

ID 1350 | DEALING WITH OPPOSITION IN PARTNERSHIP DEVELOPMENT PROCESSES

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ABSTRACT: This article reflects findings from an action research approached PhD case study, that highlights the need for legitimate planning and leadership functions to succeed in partnership development processes. The study focuses on a particular case of partnership development among actors from the public, private, and volunteer sectors. This case initially concerned a 9-year-longitudinal process of developing a community arts center in a rural region of Western Norway. One of the main findings of this research identifies the political oppositional challenges such a process faces through its different stages, actual challenges that threaten the vital legitimacy of planning and leadership functions all the way. The paper contributes important knowledge, insights and awareness to those dealing with related partnership development processes.

1 PLANNING AND LEGITIMATE LEADERSHIP FUNCTIONS; INTERWOVEN ISSUES OF A PARTNERSHIP DEVELOPMENT PROCESS

Of all the presumptions of this action research case, the most important was the one of a better outcome due to its partnership focus; the actual actors anticipated the outcome to be larger than the participants would have been able to achieve individually. As years went by, the case grew enormously to become a project with a much broader focus. Planning and Leadership functions of innovative projects must be flexible and are challenging due to changing contexts along the way. How to legitimize such innovative projects became essential to keep the innovational forces on their desired track.

The theoretical point of departure is within the field of planning, partnership-based local and regional community development, and some approaches within the field of leadership. This actual case mirrors action research and planning practice as being similar to development processes. Theoretically, this research is linked to planning theorists, partnership theorists, and a few leadership functions theorists that are relevant in the contexts of this particular case.

2 A VARIETY OF INTERPLAYING GOVERNANCE NETWORKS

The case is an innovative project. The definition of innovation has an implication also toward the definition of the term partnership as it is used here. The embryonic steps of innovative-based partnership processes and the visions and goal creation that justify the existence of both the partners and the processes are constantly dependent on context conditions, or on the social structures of the civil society that fosters these processes. During initial development of ideas and goals and their inherent needs for implementation, networks change and develop also, and...loose coupling within networks affords favorable conditions for interactive learning and innovation. Networks open access to various sources of information and thus offer a considerably broader learning interface than is the case with hierarchical firms... (Grabher, 1993: 10.)

This underlines the approach to the term partnership to be similar to the term network as a more or less constantly changing element of the partnership process.

The non-linear interactive process of developing a future innovative partnership can be characterized as a first step in a mobilization process that matches John Friedmann's four last steps (of five in all) of such a mobilization process (Table A); 1. Local Action Group, 2. Networking, 3. Coalitions, and 4. Formal Organization (1987: 274-276):

Friedmann's terms (4 of 5) of social mobilization	Adequate characteristics of Friedmann's terms
Local Action Group	-informal first organization -firsthand local knowledge -reliance on personal interaction -reliance on commitment -face-to-face dialogue -comrades and friends -flexibility
Networking	-increasing movement -easy conditions of entry and exit -few demands -locally based -efforts of enlarging the network
Coalitions	-joint undertakings -other groups or formal organizations are recruited -more complicated leadership -struggles of power and control might occur
Formal Organizations	-formal -professionals at play -political weight -legitimate standing

Table A: The Partnership Development Stages Based on Friedmann

Networks, then, are continually more loosely-coupled elements than the partnership itself. In the early development phases, it is more relevant not to talk of a partnership at all as such. It is more a case of open loosely-coupled innovation networks that come and go in order to keep the process dynamic and to avoid it stopping. It is a type of start-up of a potentially formalized organizational work, but without locking the process up at too early a stage.

Elvira Uyarra talks of initial mobilizations such as these as being elements of a democratization process, where unelected local and regional bodies are organized in order to develop themselves as bottom-up 'growth coalitions' (Uyarra, 2007: 243). Such developments may be based on a reinforcement of specific local competitive advantages wherein relevant actors have to develop partnerships in order to be able to materialize their goals. Local identities along with local learning processes might be one of the central factors and drivers for success (2007: 244-245). This learning process is relationally-based; it is a non-physical resource. Uyarra talks of a relational capital released by know-how formation ...relationships based on cooperation and competition between players, and the knowledge and ability of the 'players' to identify opportunities for interaction and relationships with the external environment... (Uyarra, E. 2007: 245).

Local identities that initialize the innovative partnership development are also carriers of tacit knowledge that might be essential as a basis for the initiative itself. According to Uyarra (2007: 246), such knowledge is geographically immobile because of its nature of being carried within persons, a fact that makes local identities a precondition for developing local and regional innovation. It could not have taken place in any other place. In order to allow such tacit knowledge and corresponding actual localized resources to bloom, networking and partnership development should be nourished. Uyarra refers to Lawson (1999) when she talks of this "recipe" of creating a necessary "institutional thickness" that can bring forward a "regional competence" ...ensembles of competences that emerge from social interaction...(Lawson, 1999: 158). She also underlines that many other authors focus on these bases, ...of developing location-specific competitive advantage, i.e. one that is embedded in regional and local cultures, and thus impossible to copy or replicate... (1999: 246). Thereby, Uyarra contributes important perspectives on the four research factors of this particular case: actors, relationships, structures and levels of formality.

According to Amdam (2008 B), regional development policy in Norway has changed from being based on a top-down distribution system to partly becoming a bottom-up initialized development regime. Often, these bottom-up initiatives are based on voluntary partnerships (2007: 4). Frequently, an innovative partnership building process as such is a voluntary based initiative. Bukve and Amdam characterize this phenomenon as being a change from government to governance (2004). Definitions of governance are manifold. One is Rhodes'. The partnership process referred to in this article includes the public, private, and voluntary sectors. In this specific context, governance means self-organizing and interdependent

networks that exchange resources, partly based on own rules of the game involving a certain autonomy from the state (Rhodes, R.A.W., 1997: 15).

The constantly changing networks of such processes are all more or less necessary in handling the innovative stages that occur in some cases unexpectedly on the way to goal achievement. It is very much the planning and leadership functions' responsibility to try to foresee them and suggest, or take, action steps to make them constructive and positive contributions to the overall purpose. The networks, then, are inevitable construction elements of the partnership process. Initially they are loosely coupled and without formal obligations for the actors involved. All of the three sectors, public, private, and/or voluntary, might be represented in these networks, but also just one or two of them might be engaged in an interaction with other purpose-based "visitors" for shorter or longer periods. The intercommunication is continuous among these networks as efforts are made to allocate resources with a view to procuring an outcome that is hoped will be larger than that which the participants would have been able to achieve individually. Often non-linear interactive processes are interplays among inhabitants, organizations, and private companies engaging players from all the three sectors; public, private, and voluntary. Basic here are the networks and partnership processes that take care of the knowledge production the project needs to achieve success. These networks are unelected bodies (Uyarra, 2007) making governance. Uyarra underlines that this is ...knowledge sharing being aided by face-to-face, collaborative relationships at the local level, based on high levels of trust and common values... (2007: 248). However, she also focuses on the fact that social networks are often too narrow or locked to be able to collect all the knowledge that is essential to the purposes in question :

...However, 'social networks are never as wide as to include all members of a community, and in many cases, (they are) not even a significant minority of them' and knowledge is often 'far from accessible to most of those located nearby' (Breschi&Lissoni, 2001:262).....More attention needs also to be given to the relationship between knowledge and different cultural environments (Bryson et al., 2000)...

(Uyarra, 2007: 249).

According to Stoker, ...Governance is about governmental and non-governmental organizations working together... (1997: 10), and, literally, autonomous networks of actors (1998). Uyarra quotes Hudson (1999) when she states that it is ...the 'milieu' that learns and innovates, rather than the firms or individuals (2007: 249). Governance initiatives might be such milieus. Like Uyarra (2007), E. Swyngedouw (2005) talks of such networks acting as a reinforcement of democracy, a type of oppositional, anti-bureaucratic way to action organized by those who, for different reasons, want to get things done. This he holds to be a reaction to the 20th century's ...sclerotic, hierarchical and bureaucratic state forms that conducted the art of governing... (2005: 1992). Governance networks such as these are often those of initial interest groups in partnership development processes. According to Swyngedouw, they can take the shape of formal or informal stakeholder-based associations, ad hoc committees or different development coalitions. They are organized horizontally, often based at local/urban level, including ...private market actors, civil society groups and parts of the 'traditional' state apparatus... (2005: 1992).

Often, these networks grow out of innovative social movements and might be the first steps in a partnership process. However, one of the big democratic challenges, Swyngedouw states, is that these innovative governance forms are ...both actively encouraged and supported by agencies pursuing a neo-liberal agenda... (2005: 1993), and it is ...this interplay between the empowering gestalt of such new governance arrangements on the one hand and their position within a broadly neo-liberal political-economic order on the other hand... that is his concern when it comes to the democratic issue and participation. Because of this neo-liberal agenda, some actors are empowered and others are disempowered within such networks. Procedures of governing might be formally codified. They might also be transparent and legible. On the other hand, the workings of governance networks might be dominated by an internal power choreography often led by economic, socio-cultural and/or political elites (Swyngedouw et al., 2002 in Swyngedouw, 2005: 1999).

In the process of legitimizing such innovative governance networks, the state has then to play a central role. Then, the governance networks' most important democratic legitimizing arena becomes the formal system state government. In fact, the state takes center stage in the formation of the new institutional and

regulatory configurations associated with governance.....the result is a complex hybrid form of government/governance...(Bellamy and Warleigh, 2001 in Swyngedouw, 2005: 2002). It is this phenomenon Swyngedouw calls the Janus Face of Governance-beyond-the-State: The Contradictions of Social Innovation in Governance (2005). According to Uyarra (2007), this might be regarded as types of 'institutional configurations' in order to secure 'regional competitiveness..' Such a development ...'advocates a type of regional economic governance, which is associational, and network-based, allowing for 'bottom-up,' region-specific, longer-term, and plural-actor based policy actions' (Amin, 1999)...(2007: 254). She identifies three preconditions for successful government/governance projects, or innovation development, such as these:

...first, that policy actions should aim to mobilize networks of association and clusters. Second, emphasis is placed on creating partnerships between the public and the private sector and on the legitimization of intermediate associations or forms of governance, such as regional development agencies (Halkier et al., 1998; Morgan, 1997), seen as better suited to act in the interest of and forge stable relationships with actors at the local level. Thirdly, the public sector adopts a different role under this perspective, acting as one of the institutions of the collective order working in collaboration with other organizations. Therefore, policy action takes the form of facilitation rather than direct intervention. Finally, a key axiom is that solutions have to be 'context-specific and sensitive to local path-dependencies' (Amin, 1999: 368)...

(Uyarra, 2007: 254).

Often, initial groups that start processes of partnership development are created from scratch, a fact that Uyarra states might lead to "institutions of inefficacy". Reasons for this are the lack of being embedded in existing routines and ...about the expectation that they will induce institutional change and enhance cooperation ... (2007: 255). In order to become successful, the long-term spans of such developments are frequently not taken into consideration; and neither is the fact ...that they have to deal with 'complex, instituted processes and barriers' surrounding their design and implementation (Howells, 2005). The risk of governing complexity and the likelihood of governance failure (Jessop, 1997) are often overlooked... (Uyarra, 2007: 255).

3 WHO WERE THE GOVERNANCE NETWORKS HOLDERS?

Another challenge in getting innovative network and partnership processes to develop in the desired direction is avoiding that policy made suggestions/results do not only focus on ...the views of those who have vested interests in verifying the claims being made, and thus limiting critical value and policy relevance (Lovering, 1999 / Markussen, 1999 / Uyarra, 2007: 255). This could legitimize and support the efforts of 'elite groups' when they eventually have a goal of constructing and promoting ...regional agendas which mask the unequal power relationships between particular interests (MacKinnon et al., 2002: 304; see also Phelps et al., 1997)... (Uyarra, 2007: 255).

Thereby, the non-linear interactive network processes within the development of partnerships, with their inherent increasing focuses on commitments for their partners, in order to try to establish their functional formal structures, are processes dependent on and originated by communicative governance networks. Rhodes states that ...governance refers to self-organizing, inter-organizational networks...(1997:53). These networks are interdependent and include non-state actors. This might mean that partnerships between public, private and voluntary sectors become erratic and opaque. Exchanging resources and constantly negotiating shared purposes cultivates continual interactions between network members. Agreements are regulated by rules of the game based on an atmosphere of trust. These networks are not accountable to the state on a daily basis. A certain degree of autonomy is present because they are self-organizing networks. Despite this, the state indirectly and imperfectly can steer these networks (Rhodes, R.A.W., 1997: 53).

Networks of this type are in fact not organizations themselves as such, but they have many organizational-like elements, e.g.:

1. Contexts that more or less influence the network and which the network itself can influence and even control.
2. Goals formulated as purposes, visions, and concrete working aims that express tasks the network wants to realize.
3. Actors, or members, who pull together in the desire to fulfil mutually developed goals.
4. Relationships among people. These relationships can be dominated by common values and opinions, by disagreements and conflicts, and by trust and distrust.
5. A structure that makes possible a specialization and a division of labor add a hierarchy that distributes power among the specialized parts.
6. A production of products and/or services that have effects and consequences for both the network and the contexts.

(Mostly based on Amdam, 2008 B, my translation.)

The interactive process towards a formalized partnership is being continuously formed by the relevant actors, the relationships that were made all along, the different structures that occurred out of necessity along the way, and the levels of formality by which the entire operation was dominated. Elements 1 and 2 above, those of shifting contexts and goals, permeate the entire process and constantly affect the four chosen research factors: actors, relationships, structure, and levels of formality.

Regarding the term ‘actors’ above, this group of individuals or institutions might be regarded as being ‘stakeholders,’ defining their interests in their various engagements. According to Newman (2001), the term “stakeholder” has in recent years been linked to governance processes as an explanation of members of networks and what “stakes” these members hold in the respective networks during their different development stages. Schmitter (2000) states that the shift from traditional forms of government by ‘political citizenship’ to governance dominated ‘stakeholder’-based polity ...does not go far enough...regarding this ‘holder’ issue. Therefore, he proposes many new approaches to this term by introducing different types of relationships according to the reasons these might have, or the rights these might carry or represent, in order to become participants in actual governance proceedings of such partnership development processes (Table B).

He calls them holders. He shows his definitions of the holders in the two columns on the left in this matrix. The column on the right suggests who these holders might be in a relevant partnership development process:

<i>Right-holders</i>	Participate because they are members of a national political community	Members of the public government system, municipality, county and/or state authorities
<i>Space-holders</i>	Participate because they live somewhere affected by the policy	Ordinary people living in the area, the inhabitants affected
<i>Knowledge-holders</i>	Participate because they have particular knowledge about the matter concerned	Skilled hands, experts, specialists and professionals
<i>Share-holders</i>	Participate because they own part of the assets that are going to be affected	Money investment people, members of investment companies
<i>Stake-holders</i>	Participate because, regardless of their location or nationality, they might be affected by change	External resource persons, external legitimating persons
<i>Interest-holders</i>	Participate on behalf of other people because they understand the issues	The carriers of the visions
<i>Status-holders</i>	Participate on behalf of other people because they are given a specific representative role by the authorities	The carriers of formal given status, status given by the authorities

Table B: Holders, Based on Schmitter (2000).

4 MUTUAL INTERESTS, TRUST, INTERDEPENDENCE AND LEGITIMACY

The development line of the interaction stages that all the networks go through in such processes is continually influenced by the actors, some stable, some unstable, and their behaviors and degrees of commitment and eagerness. A partnership might be the result of ...a network coordination in which formally independent actors cooperate long-term based on a mutual dependence... (Halkier, 2000 / Gjertsen og Halkier, 2004, my translation). Just as important are all the continuing relationships among the participants in question. Governance partnership revolves around a combination of public-, private-, and civil-society interests, which, voluntarily based, involve mutual benefits (Amdam, 2008 B). The number of networks is due to the numerous structuring efforts. Most often it is a necessity to try to formalize the network into a more committed partnership in order to be able to reach the goals. The different loosely coupled networks are a challenge throughout the various processes. The partners have to understand that the progress of the development towards a formalized alliance is conditional upon an understanding that the partners are mutually dependent on each other in order to materialize the goals that cannot be reached individually. Trust is essential here, and the structure must have enough inherent authority to be able to handle conflicts, e.g. those concerning localization of projects, or those involving various potential oppositional involvements.

In this continuous interplay of partnership development, the different levels of formality are essential all the time. According to Veggeland (2003), partnership is defined as a bounded cooperation among independent partners in a negotiated community of interests. Cooperation in governance partnerships is dependent on formal mutually developed authorizations and funding in order to be able to materialize goals and actions (Amdam, 2008 B).

More or less loosely coupled networks come into play as elements in the efforts to legitimize the entire project and establish the degree of formalization that is needed to get a functional partnership going. Thereby, the governance partnership's existence is dependent on a well-functioning and complete legitimizing process. On their ways to becoming formal alliances, strategic, tactical, and operational networks have to come more or less into play. All of these networks, or different types of governance partnerships, are development stages, some repetitive, on the road towards a long-term working, and, thereby, institutionalized, partnership. The strategic partnership is a necessary phase to secure a defined mutual understanding of reality and organize actions to make the purpose or the thoughts of a goal visible on the actual political agenda. Visionary leadership functions are essential here. These partnerships are known and defined by their lack of formalization and the absence of hierarchy. The activity is uneven and the number of members is uncertain and fluctuating (Amdam, 2008 B). Often, such partnerships function because nucleus members mobilize others due to the actual needs. Initial efforts and the networks connected to those innovative in their start-up-periods might be defined as being strategic partnerships.

Tactical partnerships arise in order to find solutions between visions and dreams and the realistic and the practical. According to Amdam (2008 A+B), these partnerships are characterized by their levels of formalization, limited numbers of members, a strong need for trust, and a marked need for acceptance and legitimacy regarding the jointly developed program for action. All the project groups involved in the innovative processes offer relevant contributions at such stages of tactical partnerships.

Operational partnerships define the periods of instrumentality wherein decisions on actions are taken. Amdam underlines the necessity of a successful legitimizing process as a basis for the operational stage where the realization of goals is essential. Typical of operational partnerships are their high levels of formalization, externally given legitimacy, a limited number of members, a clearly defined division of labor, a marked hierarchy, and a focus on production. The road towards a partnership development might end up with a shareholding company with its board, members, a precisely defined agenda and goals, and mutually accepted time limits; long-term cooperation and contracts are formalized among committed and defined partners. Every stage of such a process is accompanied by accordingly changing 'institutional partnerships'.

These institutional partnerships are the framing terms-giving-institutions that occur/are established throughout such processes. They might take the form of different 'bodies' dependent on the actual situations/needs or what development stages the processes are going through. New institutional partnerships might be the result of such governance development, such as the one cycle initiating similar cycles or purely contradictive politically dominated cycles; in plain words opposition.

5 A POLITICAL OPPOSITIONAL PLAYGROUND

When the public sector takes part and is an essential actor in longitudinal development partnership processes like the one studied in this case, particular challenges may occur when the process lasts for more than four years (a Norwegian democratic election period). There is a risk of the project losing its already established legitimacy, due to the result of the local public democratic election. A supportive local political party group before the election might turn into a destructive oppositional party group after the election, a fact that can destroy such processes through the loss of legitimate leadership functions.

6 OPPOSITIONAL CHALLENGES

In this case studied there are four main findings related to how the character of the partnership development contributed to the challenges faced by the project in taking the final steps towards its completion:

1. The Initial Period / The Strategic Partnership Development Period was blinded by dreams and visions.
2. The Period of Turning Points / The Tactical Partnership Period lacked an awareness of, and a plan to tackle, repetitive negative patterns of opposition.
3. The Company Period / The Operational Partnership Period was a very confusing development period due to the enforced adjustments to the constantly changing oppositional demands.
4. Recruiting The Actors of the Partnership led to unforeseen consequences due to over-motivational blindness and inherent unconscious and unsustainable excitement.

7 THE INITIAL PERIOD; A STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP DEVELOPMENT PERIOD

The Initial Period represented a very self-propelled development period. Retrospectively, though, the lack of process expertise in this strategic period was not acknowledged as being essential to the later stages. The initial Interest Group had only one focus in this particular process: to engage the interest of the municipal council in order to obtain the fundamental permission to initiate the process. Actually, at the start, nobody saw any potential need for the future partnership development. Rather, it was a modest request to the municipal council to allow The Interest Group to initiate and organize a relatively limited process. Initially, the potential future complexity of this rather modest initiative was not foreseen. The positive reception that this request was given blinded the initiators, the action research approach included. Within a couple of years new and pertinent actors just rushed to join the project which, then, very rapidly grew out of proportion and outside the scope of the initiators' inherent competence.

The recruitment of new actors, bringing with it the inherent need for sustainable relationship building, the continual adjustment of structures, and finding convenient levels of formality, constantly challenged the unforeseen partnership development. This did not happen based on carefully thought-out plans, but seen in retrospect as the result of cogenerated situational data between the new actors and the initiators. Viewed at the time, the action research approach functioned very well. Retrospectively, it was actually a well-functioning partnership mobilizing process. Many problems or challenges were avoided, and those that did occur were easily solved by way of dialogues and collaborative actions in which the most deeply involved actors were included. A bottom-up growth coalition was born to systemize specific local competitive advantages in order to enable the on-coming partnership to accomplish its goals (Uyara).

The enthusiasm and positive attitudes of the actors involved created a spiral effect that led to the recruitment of new potential actors. The whole initiative itself depended entirely on the municipal council's answer to The Interest Group's initial application. Also in hindsight, it is clear that the initial standing ovation of the municipal council blinded the initiators, who, rather naively at the time, thought of and handled the project as if it in fact had already been accepted and implemented by the project's most important actor, the municipal council. Thereby, a rather naive approach led those involved into thinking and believing that it was already legitimized.

Seen in retrospect, what stand out as being the real reasons for contemporary blinders grew out of a perception that everything went off too smoothly. Actually, the process of this particular initial phase was free from any seriously felt obstacles. This was the stage for securing a clearly defined mutual understanding of reality. A fact that was necessary to make the purpose or the thoughts related to a mutually developed goal visible on actual and relevant political agendas (Rhodes / Amdam).

The strategic first steps of what later, by Norwegian standards, developed into a huge partnership, originated in a local action group that started processes of networking (The Strategic Partnership Period). Later this networking consisted of more or less loose coalitions (The Tactical Partnership Period), and finally led to a formalized organization (The Operational Partnership Period) (Friedmann / Amdam).

Viewed in an historical perspective, this was a location-specific bottom-up initiative embedded in regional and local cultures (Uyarra / Amdam). It was the voluntarily based start of a gradually more clearly defined innovative governance project: self-organizing, interdependent networks for exchanging resources for mutual benefit (Rhodes). At this strategic stage, the early organizing steps were loosely coupled without specific formal obligations for the actors involved. In a contemporary state of excitement, too little attention was given to the development of the particular governance networks and their respective internal power choreographies. This also included the intervened performed action research approach through the researcher's role as the formally elected leader (Swyngedouw).

Mostly, at these early stages, the actual networks were unelected bodies in which knowledge-sharing took place face-to-face (Friedmann). Initially, the governance networks were collaborative relationships at a local level (Healey). What bound them together were high levels of trust and commonly felt values. According to Uyarra, networks like these might turn out to be too narrow, thus not enabling them to collect all the knowledge necessary to handle the contemporary challenges. Swyngedouw states that within innovative networks, some actors in such initial processes might be empowered while others might be disempowered, including perhaps precisely those actors that in fact should not be. The exaggerated, almost euphoric enthusiasm of the partnership's start-up period blinded the central actors. More attention given to the relationship between the different cultures of the actors and the knowledge produced would probably have made it possible to avoid such blinders. Preferably, the cultural cognitive pillar (Scott) and its inherent meaning construction elements represented by the social reality should have been more firmly established early in the process. The long timespan of such an innovative governance partnership development was not taken into consideration due to the actors' assumptions and contemporary experiences. It was impossible to relate to the meaning construction elements because of these blinders.

8 THE PERIOD OF TURNING POINTS; THE TACTICAL PARTNERSHIP PERIOD

The start of this research period of turning points, The Tactical Partnership Period, was felt to be equally as uncontroversial as the former strategic period regarding the lack of awareness of future potential oppositional challenges. Actually, such an attitude, displayed by both the participating actors and the contemporary action research approach, prolonged some of the blinders. Dreams, and vested interests, partly unintended as such, dominated the processes. Retrospectively, they could have worked as counterforces that reinforced the gap between the initiators and the opposition. In the view of the initiators and most of the other actors, the partnership development process ran really smoothly and stayed on track, only slightly disturbed by some bends and bumps in the road now and then. Gradually, though, the opposition more and more revealed their true tactics. Their suspensory double-communication demeanor and its appearance of the rationalized exercise of power eventually dictated the course of the partnership when formal final decisions were to be taken (Friedmann). Actually, two parallel partnership development processes took place: one by the initiators and most of the other actors, one by the opposition.

Especially, towards the end of this partnership development period of turning points / tactical period, the pressure on the actors to adhere to formal commitments increased greatly. Formal deals, distribution of formal responsibilities, plans and binding timetables, and economic commitments had to be established. Not least the most important actor, the municipality represented by its council, was heavily challenged during this stage. This growing complexity, towards the end of this period, also challenged the action research approach: what advice to give, and what cogenerated elements were worthwhile following up, due to the fact that the hidden opposition caused surprises all along. The play of the opposition came more easy, e.g. casting doubt and uncertainty about details of the partnership project to the extent that they step

by step obstructed the formal decisions necessary to realize it. In practical terms, this involved rather small adjustments and/or small changes of direction in ways that kept the project alive as such, but which also prevented it from accomplishing its preferred objective.

Actually, at the end of the tactical period, the most central actor of the partnership, the municipality represented by its municipal council, developed to become a kind of two-headed actor. The partnership project, and, thereby, also the action research approach, focused on their relationship with the formal democratic heads of the municipality, the mayor and the chief municipal executive. All along, these formal representatives supported and took an active part in the positively focused development of the project, always presenting positive propositions as a basis for the formal decisions to be taken, both by the municipal executive board and in the municipal council. Thereby, these two institutions were the key players in the public meaning-construction processes between the partnership development and the actual political agendas, at least from a formal point of view. Regarding these facts, the action research approach all the way obtained legitimacy vis-à-vis the formal face of this particular decisive actor. This manifested itself in the communicative and collaborative atmosphere developed between the leadership functions, the mayor and the chief municipal executive. The most important data cogeneration processes also took place in this particular interplay. Formally, these were the representatives in what were regarded as being the preparatory phases of the process. Communication and collaboration within the partnership functioned very well and the action research approach saw to it that practical problem-solving took place in local and holistic ways in which challenges were jointly reflected upon by problem owners, including the researcher.

On the other side stood the opposition, the other representatives of this municipal council's double-headed actor. In regard to them, the action research approach fell short. A milieu for joint debates, informational attitudes, and negotiations was never established. From the perspective of emotional and political engagement in the case studied, the reflective cogenerated processes that took place all along without doubt safeguard the prerequisite for successful action research. So did the analytical process. It created a distance for the researcher to the actual actions, the present political strategizing, and the emotional involvement (Levin). But this action research based analytical process did not contribute the problem-solving answers, e.g. by bringing the opposition to the negotiation table, nor in any way did it create any kind of communicative atmosphere at any level regarding this rationalization of power by the opposition within the municipal council. The action research approach never succeeded in establishing a continuous communicative atmosphere with the opposition. The repetitive negative spiraling patterns of the oppositional behavior represented and contained unbreakable codes, due to what was felt to be the arrogant and distance-creating oppositional platform of power rationalizing. For the partnership development project, the codes were unbreakable due to the double-faced oppositional behavior: The opposition supported the project, but were against it. They supported it, but presented "better" solutions all along. They supported it, but changed the formal propositions adopted by the municipal executive board before the decisive final votes in the municipal council. They supported some basic features, but sowed doubt about others. They pretended to be conducting democratic processes, but they were working in secret and stolidly. During the tactical period of this particular partnership development, the extent of the vital parts of the opposition's strategy was not understood by the action researcher. The same applied to the other centrally placed developers. Due to this ambivalence, everything was in a way unreal and it did not seem possible that the opposition could stay powerful over time.

At the end of The Turning Point Period, a new municipal election was held. Actually, the result finally simplified the work of the opposition, since its leaders were given a free rein regarding leadership of their respective local party groups in the municipal council. They succeeded in establishing a stable majority coalition, though the slimmest one possible, with 14 (15) representatives out of a total of 27. This newly obtained and unthreatened opposition majority placed them in a position whereby they were completely free to implement their own game plan during the final development period of the partnership project.

9 THE COMPANY PERIOD; THE OPERATIONAL PARTNERSHIP PERIOD

Operationally, this was a period of developmental ups and downs, but mostly a journey from one failure to the next one, best described as a botched and confusing wandering around in a quagmire. The formation of the partnership shareholding company represented the main element of this particular period, in which all the actors of the partnership had to take on formal commitments, not least financial ones (Friedmann / Amdam). In this particular process, a private investment company entered the scene and complemented a

full worthy three-sector private, public, and voluntary partnership. The shareholding actors appointed a board due to their holdings in the new company. A project office was established, and a hired part-time project leader and a hired project secretary started taking care of the daily activities of the company. The action researcher roles of formal leadership and formal board relations ended, a fact that also limited the action research approach as such.

During the Operational Partnership Period, the governance process became more closed, less democratic, less transparent. This development aspect was challenging, and affected the motivation of both the initiators and of those actors who were not directly involved at the control levels of the board. The action research approach tried to put a focus on these challenges by striving for reflective distance and rigorous analysis (Levin). But this failed, due to the fact that the empathic and political involvement were distanced from the communicative and collaborative heart of the partnership by the opposition's successful rationalization of power. The action research approach could not counteract these tactics. The challenges simply increased as a result of the arrogant exercise of its power by the opposition, which finally ended the partnership by putting forward a series of concrete formal demands, most of which were, of course, impossible to accommodate.

10 OVER-MOTIVATIONAL BLINDNESS AND UNSUSTAINABLE EXITEMENT

Actually, what was strongly felt to be successful initial development periods of the partnership blinded the chosen action. It did not manage to recognize the likelihood of the need to establish or consider alternative ways forward. A culturally-based and defined idea among equals, all of them local citizens who shared a joint vision of a certain field, was the partnership's point of departure. At the starting point, none of the participants, all of whom were rather randomly included, was able to foresee or predict the future dimensions of the project nor how demanding it would become with regard to time and resources. According to Bob Jessop, the actors of such governance processes are involved in complex relationships of reciprocal interdependence. Furthermore, Jessop defines governance as also being a self-organizing process based ...on continuing dialogue and resource-sharing to develop mutually beneficial joint projects and to manage the contradictions and the dilemmas inevitably involved in such situations... (Jessop, 2003: 1, Chpt. 6.5). Often, despite the interdependency between the actors involved, some of the specific dilemmas and developmental challenges are based on the fact that the actors in question operationally were autonomous actors. According to Friedmann, such a networking process is strongly colored by easy conditions of entry and exit, involving just a few bindings.

There was an inherent excitement stemming from the way the very central and decisive local authorities received the project initially. This fact, coupled with the early and rather enthusiastic recruitment of actors, fostered a blindness that prevented a cool and oriented evaluation of eventual later consequences, or of upcoming challenges (Friedmann). Additionally, no one involved was able to predict the fact that this was the start of a 9-year-longitudinal development process that would involve huge challenges. The randomly democratic-based challenges related to the local election results of the various municipal four-year election periods was one of these. Actually, the initiators did not expect the project to last for more than one, at the most two, election periods. "For sure, it will be realized faster than that," was the conviction of everyone involved all along.

11 CONCLUSIONS

The public sector actor of the partnership case studied, the municipal council, was the most important actor of the project. This was the case even though the municipality's share of the total room space program was only about 21%. In addition, this project developed to become an unforeseen longitudinal one spanning as many as four consecutive municipal council periods. The governance arrangement's red thread was very challenging to hold, and, thereby, also the leadership functions accepted by every central actor at vital moments in time.

Over time, such legitimate leadership functions were almost impossible to maintain. An eventual unidentified meta-perspective of the governance function was almost impossible to prolong. It had to be continually renewed and revitalized. Due to these challenges, these secondary criterions of failure, the

governance arrangement's historic facts became rather vague. In fact, now and then they almost disappeared from view, which prepared the ground for an easy oppositional play all along. This was the play of new, unforeseen, undemocratically made "new truths", which even today, seen in the light of history, stated as being the real truth by the representatives of the opposition.

As a governance enterprise, the partnership development project lacked a stable and firm approach. It lacked its meta-governance perspective, which constantly should have guaranteed both the legitimate leadership functions, every actor's ownership of the project, and the overall aspects framing it. Throughout all these years, the absence of such a perspective allowed room for the opposition's particular political strategy. Neither the normative nor the cultural-cognitive pillars ever became strong enough to really sustain the complete partnership project and to combat the opposition's political designs. The essential communicative process between all the actors in position and those of the opposition was never established, and, thereby, neither were the legitimate leadership functions that were vital in order to accomplish the final goal.

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