense as rationally calculated sets of actions aimed at achieving specified ends. Instead, we perceive the strategic dimension more in terms of a relatively clear-cut and explicit governance imperative that is reflected in (an emerging) procedural principle and approach to the public-private co-operation in the *kvarterløft* programme.
2. The metaphorical, paradoxical perspective: Secondly we look at consensus-steering as a metaphor by exploring how it embraces (hides?) conflicting rationales and paradoxes experienced as tangible dilemmas and difficult challenges in practice. Metaphors play a key role when analysing the domain of knowledge and social organisation since they have a double function; they constitute windows into new understandings, and they

organise our ways of thinking and thus influence the way we act. By approaching consensus-steering as a metaphor we wish to underline both how it reflects accumulated, collective experience and provides a strong point of identification that functions as a means of interpreting (thus organising) new situations as an ordering mechanism in the midst of complex situations.

Consensus-steering as ‘appropriate’ governance strategy

The rule ‘mandatory consensus’ can be perceived as a procedural rule and governance mechanism that is incrementally developed in response to particular complex situations influenced by social and political institutions. The way we phrased the term implies that it is conceptualised in terms of procedural in contrast to substantial consensus. In its ideal-type formulation, consensus-steering implies that actors do not have to share substantial ideas, values or preferences, but they do have to negotiate and reach a consensus as a common platform for the process to move on. In the following we explore the causal, realistic dimension of the concept, elaborating upon a number of analytical points and observations made in the case-study in order to show how the rule emerges as an ‘appropriate’ governance strategy and key organising principle in the *kvarterløft* programme.

Consensus-steering and informal decentralisation

The key rationale in the *kvarterløft* programme is to bring about a process of informal political and administrative decentralisation as a means of involving citizens in an effort to improve the quality of life of their neighbourhood. The decentralisation process initiated by the *kvarterløft* programme is informal since it does not mandate the erection of representative bodies at the local level. However, the programme does promote decentralisation in that it sets up public-private partnerships as anchor points for local development policies in terms of neighbourhood development plans, funding, administrative support and task-decentralisation combined with a long-term effort to mobilise and assist citizens’ project-groups. Exploring and setting the boundaries for this informal decentralisation process, consensus-steering becomes the defensive mechanism for handling the conflicts and turf-fights that are automatically generated in the process. The mechanism is necessarily defensive; with the absence of formal representative bodies and a formal voting procedure for the handling of conflicts the process comes to a halt if consensus can not be reached.

Voluntarism implies veto and exit options

The *kvarterløft* programme is a voluntary programme based on the active involvement of local citizens in project-activities, and the municipal *kvarterløft* agencies face an incentive to engage in consensus building in their effort to establish a minimum platform for public-private co-operation and mobilise commitment among residents of the neighbourhood. Consensus expresses the spirit of partnerships and mutual commitment; from each of their positions, participants can contribute to the reaching of common goals, and withdraw from the partnership if their interests can not be included in projects or partnership agreements.

The top-down-bottom-up tension is quite discernible in the organisational processes of the *kvarterløft* programme. The partnership model can be perceived as a formal framework for joint public-private activities only, and as such it has to be substantiated by a negotiated agreement on content and scope of authority positions and rules of interaction to evolve into a sustained co-operative platform in the neighbourhood. Negotiations of the rules of public-private interaction necessarily takes place within the context of the

municipal hierarchy of decision-making, and the formalised structures in all areas to some extent reflect this hierarchy. As shown in section 4, municipal authorities in two of the four districts issued a veto as a conflict response in the initial phase of the programme: If local actors did not agree to the municipal position, co-operation as such would be abolished. However, this veto option also works the other way around, for the co-operative strategy to be effective it depends on a high degree of local support. Formal partnership arrangements are more prone to success when developed into public-private working alliances based on trust and reciprocity, and this necessary ingredient of mediated trust in informal decentralisation processes makes the co-operation equally vulnerable to distrust and politicisation hereby strengthening the citizens' veto.

A safety-line vis-à-vis the formalisation of relative interdependencies

Consensus-steering functions as a kind of safety-line vis-à-vis the relative interdependencies between public and private actors when they commit themselves to formalised long-term co-operation. Most significantly, the civil servants that take part in partnership settings struggle with dilemmas relating to control and accountability in networks in which private partners seek to challenge and influence municipal decisions and priorities. Typically, there is a tendency for the officials to have their participation politicised at the same time as the internal routines and priorities of the administration clash with local aspirations for autonomy and demands for resources. This inherent tension is modified somewhat to the extent that 'consensus' includes a mutual recognition of and respect for differences in roles and institutional affiliations, i.e. the political and administrative limits to the scope of collective decision making and -activities. Further, when patterns of co-operation and specific outcomes are based on a high degree of consensus among active participants, the political and administrative executive levels of the municipality are less prone to bring up the legitimacy issue questioning organising processes or the roles of specific civil servants retrospectively.

Consensus-steering is also alliance formation

Public-private co-operation has to do with alliance formation and consensus is a key motor in the transformation of a formalised partnership arrangement into a collaborative forum capable of concerted action. Following Ferguson (1999) alliances can be perceived as 'networks engaged in mutual projects', i.e. as teams that co-operate on specific tasks. Ferguson expands upon this view arguing that relations of trust develop through involvement in concrete activities potentially allowing for broader alliance formations capable of complex project-management. Working alliances in an urban regeneration programme like *kvarterløft* fuel implementation processes especially when decision making powers, responsibilities and obligations are not defined a priori but subject to negotiation and questioning.

Consensus-steering legitimises the corporate dimension of direct democracy

Formalisation of public-private co-operation accentuates issues of accountability and legitimacy that are reflected in the tension between representative and participatory principles of democracy; with direct citizens' involvement in public decision making the active citizens do not enjoy the (supposed) representative legitimacy of electorates. In all of the analysed processes the question of representation is an issue, whether citizens act in their capacity as private persons or as organisational representatives that operate on a corporate-oriented basis. Steering by consensus provides a response to this legitimacy issue; voicing dissent is an effective (though reactive) means of influence when the rule of the game is consensus, and dissenters have access to the decision-making arena on an equal footing with everybody else.

Going through this (necessarily incomplete) list of examples renders support to the assertion that consensus-steering is a rational governance strategy in the context of the *kvarterløft* programme in that it essentially mediates the tension between efficiency and legitimacy in a number of ways. But also, consensus-steering is a rational governance strategy because it embraces ambivalence and 'makes sense' out of complex governance relations, a point that we pursue below.

Consensus-steering as ambivalent metaphor

A metaphor is a channel for articulation of new meaning: Metaphors both embody disruptions of classifications and potential qualitative changes in understandings and worldviews. A metaphor can be defined as "two contradicting concepts incorporated in one word" (Nonaka 1994 p.21). The narrative trick performed by the metaphor is that it establishes a connection between otherwise non-related meanings hereby creating an identity between these, resulting in a new meaning. Because the metaphor allows one to experience one thing in terms of another (by way of images and intuition) by associating (a network of) concepts, the metaphor also aids in the process of exploring similarities and inconsistencies between concepts hereby also pointing to new meanings. This aspect of creative articulation of new meaning through metaphors has been pursued in particular by Morgan (1993) who advocates 'Imaginization' as a creative management process in which new images are expressed in metaphors strategically to improve the ability to see and understand situations in new ways. Metaphors are also media for the articulation of tacit knowledge when they visualise unarticulated experiences and intuitions embedded in practice.

How to handle conflicts and political antagonisms?

Within a consensus-oriented framework it can be impossible to incorporate and handle political antagonisms, what to do if consensus cannot be achieved? Co-operation oscillates between plus-sum and zero-sum situations, and consensus-steering entails a systematic incentive to avoid conflicts by suppressing these or avoid that they arise in the first place, and when they do occur to maintain that they should be resolved between all involved partners for the process to move on. The case studies illustrate how the municipal authorities on a number of occasions threatened to or actually abolished partnership-arrangements in situations where agreement between all partners could not be reached, taking over control of the process. If consensus-steering implies that political antagonisms are ignored or overruled it will tend to reproduce relations of power and inequality and hereby undermine its legitimacy as a governance strategy organising relations of public-private interaction.

How much autonomy, and how much control?

This ambivalence is quite visible when participating civil servants describe their ideal role in terms of a 'neighbourhood advocate' vis-à-vis the municipality but also emphasise the 'emergency brake function' they pursue in partnership arrangements when they judge that decisions and activities go beyond politically and administratively sanctioned boundaries. The metaphors underscore the dimension of area-lobbyism that automatically generates tensions between a local and geographical perspective and the functional rationale deeply embedded within the specialised municipal organisation. Also, the two positions illustrate the schism between the hierarchic authority relations of the municipal bureaucracy and the horizontal relations of co-operation in relation to specific project activities. Consensus-steering is a pragmatic response to these tensions when the strategy helps to balance

the positions, but with the consensus-rule such an outcome tends to be the lowest possible common denominator to the relative disadvantage of the local perspective.

How to affect organisational change in the municipal bureaucracy?

The tension between the local and the municipal perspective also surfaces with respect to the potential organisational changes necessary to accommodate the local urban regeneration processes. The traditional co-ordination problem caused by the division of labour that partitions the local public administration into specialised domains is accentuated by the area focus and by individual project activities in *kvarterløft*. The analysis of administrative changes caused by *kvarterløft* in the 4 municipalities indicates ambiguity (Engberg, Bayer & Tarnø 2000: 15-22). On the one hand the *kvarterløft* process is primarily perceived as external to the municipal administration with little focus on how the process challenges internal segmented practices, and assistance is typically rendered out of goodwill, i.e. as extra-ordinary help in circumstances of time- and resource-constraint. On the other hand the new bodies that emerge with *kvarterløft* like cross-disciplinary working-groups, cross-departmental committees etc. all support a trend towards project-organisation and more emphasis on co-ordination in the municipal bureaucracy. With the absence of formal political prerogatives in the *kvarterløft* organisations, the issue of inter-organisational co-ordination is in the hands of administrative leaders, who deal with local demands in the general context of the political municipal organisation.

How to define and defend the 'public interest' in a consensus-framework?

In the *kvarterløft* programme successful project-implementation has to do with successful development of public-private working-alliances (p. 27-28). These alliances tend to be exclusive, and from a democratic perspective it is a challenge to integrate public-private collaboration while keeping alliances accountable and open to participation of new agents. As pointed out above, consensus-steering presents a partly response to the legitimacy issue related to an informal decentralisation that involves diffusion of responsibility and decision making powers in governance constellations. However, legitimacy and accountability problems related to diffusion are further strengthened in the context of a consensus-framework, in which civil servants necessarily gives up the opportunity to define the 'public interest' in situations of conflict and more actively pursue what they consider specific public policy objectives. A tentative analysis of consensus-steering as governance strategy in the *kvarterløft* programme would indicate, that the strategy fuels processes of relatively more closed decision-making processes while simultaneously creating the conditions for a mobilisation and development of the neighbourhood.

6. The two faces of consensus-steering

Organisation has to do with creation of shared meanings and understandings that people use as common reference points in order to shape and align their activities in an organised way (Morgan 1993: 11). People creatively interpret and develop meanings and shared understandings that are institutionalised in modes of organisation. Institutionalisation occurs when the boundaries between meaning and social organisation are fixed in the sense of being *reified*. Institutionalisation can be perceived as reification of the socially constructed reality (Castriadis 1981, in Dahler-Larsen 1998: 47); institutions emerge when specific articulations and interpretations of individuals are reified as collective “facts” that routinise behaviour according to logic’s that operate independently of these individuals. Consensus-steering is an incrementally developed response to the complexity of governance relations in the *kvarterløft* programme, a response that is also an institutionalisation of these governance relations. However, as emphasised in the paper, this process of institutionalisation is not a clear-cut ordering of relations according to an unambiguous logic, it is a process that is characterised by ambivalence.

The first ambivalence contained within the concept of consensus-steering is that it is substantial as well as a metaphorical. We claim that it is the ‘best fitting’ hypothesis explaining existing historical experiences with organising governance relations in the *kvarterløft* districts of the study, and to do this we have to depict it as a substantial mechanism with empirical existence. But also, by emphasising its metaphorical quality, we show how it is just a reified image of a complex reality; it is sufficiently precise to embrace governance dilemmas and claim ‘an appropriate’ response to these dilemmas, and sufficiently imprecise to be quite empty of theoretical substance. Metaphors are media for new understandings, but they also reify social reality by reducing complex experiences and phenomena to relatively simple images, if the metaphor expresses an analytical point it does so through images and not by means of logical reasoning. Going back to the change of ‘lenses’ (Farmer) from network management to consensus-steering in the process of the study, this ontological-epistemological ambivalence can be phrased in terms of a question: Is network management a less adequate lens or metaphor than consensus-steering in the context of the *kvarterløft* programme? Or is the change of metaphors a change of analytical lenses only?

The second ambivalence has to do with ‘the two worlds of consensus’ that have surfaced in the study. Consensus-steering tends to legitimise and fertilise the development and strategic role of corporate networks, but ‘consensus building’ is also a core dimension in the collaborative effort to generate trust and a public-private capacity to carry forward the urban regeneration processes. ‘Consensus-advocates’ emphasise the deliberative aspect of consensus formation; if certain ground-rules of dialogue are followed, consensus does not preclude a process in which participants explore individual as well as collective ideas and preferences while respecting differences. Critics argue, that consensus ignores antagonisms and inequalities thus legitimises outcomes defined by the most powerful, especially if the consensus-rule is not followed by compensating correctives designed to deal with such inequalities. Both dimensions are discernible in the relation to consensus-steering in *kvarterløft*, it is an exercise of bureaucratic power that compels actors to reach agreement if they wish to move on, and it is a framework for deliberation and dialogue. But the ambivalence is there; for the form to make sense there has to be dialogue.

The case of consensus-steering in *kvarterløft* supports the assertion that governance is governing: When municipal administrative practices as determinate command-and-control structures are challenged, a number of new discourses emerge that reinstalls government in governance relations. These discourses are articulated and institutionalised as a pragmatic response to the paradoxes and trade-offs that arise from developments in formalised patterns of public-private co-operation. With the pros and cons of consensus-steering, it is still not difficult to identify its potential as governance strategy. Steering by consensus handles a number of governance paradoxes and challenges, and it constitutes a quite persuasive balance between democracy and efficiency when it provides a framework that combines dialogue and deliberation with a co-ordination mechanism fertilising the ground for project-implementation under the direct and indirect control of public authorities.

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