

Playing with Boundaries as Democratic Scholars

Sandra Kensen*, Tilburg University, The Netherlands

With Collaborators:

Helle Sundgaard Andersen, Municipality of Heslev, Danmark

Rune Flessen, Regional Competence Center for Drug and Alcohol Issues, Norway

Julliet A. Musso, University of Southern California, USA

Karina Sehested, Urban Research Center, Danmark

Abstract

The meaning of research has changed, in particular in relation to local democracy. Researchers do not want to just contribute to the stock of knowledge regarding local democracy or comment on democratic processes from the outside; they also want to be among the democratic agents and use their knowledge, also of theories and theoretical concepts, and skills to contribute to democratic processes. In this article, five such researchers and their work in four different countries are discussed. This results in the presentation of new strategies for democratic research, the most characteristic quality of which is the ability to play with practice-theory boundaries.

Introduction

The meaning of theory has changed due to a postmodern discourse. This discourse questioned the relationship between world and word. It was no longer believed that our accounts of the world gave accurate pictures of how things are and will develop (McNamee & Gergen, 1999, p. ix). Instead, the postmodern discourse assumes that the world is communicated into existence (Blaakilde, 1998). That is to say, words and other signs gain their meaning through their use within social relationships and this is an ongoing process: time and time again people have to use their language to interpret what is going on and to express what they mean. In this social interaction process, meanings slip and slide and are therefore changed. Within this postmodern discourse, 'theory' has, therefore, lost its special privilege as being considered as 'a whole'. By putting theory and theoretical concepts at work in social relationships (Bourdieu, 1992, p. 160), their meaning becomes fragmented and changeable.

In addition, theory is no longer considered the crowning achievement of scholarly and scientific activity; the concepts of 'theory' and 'theorist' have gained new meanings. For those who engage in the language game of a certain theory, whether they are institutionally recognized as theorists or not, theory may furnish a sense of moral direction or give intelligibility to the world, for instance (McNamee & Gergen, 1999, p. x). However, because of their fragmented and changeable meaning, it is also possible to play with theory, for example to engage in playing, instead of playing by the rules of a certain theory or, to engage in gaming (Farmer, 1997; Kensen, 1999, p. 258). This possibility of play adheres to new pragmatism and its central tenets of action orientation, development, reflective participation and experimentation. These can all be tailor-made (Bogason, Kensen, and Miller, 2002, p. 683).

The above means that for those who want to make a difference in the social practices they study, it will mean interacting with participants in these social practices and playing with the boundaries of theory. After all, with each new person in the

research process a new meaning has to be negotiated and re-negotiated so the meaning of research must also change. Instead of generally reducing the interaction with respondents as much as possible so that an objective account can be achieved knowledge is now produced in interaction (Hacking, 1999; Latour, 1988). Depending on those involved in the inquiry, and their questions and capabilities, interaction will take place to some degree or another. Also, more and less interaction can interchange with each other during the research process. Analytically, three positions can be distinguished. One can follow, participate and/or intervene in social practices. The last two may have resemblances with different variations of action research in so far as they also aim at change (White, 1999). However, not each variation of action research is based on the methodology of social interactionism or social constructionism.

In this article, new strategies for conducting research will be examined. These new strategies will be examined in the context of local democracy and by means of five personal research stories. Each tells a story about a researcher and the way in which he or she conducted interaction research in a certain situation. The first tells a story about one of my research experiences in the Dutch city of Tilburg. This story explains the background for my interest in the other four researchers: Helle Sundgaard Andersen and Karina Sehested from Denmark, Rune Flessen from Norway and Juliet Musso from the United States of America. We discussed the way in which we practice and conceptualize interaction research. This took place between January 2003 and June 2003. I knew these researchers personally through my connection with Roskilde University, Denmark.

The use of the narrative form of stories is especially suitable in this case, which is characterized by being able to relate to concrete persons and their development in a concrete frame of time and place (Zipes, 1995). A characteristic of interaction research is that the research process is tailored to the topic and the situation in which this topic is investigated. In addition, in order to develop authentic relationships with the research participants, an interaction researcher has to put something of his or herself into these relationships as well (see also Kleinman, 2002). Finally, this article shows the learning processes we went through in relation to interaction research in a democratic context.

We have all experimented with theory as well as with our role. Each researcher has tried to assimilate his or her democratic perspective in the research as well. Therefore, we have become both a researcher into democracy and a democratic researcher. In other words, our topic of research interchanged with our research methodology. Based on this, I have labeled our research in general as *democratic interaction research*, although from the five stories it will become clear that each of us gives a somewhat different meaning to this. How and why precisely will become clear in the next five sections. The values we refer to here which are summed up by the term 'democratic' are: participation, dialogues about values, the inclusion of different people, letting people influence and contribute to what is happening, transparency of decision-making processes, justice, fairness, personal development and civic education.

This article is further organized as follows. In the next section, based on my own research experiences, I will elaborate on the theoretical interest of this article: democratic interaction research and local democracy. This section is a further introduction to the four stories, which will follow. In the final section the new strategies for research as proposed in this article, will be summarized and reflected upon.

Democratic Interaction Research and Local Democracy

The first study that I experienced a democratic interaction research was the research project 'The Other' in the Dutch city of Tilburg (2000-2001). Somehow the relationships that evolved between researchers and public administrators created a dynamic situation in which the contents and the form of the research project contributed to one another. This led to relevant and innovative outcomes regarding research methods, public policy and local democracy. Below I will describe the research process and its results. The results will be a first indication of what democratic interaction research in the context of local democracy could entail.

In the summer of 2000, the manager of the department for district affairs of the Dutch city of Tilburg asked Pieter Tops and myself to conduct a study into the relationship between the department for district affairs, including its political leadership, and the citizens of Tilburg. Our research assignment entailed organizing a conference about this theme. The conference was organized for the political leaders and all 200 employees of the department in the research. In order to clearly define the main question to be addressed at the conference, we first organized a number of interviews.

The interviews conducted turned out to be much more than 'just' preparations for something else, for instance, a conference. They acquired a meaning of their own. This was due to the way in which these interviews were organized. Each interview was made into a group interview, bringing together people from different divisions of the department or bringing together a public officer, one of his or her professional partners in the district, such as a community worker or a police officer, and an external expert on the subject. In this way organizing something for public administrators and their political leaders transcended into organizing something together with public administrators and their political leaders. Instead of providing knowledge that was simply consumed, the researcher's contribution was to challenge the practitioners to actively participate in the research (for more information on these interviews, see Kensen and Tops, 2003).

And so it happened that the department of district affairs explored the theme of the relationship between the department, its political leadership and the citizens of Tilburg itself. Apart from the interviews previously described, a bus full of public administrators visited the bigger city of Rotterdam for an all-day 'city-safari' (which involved talking to citizens). Two political leaders and the complete management team of the department of district affairs also participated in a workshop in which they interviewed one another about the topic of inquiry. As part of this workshop, for which we choose the metaphor of making a newspaper together, Pieter Tops presented 'an oral editorial' and a guest speaker was invited to present 'an oral column'. On the basis of all these different research activities, an actual newspaper was produced in collaboration with a communication expert from the department of district affairs. During a rather informal meeting, we presented this newspaper to the 200 employees of the department of district affairs. It included city-safari photos featuring some of the participating public administrators: they were the stars of their own research product!

While working on this research project, we were able to give shape and meaning to *interaction research*. The way in which the research process developed was the result of the commitment of the contract-commissioner, the researchers and the other

participants involved. We all wanted to learn and we cared enough to make the effort. Together we built different relationships between us to develop activities and to produce good learning experiences. As a result the course of the research the distinction between researchers and practitioners became blurred. In addition, the research process was influenced by a conclusion drawn half way during the project about the topic of research. As researchers, we proposed to label the theme of the relationship between the department and citizens 'The Other'. The conclusion was that 'The Other' was a person who should be met face-to-face, and with whom things should be discussed. And this was exactly what we did, both as researchers and practitioners. Therefore, our research became democratic interaction research, since we practiced democracy while conducting research together.

'The Other' refers to a multi-cultural society in the broadest sense. So not only ethnic differences can make someone 'The Other' in a specific situation, but also differences in habit, age, gender, occupation, and so on can do so as well. The abstract title, 'The Other', forced the public officers of the department of district affairs as well as the researchers to define exactly who we were talking about in each and every situation and what differences mattered. Until then, the public administrators of the department of district affairs were used to talking about 'residents'. But are all residents the same? Or do public administrators have a sort of average resident in mind? But what about those who differ from this image? How do public administrators approach individuals?

It became clear from one of the group interviews, for instance, that public administrators communicated in particular with residents, which they defined within the unusual policy category of the 'Complainers'. To these public administrators, the category of the 'Silent', for example, uncomplaining residents were 'The Other', and they wished they could spend more time communicating with them. Perhaps these 'Silent' residents had, instead of complaints, positive ideas they wanted to implement. However, this would require a different attitude from these public administrators. Instead of waiting for residents to come to them, they would have to go to the residents themselves and no matter how difficult this may be for the public administrators, the advantages to citizens could be: easier access to policy-making processes, resident's participation in setting up neighbourhood projects, and a better quality of participation because there would be opportunities for having real dialogues instead of only consultation.

So, fairly soon after, the other standard categories on which policy is based, such as 'residents', 'youth', 'the elderly', 'drug addicts', and 'immigrants', were also questioned, because one youngster is not like another, and what about those who 'fit' into two or more categories? Finally, which citizens do not fit into any category? Who are forgotten or overlooked? Should policy address these people too?

Questioning well-known policy-categories raised a question that caused the public officers to worry. Because, if local society is as colourful and diverse as it was suggested by the researchers, and people could not be put in one category or another, what should policy be based upon? In order to find this out, we visited 'The Others' and talked to them.

And so, 'The Other' became a means to reflect upon ourselves. How does 'The Other' affect you? What does 'The Other' tell you about you and your work? The research questions evolved into: With whom and how does a local government interact and, what does this mean for policy-making? How can a local government interact differently with every citizen and, what could this mean for policy-making and local democracy? One answer to these questions was given by a public official

whose duty it was to write a new white paper about the care of drug addicts. Instead of following the usual routine of collecting only information from the third sector institutions and the professionals working there, she now also worked as a sort of trainee at one of those institutions. During her traineeship she got to know the recipients of the white paper herself. Based on her experiences and diverse information sources, she could better address the problems at hand.

The research into 'The Other' showed the value of investing in relationships in order to develop learning experiences that carry through into daily working life. However, for different public officers, different research activities had to be organized in order to address their specific issues and questions related to the overall research topic. Hence, many people were involved in the research. In addition, their role was not so much as an informant to the researcher and consumer of the research, but much more as partner in dialogue, and co-producer of the research. This also became clear in the way in which theory was presented and used in the research project.

In the case of 'The Other' research project, we did not present a fully-fledged theory about how to deal with diversity in society, even though we had developed one (Kensen, 1999). Instead, we introduced our ideas and knowledge about the subject during dialogues with the other participants. It was because of this interaction between researchers and public administrators that we could implement certain theories in the first place. First of all we needed to find out what sort of questions the respondents were struggling with, to what extent our ideas helped them to either reformulate or answer their questions. And what would then be the next issue to address? Only in this way could we find out what would be appropriate, useful, meaningful, and could be considered as additional knowledge for the issues at hand.

In the course of the research, our scientific understanding of our theories also changed. For instance, we discovered it was not as easy as we had expected to approach 'The Other', and to deal with "otherness" on a case-to-case basis. Therefore, we needed to start paying attention to this topic theoretically by, for instance, addressing issues of participation in relation to political-bureaucratic routines (King and Kensen, 2002).

The research into 'The Other' was research into local democracy, in the sense that it was about inclusion and exclusion: who are addressed and who are not and how are they addressed? Does the local government talk *about* citizens or does the local government talk *with* citizens? And, to what extent does their input make a difference in the decision-making process? Has this also got something to do with the way in which participation is organized by local government: public hearings or walking around in the neighborhood and asking people in the street, ringing their doorbells?

This democratic perspective was simultaneously assimilated in the research by involving the whole department for district affairs and by organizing different research activities for different groups. The research activity would then fit the composition of the group in order to resolve their issues.

The above described research experiences of interacting with public officials, professionals, politicians and citizens in order to address public issues and to make a contribution to reflecting upon and/or changing administrative practices as well as theories is not unique as this symposium makes clear. Therefore, I wanted to put my own experiences and those of my fellow colleagues in Tilburg (see Hendriks and Zouridis in this issue of *ATP*), in both an international and broader theoretical and

empirical context. For this purpose I asked four researchers to also reflect upon their research in terms of democratic interaction research. In the following four sections I will present the results of these reflections. But first, I will list the questions I put to them and will then briefly introduce them.

The questions that guided my discussions with the four researchers concerned the theoretical language game in which they engaged with their respondents. I also wanted to learn how they played with theory and research, what theory would provide in their particular case, which concept(s) they applied, how they did this and what the results were. Furthermore, I asked them how they saw their role, to what extent their work was connected to local democracy and in what sort of way. I also raised questions regarding the way in which their understanding of theory had changed due to their empirical work, and how they thought local practices became transformed because of their research. Finally, I asked them what they wanted to develop further in the near future.

These questions were posed to the following four researchers:

Helle Sundgaard Andersen who is a municipal leader in the Danish municipality of Heslev. As a municipal leader, she conducted a study into the relationships between the municipal departments. This study was organized in an interactive way and its purpose was to examine the extent to which the public officers of Heslev wanted to be a part of the community of Heslev.

Rune Flessen who works as a researcher and project developer at a regional competence center in Norway. He assists professionals to develop their work in the field of the prevention of alcohol and drug abuse. He does this through evaluation research and by using a method for competence raising.

Juliet Musso who is associate professor of public policy at the School of Policy, Planning, and Development, University of Southern California, USA. She conducts action research into neighborhood councils in the city of Los Angeles. In line with the objectives of instituting neighborhood councils, her research intends to contribute to an increase in both citizen participation in local governance and city agencies responsiveness to local needs.

Karina Sehested works as senior researcher at a Danish research center in Denmark. She investigated a decision-making process regarding a shopping mall in the Danish municipality of Helsingør. In this study she, for the first time in her career, changed her position from being ‘the knower’ to being one of the parties constructing reality.

Helle Sundgaard Andersen: “A Unifier”

Helle Sundgaard Andersen (Ph.D.) works for the local council in the Danish municipality of Haslev as deputy Chief Executive Officer (CEO). She started working in Haslev as a deputy CEO shortly after obtaining her Ph.D. degree in 2001 at Roskilde University, Denmark. While conducting research into the contemporary role of municipal leaders, she decided that it was time to put the results of her Ph.D. study into practice. When Andersen applied for this position, she thought that Haslev had the potential of becoming a learning community.

In 2001, the different administrative departments worked independently in Haslev which meant that there was little cohesion. Managers and officers had no idea of which way they were heading in relation to other professionals within the

municipality, or whether matters were being well communicated. There was no 'unity' as Andersen puts it so perhaps she could become a good 'unifier'.

Andersen's Ph.D. dissertation analyzed the role of municipal leaders, in particular in relationship to politics and administration. The concept of their 'role' was defined in such a way that it referred to both a functional and a social-cultural understanding of appropriate behavior (Andersen, 1999, p. 56). Furthermore, three analytical perspectives were employed in order to examine the role of municipal leaders in the Danish municipality Skanderborg. These were: government, new public management, and governance (Andersen, 1999, p. 14).

In the government perspective, the parliamentary chain of command is centrally focused and, the role of the municipality's administrative leadership in relationship to politics is that of neutral implementer of the political objectives set out by the municipality's council (Andersen, 1999, p. 69). In the new public management perspective, or at least in its second-generation form (Ferlie et. al., 1996, p. 12; Andersen, 1999, p. 93), the separation of administration and politics, or in new public management terms, of production and politics, is questioned. In the second-generation new public management it is recognized that the public sector is unlike the private sector. Process is perhaps a better metaphor for the public sector than production, since the public sector deals with citizens and social problems. These ideas were further developed in the governance perspective in which public officers are considered as agents (Wamsley, 1990, p. 117), or as network managers (Kickert, 1997, p. 11), and both are considered to have a linking function.

The Danish municipality Skanderborg was selected as the empirical basis for investigating the degree of resonance of these three theoretical perspectives. The analyses showed that municipal leadership in Skanderborg was based on two perspectives: the government and the first-generation new public management perspective. Highly political issues, such as stimulating people to find a job and matters pertaining to refugees, were considered management issues. How should specific objectives be defined and how should user-satisfaction be measured? In Skanderborg, the difficulties in answering these questions were not considered as grounds to question the role distinction between administration and politics, even though politicians complained about the hollowness of their roles and the lack of improvement in citizen turnout at municipal council meetings (Andersen, 1999, p. 116).

According to Andersen (1999, p. 184), in order to explicitly bring politics and people back into local democracy, it is necessary to create new paths of democratic legitimacy, which are not exclusively based on being elected. The perspectives offered by second-generation new public management and governance served to develop this new path. According to these perspectives, the public officer could be considered as a 'special citizen', not someone with a special status or privileges, but as someone with a particular responsibility and certain special abilities. The public officer's role could be to stimulate dialogue or to act as a mediator. Their responsibility for the involvement of the 'less strong' actors in the process is of essential significance to the governance perspective. The focal point is on process - to participate in many, complex forms of co-operation and process is the everyday practice of the administrative leader. Andersen (1999, p. 157) studied among others the role of a particular public officer concerning the construction of a culture centre in Skanderborg. This officer was not a municipal leader, but was employed as a process consultant who had a linking role, which caused no problems regarding legitimacy.

Andersen (1999, p. 184) concluded her Ph.D. dissertation with the presentation of a normative role model. This role model was based on the agency model (Wamsley, 1990) and the network manager model (Kickert, 1997) as well as on her analysis of the Skanderborg-case. This theoretically ideal model presents the unifier. The unifier considers politics as an integrated part of his/her function in the public sector. There are many channels in the political sphere that are equally legal – taking into consideration that the structure has been made to accommodate politicians, and not that the politicians have to accommodate to the structure. The unifier has a particular responsibility to further develop local municipal democracy by linking different groups to each other in order to build and maintain policy relevant networks. Finally, the unifier is also conscious of his/her economic responsibility towards politics and the public (Andersen, 1999, p. 198).

It is one thing to develop a role model for municipal leaders but it is another to put it into practice and at the same time to take the specific context into consideration. This requires the necessary experimentation, reflection, elaboration and adaptation. Instead of leaving a practitioner to do this work, Andersen chose to become a municipal leader herself. The municipality of Heslev turned out to be a good partner to put the model into use.

Andersen combined the role of deputy CEO (chief executive officer) with that of action researcher and process consultant. She started the unification process with the support of the CEO and others involved in connecting the different administrative departments so as to strengthen their sense of unity without losing the sense of individuality. During this process - explicitly not a project with a clear beginning and an end -, she conducted open-ended interviews with the employees and organized focus groups. According to Andersen these (group) interviews developed in unexpected ways.

To organize this process, Andersen was assisted by two internal process consultants. She was assisted by an external consultant to train the two internal consultants in appreciative inquiry (Cooperrider, 1996; Cooperrider & Srivastva, 1981) and to work with values in creating political processes and implementing policy processes. In short, appreciative inquiry gives rise to an appreciative voice to joint-valuation. People with different backgrounds are encouraged to see the best in one another's (working) life experiences and histories; to share dreams and ultimate concerns in mutually affirming ways; and to connect in full voice to create not just new worlds but better worlds (Cooperrider & Whitney, 1999, p. 58).

Besides the role of unifier, Andersen was also deputy CEO. This meant that she was not able to have the same sort of (appreciative) conversations with the employees as the consultants. However, she could listen to the employees. Andersen learned from Karina Sehested (Sehested, 1995), how important it is to listen in order to have a good process: employees have a lot of knowledge and they want to make a difference.

Apart from listening to the employees, Andersen also tried to change the discourse in the organization. When she first arrived, she noted that the discourse was "Just finish your work in time". In view of this discourse, the daily working practice was to work on the basis of known routines. There was no time for making mistakes and/or for reflecting upon these routines. In order to try to (partly) change this discourse into a more learning oriented, relaxed, and therefore healthy way of working, Andersen started to say completely the opposite. So, in as many different contexts as she possibly could, she told the employees that: "You need to make at

least one mistake a week, otherwise you are not doing your work right”; “Let’s give ourselves an extra month to do this”; and, “There is not just one-way of doing things”. These statements encouraged people to try new things out, to dare to deviate from the routine if the situation so required, and to appreciate other ways of working. This is an example of a combination of narrative-action research: new concepts may invite new actions when given meaning by a certain number of people (Van Twist, 1994).

A temporary result of the unity process thus far has been to create a unity plan for the local government of Haslev. This unity plan was presented to the local council and accepted with enthusiasm. Despite the local government having to make cutbacks, the process can continue, because Haslev received a large grant from an authority responsible for ensuring good working conditions for the employees.

In order for the municipality of Heslev to make this unity plan, Andersen combined the function of deputy CEO with that of an action researcher/process consultant and as such she put to work theoretical ideas about the role of the municipal leader as someone who connects democratic agents by serving as a catalyst and a dialogue-creator. In order to do so she also made use of social constructionist theory or methodology, such as appreciative inquiry. So as to be able to write down her learning experiences with the municipality of Heslev and in this way develop the theoretical model of the unifier further, Andersen should perhaps modify her position for a while and allow herself more time to write down her experiences. It would be a good example of combining theory and practice with the aim of developing theory further - in this case democratic theory.

Rune Flessen: “A Research Co-Worker”

Rune Flessen works as a researcher and project developer at a Regional Competence Center for Drug and Alcohol Issues in Norway since 2001. The competence center is funded by the central government of Norway. Its tasks are threefold. Firstly, the competence center allocates money to various drug and alcohol prevention projects and programs. In order to obtain a grant from the competence center, the recipients of a project or program should be young people who have not (yet) developed a drug and/or alcohol problem. The competence center does take its funding role seriously by becoming involved in the project or program. Its involvement in the project or program is to ensure its quality.

Secondly, project and program leaders can ask the competence center to evaluate their project or program and they can ask the competence center to assist them in further developing the project or program. Besides alcohol and drug prevention projects aimed at the youth, projects and programs for alcoholics and/or drug addicts are also eligible for (research) assistance.

Thirdly, the center can initiate projects itself. The center then invites representatives of institutions for discussions and together they then develop a project.

By combining evaluation research with developing a project or program further, the center helps to increase the competency of those delivering the service. The most important thing for Flessen and the center is to get something done, and to get it done in the best possible way (given the means and the available knowledge). This pragmatic stance can also be found in Juliet Musso’s story (see the next section).

An evaluation contributes to developing the professionals’ working methods: What works well? What does not? How come? What is needed to improve things?

Therefore, communication (dialogue) is very important, and in line with this: to find *the time* to talk, discuss and reflect upon findings. How difficult, yet how important it is for the evaluation process to find the time from the design stage onwards for a community development ethos of an evaluation study is also described in McKie (2002, p. 274). Communication time can be found by organizing experience-seminars or dialogue-conferences.

Evaluations are organized in line with democratic ideals. To Flessen, local democracy is about people influencing and contributing to what is happening. Democracy is about letting people be heard. On a pragmatic level, helping to develop local projects further is part of helping local democracy work, because local projects are aimed at citizens.

The sort of evaluation that is being carried out is process evaluation. A process evaluation focuses on the development of knowledge, both connected to the specific field and to working methods, among the actors to improve the process and the results as the project moves forward. In such an evaluation, the evaluator has three different roles: to observe, to contribute, and to participate.

A fourth role for the evaluation researcher is to be aware of the broader societal and economic context in which the evaluation study takes place. Profiling the social, economic, and political factors is likely to illuminate pertinent issues that may impact on the design and conduct of the evaluation (McKie, 2002, p. 281). For example, the Norwegian policy towards drug abuse has always been focused on both drug and alcohol prevention and treatment. However, presently a huge re-organization of the field is taking place. This re-organization is stimulated by a debate on what drug abuse really is. There is a growing tendency among politicians and public officials to see drug abuse as an illness. Drug use should therefore be treated by the health institutions and by medicine. The fear is that all other kinds of treatments and services will suffer cutbacks and/or closure. In such a context it is difficult to ask participants in an evaluation study to reflect upon their current working methods and competences with the objective of improving them.

The competence center where Rune works is about introducing new knowledge and improving competences of professionals, but also of parents, through reflections in groups. Those who participate can reflect upon their own competence, upon their own practice, upon new knowledge, and upon how to relate new knowledge to their own practice. The participants decide which topics they want to focus on. They are invited to a meeting and then asked what they want to focus on and what knowledge or skills they need. Such a meeting is the first step in a four-step method for developing competences. The four steps are as follows.

- 1) Bevisstgjøre – "be conscious/be aware", by inviting the participants to reflect upon current and desired knowledge.

For instance, through a dialogue it became clear that employees of so-called low-threshold services for drug addicts were in need of new competencies. They wanted to focus on the ethics and values related to their work with and towards drug addicts. In working groups, they were then challenged to reflect on their working practices and the ethics and values based in these practices. For instance, what choices do they make and why? This first step visualizes their current competence of the topic. In many cases, it shows practitioners that they actually do possess a lot of competence, more than they were aware of.

- 2) Berike – "be enriched" through newly acquired knowledge.

During this step, the participants are encouraged to enrich each other. This can be accomplished by encouraging the participants to exchange their own experiences and afterwards to reflect on what has been presented. Another way of providing enrichment is to organize lectures on the chosen topics. These lectures can be provided by employees from other locations or by researchers. In the case described with employees in low-threshold services, Flessen gave a lecture on youngster's attitude towards drugs as part of the enrichment process.

- 3) Bearbeide – "be cultivated", by solidifying and integrating acquired knowledge with participant's own understanding, professional knowledge and practice.

Step three is perhaps the most challenging part of the method, which can be carried out in reflection-groups for instance. Each participant is supposed to reflect on how new knowledge, experiences and so on, could and/or perhaps should affect his/her own future practice.

- 4) Befeste – "be reinforced", by reinforcing the acquired understanding into a broader context and practice.

Step four is also very demanding. Here the new knowledge and competence should make a difference in the participant's practical work. The participants are asked how they see their newly acquired knowledge and competence being reflected in their future work. The competence center hopes that the participants will implement this way of approaching knowledge and competence in their own office, and that they will use reflection as a tool to perform better. The competence center realises that this is difficult and that they may have to play a more active part in transforming these ideas into the various job settings. The competence center wants to develop this further. In addition, the center is presently working on the relation between this four step-method and process evaluation with the aim of helping to develop projects or programs.

The people Flessen works with are, generally, enthusiastic about the way the center works. "They find it very refreshing and stimulating. People are tired of courses and conferences with one-way dialogue. They want to become more involved and to participate but most important of all, they want to have an impact on the topics. No matter what we do, we do not make one-man or one-time shows. We want the work we are doing to be transferred into the daily working life of the participants. It is important that someone is taking it further".

Juliet Musso: "In the Interest of Deliberative Democracy"

Juliet A. Musso (Ph.D.) is Associate Professor of Public Policy at the School of Policy, Planning, and Development, University of Southern California, USA, and one of the leading researchers of the Neighborhood Participation Project (NPP). Since 1996, Musso has been conducting research into neighborhood political participation

in Los Angeles and has been documenting the growing neighborhood council movement. In June 1999, the citizens of Los Angeles voted to approve a charter reform measure aimed at increasing local input into city government. Among the mandates of the charter reform were the creation of a Department of Neighborhood Empowerment, the establishment of an official system of neighborhood councils, and the development of an early notification system to enable neighborhood councils to participate more actively in city policymaking (NPP, 2002).

According to Musso, the reform had a spirit of deliberative democracy and self-governance. The neighborhood councils were intended to involve the city's large and diverse population in taking care of the community by both taking street-level actions and influencing city services and their quality. In these objectives, democratic values, such as inclusion, transparency of governance, and participation, can be read. Since the beginning of the movement, a daunting task has been worked at. Currently, 65 neighborhood councils have been certified. The requirements for certification which were enacted by the City Council in May 2001 include collective activity on the part of community members to establish boundaries, design a governance structure, create bylaws, and establish organizing and outreach procedures designed to attain inclusion or representation of all community stakeholders (Musso, Kitsuse, and Cooper, 2002, p. 84). Therefore, the people involved in the neighborhood councils are still sorting out their way of doing things. Musso expects that now comes the phase in which they will work at concrete projects and results for their neighborhood. Initial findings of Musso's research show that at present the neighborhood councils are more interested in doing things for their community than in influencing and changing formal city policies, although examples of the latter are documented.

Musso's research is directed towards more deliberative democracy in Los Angeles. Her research agenda is a politicized one. This is not the same as a political agenda because the research is not being conducted in someone's particular political interests. Since her research agenda speaks to action and change, Musso labels her research as action research.

The research into the neighborhood councils is infused by the same deliberative democracy values as were mentioned above. This is being expressed by both the topics of research and the research methods. The research methods include interviewing, conducting large opinion surveys and making visual surveys of the areas. In addition, conferences are being organized. For instance, in 2000, 150 representatives from diverse neighborhoods across Los Angeles were invited to deliberate about the challenges and opportunities of creating the citywide system of neighborhood councils (NPP, 2000). And in 2002, a group of 50 academics, city officials, and neighborhood leaders joined a discussion about a number of research concerns, among which the question whether neighborhood councils would encourage participation by traditionally disenfranchised groups, or whether they would simply reinforce existing disparities in political power (NPP, 2002, p. 5).

In line with an important deliberative democracy value, an important topic of research is the degree of inclusion both of different groups within the neighborhood councils and of neighborhood councils in the policy processes of city hall (see for instance, Avalos, Derghazarian, Kitsuse, and Musso, 2003; and Musso, Kitsuse, and Cooper, 2002). These research topics are investigated mainly by ongoing field research and studying literature of comparative research. However, also theoretical concepts, such as social capital (Putnam, 1993, 2000) and community capacity-building (Avalos, Derghazarian, Kitsuse, and Musso, 2003), are used in order to focus the topic of study, to relate research findings to broader theoretical discussions, but

also to discuss these concepts from the point of view of the Los Angeles research findings. For instance, Chaskin et al.'s model of community capacity-building consisted of four dimensions: sense of community, commitment, the ability to solve problems, and access to resources. Because Avalos et al.'s study particularly concerned the ability of a community to mobilize around politic and civic issues in order to participate in the governance process, one dimension was added: political and civic culture.

Musso sees herself as a bird on the back of a buffalo. The bird is somewhat annoying, but at least it's eating the far more annoying bugs (these are the mistakes in the system). The research is something of a service to the respondents. Both the neighborhood councils and city hall receive advice from Musso and her research team. The advice is about how to develop local democracy towards more deliberative democracy by helping people in their policy-making and/or in influencing policy-making.

For instance, budgetary input is one of the main powers granted to the neighborhood councils. In order to get this input, city hall organized a budget day for the neighborhood councils. Musso then argues that this is a rather mechanistic way of dealing with the neighborhood councils, and therefore she proposed to organize the process differently in order to include people in a meaningful way in the budget process. The aim would then be to give people a civic education instead of to educate people in the fastest and cheapest way only to give advice during one day and in the format of city hall (Musso, Kitsuse, Okumu, Sithole, and Steinberger, March 13, 2003). As part of her democratic action research, Musso developed a political awareness, for instance regarding releasing reports at strategic moments. The report containing the research into the actions taken to increase neighborhood council involvement in the city budgetary process as well as the advice for city hall regarding this topic, was released at a strategic time: just before the City Council was about to deliberate about this topic.

Another example is the bylaws produced by each individual neighborhood council. These bylaws follow the parliamentary proceedings of voting. This way the neighborhood councils become mini city halls. Musso and her colleagues expose this, and raise the question whether this is what the neighborhood councils really want, because there are alternative forms of democratic rule possible, among which deliberative democracy. This broader experience is then communicated as well.

Private foundations fund this research. This is important to Musso, because it means she can work as an autonomous and independent researcher. Both the functioning of the neighborhood councils and the functioning of city hall in relation to the neighborhood councils are investigated.

The university department Musso works at is known for the type of research she does: participative research, so people become empowered. The respondents have become used to this type of research. Musso was amazed though to learn that scholars from the United States accept her work, and even find it interesting. These are political science and planning scholars in particular. The policy sciences in the USA are technically oriented, while Musso describes her research as constitutive. Over the years, Musso learned that she first needs to find out what persons constitute her audience, before she knows what aspects of her research to highlight. This is true both for publications and for grant proposals.

Musso wants to extend her work in other directions. She wants in particular to explore two subjects both theoretically and practically. The first subject is emotions in participation, and the second subject is conflict resolution.

Karina Sehested: “A Good Listener”

Karina Sehested (Ph.D.) works as a Senior Researcher at the Danish Building and Urban Research Center, division of Housing and Urban Research, in Hørsholm, Denmark. In this article, I will discuss a study Sehested conducted when she was an Associate Professor at Roskilde University. Sehested received funding from the Danish research council in order to conduct a study into contemporary local politics. She looked for towns across Denmark where shopping malls were being built in the town center. Sehested selected Helsingør, because it has a medieval town center, and despite this, a modern shopping mall was being built in the medieval home of Hamlet. Sehested was looking for a complex planning process in which economic interests were involved. She found this in Helsingør.

Sehested began her study with theoretical discussions about network-based democracy. Local democratic networks may take different forms in practice. Networks may be centralist-elitist and based upon a corporatist tradition, but networks may also be pluralist and combine public participation with representative democracy. Therefore, how networks are organized is an empirical question.

Sehested’s research questions were the following: How were policy networks established in the city, and how did these networks operate and affect urban democracy? Were these networks related to representative democracy at all? Or did new democratic forms arise from the governance processes? (Sehested, 2003) In order to answer these questions in the case of Helsingør, Sehested interviewed a broad range of respondents, among whom politicians, shopkeepers, residents, public officials, and lawyers. In the process, they together produced knowledge about the way politics work as seen from the different perspectives.

Sehested’s study shows that, among the coalitions and interest groups involved, only the weak coalition was prepared to modify its views, whereas the strong coalition did not want to listen to others. The majority of the city council and the representatives of the large interest groups in the city formed the strong coalition. This closed and stable network evaluated the process to be democratic because it represented the common interest and it followed the legal procedures of representative democracy. The other coalition consisted of citizens and small shopkeepers, who together formed an open and unstable network. The relationship between these two networks was one of confrontation, and this was not new. Former decision-making processes had followed the same pattern of confrontation and also had resulted in the victory of the strong coalition and the disillusion among citizens about the meaning of local democracy. In such a (historical) context, one researcher cannot change existing democratic practices into a deliberative democracy.

Sehested, as a researcher, was confronted with the politics described above as well. Whenever she explained other points of view to respondents, they argued even more strongly about their particular case. This is contrary to a deliberative communication process, in which participants are expected to be open to other views as well as to changes in their attitudes, ideas, and/or positions (Yankelovich, 1999). So, the research setting of this study shows clearly what type of research can be conducted, whatever the agenda of the researcher.

Apart from the fact that Sehested was not in a position to change the process towards a more deliberative democracy, as the weak coalition had wanted, she did not want to do this either. However, Sehested's study concludes by pointing out the gloomy consequences when representative politicians participate in only one of the networks instead of various networks and not translate the different democratic ideals on which these networks are based into a third model (Sehested, 2003). Sehested is very good at listening to people: she is empathic and is able to understand what people mean. This was exactly the research skill that the Danish town of Helsingør wanted, because people were very eager to tell their own stories.

The idea of developing her social constructionist approach further into democratic interactive research appeals to Sehested, but she has to find her own way in this. This is something she wants to develop within herself.

Conclusions: New Strategies for Democratic Research

In 1990, Ernest L. Boyer argued for enlarging the perspective on scholarship. He distinguished four types of scholarship: the scholarship of discovery, of integration, of application, and of teaching. Taken together, these types should lead to an intellectual climate in which new insights are brought to bear on original research. In addition, knowledge gained from research should not only be passed on to either non-scholars or students, but it should also be transformed and extended in interaction with these groups (Boyer, 1990, pp. 15-25). Boyer's theoretical ideal model has now been put into practice. The five researchers discussed in this article show how this can be done and what the consequences may be for theory and practice.

In addition to Boyer's model, which addressed academic scholars only, the five researchers play with their "scholarly" roles. Academic researchers work with practitioners, and researchers who work with or among practitioners work with theory, theoretical concepts, and methodology. What we have in common is the systematic and disciplined way in which we conduct research.

Furthermore, the five researchers in this article all work at group level and at the level of interpersonal processes, particularly in connection with local democracy. We put process or social constructionist theory into practice, help to construct local knowledge regarding outreaching to drug addicts or other stakeholders in democracy, for instance, and further develop democratic theory. The latter takes place by, for instance, questioning the standard categories on which policy is based and by constructing new, uncommon categories, or by, for example, showing the functioning of different democratic networks and discussing the consequences of confrontations between these networks.

Our research into local democracy also drives on democratic values itself by, for example, giving an appreciative voice to joint valuing, providing also others with the opportunity to develop and learn, finding time for dialogue and reflection, stimulating participation of traditionally underrepresented groups, and by sharing responsibility for the research with others. In our research, each in our own way tries to live up to his/her democratic views. In short, as researchers we enact our own theoretical words by conducting one type of democratic interaction research or another. We have tried to move from a theoretical stance to the further development of theory and urban policies by risking the pain, joy, conflict, ebb, and flow of human relationships (Anderson, 2002).

As a consequence of emphasizing the importance of developing relationships, we share a process view on research. Along the way, we have to find out time and time again what to do next, even though we may have some sort of global objective in mind, such as raising competence or connecting administrative departments with each other. But the questions of how these objectives are to be defined and how to attain them, are part of the research dialogue in which we, as researchers are engaged together with the respondents. This is our answer to the question about how to stay relevant in local democracy in this time and age of diversity and change.

Given the process quality of democratic interaction research and the fact that each research context requires its own approach, the institutional setting should allow time to try things out and to discuss things, to constantly reflect upon the research, and to learn about the latest developments within theory. The fact that we are differently embedded institutionally shows that several institutional settings are possible. It is important to also have colleagues who support and conduct this kind of research, and to feel part of a larger movement (see also McSwite, 2000, pp. 49-52). In addition, democratic interaction research has variations. Accepting, but also celebrating, differences among colleagues because of different personal capabilities, is another requirement. From a process or social constructionist point of view, learning requires the confrontation between differences (Van Dongen, De Laat & Maas, 1996).

Depending on the institutional setting and the research context, different types of funding are possible for conducting democratic interaction research. This also seems to relate to each country. In Denmark, Sehested and Andersen applied for public funding. Flessen works at a Norwegian public center. Musso applied to private foundations for funding. My research is commissioned by municipalities. Therefore, respondents will take a stake in the research even though they did not pay for the research themselves. Involving respondents in the research requires skills such as listening to respondents, letting them have their say in the whole process, and/or working with them in the process in order to create moments of learning that carry through into their daily (working) life.

Democratic interaction research is an undertaking, which is carried out in close cooperation with - in our case - local democracy. It may give local governance the following: good questions, assistance in developing answers, training possibilities for staff and citizens, relevant meetings with people who have struggled with the same issues, awareness of certain routines or (the lack of) certain competences, and research findings by way of presentations, newspaper articles, videos, booklets, and multi-authored volumes. To us, democratic interaction research presents us with an inspirational context so that we are able to take part in society while continuing our personal and academic learning process.

References

Andersen, H.S. (1999). *Kommunal ledelse – en svær gangart?*, Roskilde: Roskilde University, Department of Social Sciences 18/2000: Copenhagen.

Anderson, D.K. (2002). A Psychodynamic Analysis of Discourse Theory: Understanding the Influence of Emotions, Regression, and Change. *Administrative Theory & Praxis*, 24 (1), pp. 3-24.

- Avalos, C., Derghazarian, E., Kitsuse, A. & Musso, J. (2003) *Newcomers and Neighborhood Governance: Building Local Civic Capacity In Los Angeles' Immigrant Communities*, Paper prepared for delivery at the annual meeting of the American Society for Public Administration, Washington D.C.
- Blaakilde, A.L. (1998). A vision of 21st century folkloristics: Difference, coherence, and interpretation. In: *ARV Nordic Yearbook of Folklore*, 107-116, Uppsala, Sweden: The Royal Gustvis Adolphus Academy.
- Bogason, P., Kensen, S. & Miller, H.T. (2002). Pragmatic, Extra-Formal Democracy. In: *Administrative Theory and Praxis*, 24 (4), pp. 675-692.
- Bourdieu, P. (1992). *Argumenten. Voor een reflexieve maatschappijwetenschap*, Amsterdam: Uitgeverij Sua.
- Boyer, E.L. (1990). *Scholarship Reconsidered; Priorities of the Professoriate*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Cooperrider, D.L. & Srivastva, S. (1981). Appreciative inquiry into organizational life. In: W.A. Pasmore & R.W. Woodman (Eds.), *Research in organization change and development*, Vol.1, pp.129-169, Greenwich, CT: JAI.
- Cooperrider, D. (1996, October). The "child" as agent of inquiry. *The Organizational Practitioner*, pp. 5-11.
- Cooperrider, D.L. & Whitney, D. (1999). When Stories Have Wings: How relational responsibility opens new options for action. In S. McNamee & K.J. Gergen (Eds.), *Relational Responsibility: Resources for Sustainable Dialogue* (pp.57-64). Thousand Oaks, California: Sage Publications.
- Dongen, H.J. van, W.A.M. de Laat and A.J.J.A. Maas (1996). *Een kwestie van verschil*, Delft: Eburon.
- Farmer, D.J. (1997). In *Public Voices*, Vol. III (1) pp. 33-52
- Ferlie, E. et al (1996). *The public Management in Action*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Hacking, I. (1999). *The Social Construction of What?*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Kensen, S. (1999). *Sturen op variatie; Sociale vernieuwing en de Deense variant als bronnen van inspiratie*, The Hague: VNG publisher.
- Kensen, S. and P.W. Tops (forthcoming 2003). Interaction Research: Joining Persons, Theories, and Practices. In: P. Bogason, S. Kensen, and H. Miller (eds.), *Tampering with Tradition: The Unrealised Authority of Democratic Agency*. Lanham, Maryland: Lexington.

Kickert, W.J.M. et al (1997). *Managing Complex Networks – Strategies for the Public Sector*, London: Sage Publications.

King, C.S. & Kensen, S. (2002). Associational Public Space; Politics, Administration, and Storytelling. In: Farmer, D.J., Hummel, R., Kensen, S., Simrell King. C., McLaurin, M. & C. Stivers (2002). *Constructing Civil Space: A dialogue*, *Administration & society*, vol. 34 (1), pp. 108-113 & 122-125.

Kleinman, S. (2002). Emotions, Fieldwork and Professional Lives. In: T. May (Ed.), *Qualitative Research in Action*, pp. 375-395, London: Sage Publications.

Latour, B. (1988). *Wetenschap in Actie: “Wetenschappers en technici in de maatschappij”*, Amsterdam: Uitgeverij Bert Bakker.

Mckie, L. (2002). *Engagement and Evaluation in Qualitive Inquiry*.

McNamee, S. and K.J. Gergen (1999). *Relational Responsibility; Resources for Sustainable Dialogue*, Thousand Oakes, California: Sage Publications.

McSwite, O.C., (2000). On the Discourse Movement – A Self Interview, *Administrative Theory and Practice*, Vol. 22 (1), pp. 49-65.

Musso, J.A. (Draft 2003). *Visioning Venice: Engaging the Venice Community in Planning Their Future; Report to Grass Roots Venice Neighborhood Council*, Los Angeles: University of Southern California.

Musso, J.A., Kitsuse, A. & Cooper, T. L. (2002). Faith Organizations and Neighbourhood Councils in Los Angeles. In: *Public Administration and Development*, Vol 22, pp. 83-94.

Musso, J.A., Kitsuse, A., Okumu, L., Sithole, M. & Steinberger, J. (Review Draft 2003). *Building Citizenship through Budget Participation*, Los Angeles: University of Southern California.

Neighborhood Participation Project (2000). *Creating Neighborhood Councils: A Report on Emerging Issues*, Los Angeles: University of Southern California.

Neighborhood Participation Project (2002). *Civic Engagement through Neighborhood Empowerment: The LA Experiment and Beyond*, Los Angeles: University of Southern California.

Putman, R. (1993). *Making Democracy Work*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Putman, R. (2000). *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community*, New York: Simon & Schuster.

Sehested, K. (1995). *Preofessioner og offentlige strukturændringer*, Copenhagen: AKF.

Sehested, K. (2002). *Netværksstyring i byer. Hvad med planlægningen og demokratiet? Under udgivelse på Jurist- og Økonomforbundets Forlag*, Copenhagen, Denmark.

Sehested, K., (2003). Democratic Consequences of Urban Governance: What has become of representative democracy? In: P. Bogason, S. Kensen, and H. Miller (Eds.), *Tampering with Tradition: The Unrealized Authority of Democratic Agency*. Lanham, Maryland: Lexington.

Twist, M.J.W. van (1994). *Verbale vernieuwing; Aantekeningen over de kunst van bestuurskunde*, The Hague: VUGA.

Wamsley, G. et al (1990). *Refounding Public Administration*, London: Sage Publications.

White, J.D. (1999). *Taking Language Seriously; The Narrative Foundations of Public Administration Research*, Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press.

Yankelovich, D. (1999). *The Magic of Dialogue: Transforming Conflict into Cooperation*. New York: Simon and Schuster.

Zipes, J. (1995). *Creative Storytelling; Building Community, Changing Lives*, New York: Routledge.

Sandra Kensen (Ph.D.) is a staff member of the Faculty of Public Administration at Tilburg University, the Netherlands. She is together with P. Bogason and H. Miller, editor of *Tampering with Tradition: The Unrealized Authority of Democratic Agency* (Lexington, 2003). Sandra has, since 2001, led the research program *Relational Thinking in Urban Policy*, which is being carried out in Amsterdam and other cities in the Netherlands and Denmark. She is presently writing a book about this research and hopes to publish her findings next year, after her maternity leave.

* I want to thank Gary S. Marshall and Pieter W. Tops for their valuable comments on an earlier draft.