2 The harvest of the “Towards Knowledge Democracy” conference

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Abstract

The harvest of the conference “Towards Knowledge Democracy”\(^1\) is only partially collected in this volume. We have selected the most promising contributions that illustrate aspects of knowledge democracy. Of course, this selection is not objective at all. We will introduce the selection in this chapter in a more or less neutral manner, and draw some conclusions in the final chapter.

We did not attempt to introduce the concept of knowledge democracy as either a consistent theoretical framework or as a closed well-defined concept at the conference nor in this book. Our objective was to focus on a group of crucial relationships, in order to draw attention.

2.1 The character of the knowledge democracy concept

We consider the concept of knowledge democracy as an inspiring normative notion that indicates, integrates and summarises emerging phenomena. Esther Tuhout points out that this type of concept is neither riskless nor without dangers. She ranks knowledge democracy in the range of concepts dealing with the relationships between the production of knowledge and its use. She discusses at first the traditional speaking truth to power model and the information-deficit reasoning. She considers both to be simplistic and unsatisfactory concepts that cannot any longer be upheld in a world that is characterised by “scientisation of politics and politisation of science”. Therefore a need for new visions on the relationship between knowledge production and use exists. The analysis of written statements during the Knowledge Democracy Conference in August 2009 leads her to the assumption that the concept of knowledge democracy should be interpreted as an enriched speaking truth to power model, as a model supplemented with a participatory ideal. Moreover she interprets knowledge democracy as a utopian concept. Following Achterhuis, she points at the potentially totalitarian character of utopian concepts.

\(^1\) Leiden, the Netherlands, 25–27 August 2009.
The aforementioned participatory ideal is her next concern. Like many other authors, she criticises the assumption that the participatory processes could be constructed by process architects in each relevant case according to standardised protocols prescribed by a or “the” theory on knowledge democracy. She points out that the public is brought into being in the context of participation. She shares this viewpoint with Floor Basten, who also argues that the public is an event-bound phenomenon that can only be observed ex post. She fears technocratic applications of knowledge democracy concepts.

2.2 The institutional context of knowledge democracy

Voters are also citizens and clients. Public authorities deliver services to clients, who earlier decided upon the service deliverance indirectly in their quality as voters.

We depart from an institutional framework characterised by the classical representative democracy that produces collective goods and merit goods with classical instruments like standardised regulation and standardised subsidies, in order to provide equality and justice. The complexity of the relationships between public authorities and citizens however, cannot be met adequately any longer by standardised arrangements only. Values are more fragmented than ever before. More flexible systems should be introduced.

Dirk Wolfson digresses on the concept of “situational contracting”. To his opinion, the application of this type of contract would fit the demand for organisation of a properly informed democracy. It appears that equal and standardised provision of services by public authorities causes injustice because under the surface, equal cases are unequal. The available knowledge and information are insufficient for the purpose to meet variety in a just manner. Public failure is the consequence. Being a self-critical economist, Wolfson concludes from an overview in social theories that a new institutional design is needed which modernises the “contractarian” conception, and among other things does justice to the growing fragmentation of values in a pluralistic society.

Departing from principal-agent theory, he moves to situational contracting. This concept is characterised by the discretionary authority of public service deliverers to offer facilities customised to differences in the counterparts’ abilities to perform. Value convergence is revealed in relationships characterised by empathy and the expectation of reciprocity, both essential components of the concept of trust.

Situational contracting rests on the firm base of value patterns of public officials that are not only restricted to the pursuit of self-interest, but also contain altruistic parts. Application of the concept is, according to Wolfson, a manner to deal adequately with the flow of information as well as to introduce elements of deliberative and direct democracy. The crucial factor is the way in which information is revealed and the interactions that take place between stakeholders throughout the entire chain of policy-making and implementation.
2.3 The constitutional values in a knowledge democracy

Freedom of choice and equality belong to the most important constitutional values to be realised by democracy. The majority rule is one of the least deficient methods to take collective decisions while respecting these values, as was explained in the previous chapter. These constitutional values are in general not related to a certain substance. Equality is a relational value.

Klaus Töpfer and Günther Bachmann introduce a substantial constitutional value: the fundamental idea of environmental justice in the formulation “one man, one vote, one carbon footprint”. They consider this idea as a contribution to knowledge democracy. According to them, the sustainability challenge adds a normative, political challenge to justice. The classical democratic concept should be broadened to the idea – based upon the precautionary principle – of concretising the individual environmental space into “one carbon footprint”. The necessity of such a concept is based upon the empirical observation that an overwhelming amount of available scientific evidence on the threatening ecological disasters so far has not led to adequate political action.

They argue, in analogy to “the one man, one vote” adagium that was meant to avoid civil wars, that the introduction of a restricted individual claim on ecological damage could avoid ecological disasters.

2.4 The people

In classical democracy the population of a certain territory is the “logical” electorate. In the previous chapter we already pointed at the consequences of ICT and the existence of virtual communities as a complicating factor. Moreover people are absent from their homes more than ever before. The notion of a steady electorate fits in schemes of representation, but far more complex considerations are at stake in participatory collective decision-making. The question: “Who are the stakeholders that should participate?” is sometimes answered by the public authorities themselves, but in less orthodox cases groups of citizens themselves decide to utter themselves. ICT plays an important role here also in the creation of communities by bottom-up media. Masses, crowds and publics are well-known concepts in sociological theory. But they are hard to handle in prescriptive theory on participation.

Analysing roles of citizens in participatory processes we often tend to speak about either civic society at large or about inhabitants of a certain territory. However, citizens manifest themselves collectively in many shapes and formats. We deal here with masses, crowds and publics. Floor Basten deals with publics in the context of the crisis in social sciences as she experiences it. Her first insight relates to Baudrillard’s description of the mass as a highly implosive phenomenon, a “black hole”, “that does not think, but is researched”. “Nothing can represent the silent majority and that is its revenge” (Baudrillard). Masses are cemeteries for the dying social. Information produces still more masses.
The inertia of masses is absent in the term “publics”. Publics are defined by and after events. They must become involved when existing institutions do not (any longer) provide an adequate framework to settle issues. The outlines of a public are defined by the people involved in an event. A public has no central intelligence, but may act consistently. Recognising and involving publics may create “democratic spaces” that produce knowledge under democratic conditions. Event-oriented decisions are taken more and more as the media create agendas and hypes. Hypes are events that enable publics to constitute themselves.

The crowd is a somewhat vaguer notion. Maurits Kreijveld attempts to reduce the applicability of insights into the potential wisdom of crowds by describing far more accurately the series of circumstances that enable the emergence of wisdom to be produced by crowds. He also indicates the potential wisdom of process-bound groups of participants in interactive decision preparation.

Of course more in general the interaction of different stakeholders with different interests and varied types of knowledge is at the heart of all participatory processes in decision-making. We will deal with this later on.

### 2.5 The political process: agenda-setting

The theoretical viewpoint that considers the policy process as a life cycle indicates agenda-setting as the initial phase.

Agenda-setting is a crucial process in the political realm. The selection of agendas is usually based upon the objectives of the actors involved: politicians will select agendas that may produce success. The citizen who might have thought that societal agendas have to cover the most serious societal problems will be disappointed, but the logic of politics is irresistible in itself. Unsolvable problems do not appear on political agendas because success is impossible. The construction processes of political agendas by cabinet formations and the like are well-described in political science literature. Media play an active role in agenda construction.

Politicians rely upon participation by citizens and other relevant actors if they are uncertain about future success. Anders Jacobi et al. analyses in particular the combination of foresight and citizen participation. The CIVISTI project specifically deals with seven smaller European nations, where citizen panels were constructed in a comparative approach. The character of the approach is iterative: at first well-informed citizen panels design long-term visions, subsequently experts and stakeholders transform these visions into research agendas, followed by the final step where citizens set priorities on the expert designs and policy options. The project is underway.

Tjard de Cock Buning describes an actual case which involved citizen participation in policy-making on biotechnology and food in the Netherlands. A constructed societal agenda was produced by iterating classical approaches with participative tools. According to the author, this societal agenda serves as a reflective
mirror, and illustrates the development that the focus of power on innovation is shifting from an elitist mode to a democratised mode in which concerns of society are analysed and transformed into the content of research policies.

Civil society is organising itself, but also has to organise itself because the traditional institutions do not function properly any longer so that one might speak about an institutional void, in the terminology of Hajer (2003). Also in De Cock Buning’s approach iteration between revealing preferences and priorities on one hand and the formulation of expert judgements, report and designs on the other hand is furthered. The result of the approach described by him is the concrete identification of a number of areas where research efforts should be intensified.

2.6 Wicked problems and configurations

Wicked problems dominate political agendas nowadays. We speak of wicked problems if dissensus exists regarding both the relevant values and the necessary knowledge and information. Multiplicity and plurality of knowledge are essential characteristics of these problem domains. Transdisciplinarity is the concept that covers processes and trajectories that lead to robust plausible action perspectives for wicked problems. Configuration theory sheds an interesting specific light on the complications that can be found in the amalgamation of knowledge and preferences in transdisciplinary processes. Configuration theory explains “organising” as a process of gradual construction of meaning, of a common view on reality, in two dimensions: the social and the cognitive dimension. “Organising” is then realised by communication and argumentation. Configurations gradually acquire a specific identity, close themselves, and become “fixed”, both in the cognitive and in the social dimension. They often experience the utterings of other configurations as lies, as hostile opinions that should be mistrusted.

Katrien Termeer and others analyse the issues around the revolutionary agricultural idea of mega-stables in terms of configurations. They try to explain why this creative idea was not accepted by majority coalitions. They clearly demonstrate how fixations in different configurations that are rooted in self-referentiality and revealed in convictions of self-evidence, hamper fruitful communication between configurations and produce mistrust and still deeper dissensus.

The understandable but wrong approach to overcome this bottleneck on behalf of the process architecture is to conduct more research in order to strengthen the cognitive basis of the proposal. The recommendations from the authors to the process architecture are: identify the relevant configurations, avoid fixations by maintaining reflection, and try to return from fixation to reflection by the variation of context.

The authors were not successful as consultants in the real case in proposing variations of context that overcame the fixations in the real case. They suggest an incremental “small step” approach as desirable. We might also explore other approaches, aiming for instance at “revelation”. This quest for effective interventions is the continuous assignment of process architecture around wicked problems.
2.7 Media

*Miguel Goede* attempts to present a conceptual framework describing the interrelated functioning of the media, democracy and governance. The classical top-down media have changed the character of politics profoundly. The media frame the societal debate in which politics function like a television reality show. The classical media impose their specific logic upon the political process. The structural mutual dependence of politicians and media leads to an unholy alliance. Representation in its original meaning disappears, so democracy itself is threatened. Hypes prevail.

New bottom-up media however reveal preferences of until now inaudible groups. Bottom-up media may also exercise political influence. As a consequence, the media logic changes dramatically. Mediocracy is no longer a top-down affair only. Classical media-politics are sometimes overthrown by bottom-up media. But one may also observe that either classical media or politicians attempt to incorporate bottom-up media. Goede concludes that the convergence of politics and the media towards a reality show is now irreversible. The notion of reality show may bear a negative connotation, but Goede argues that it may also hold the promise of a direct or participative democracy in which people play an active role in their own government.

2.8 Transdisciplinarity

Transdisciplinary research is a process that is meant to amalgamate different types of knowledge on one hand and values and preferences on the other.

*Joske Bunders* et al. answer the question how transdisciplinary research may contribute to knowledge democracy. They compare the historical developments in Switzerland and the Netherlands, followed by the design of a typology of transdisciplinary research styles in two dimensions: the degree of involvement of non-dominant groups and the degree of lay knowledge input. A low score on both dimensions illustrates a self-referential knowledge production style, a high score on the first dimension and a low score on the second describes a knowledge dissemination style, while a low score on the first and a high score on the second dimension is named mutual learning between scientists and dominant societal actors, and a high score on both dimensions is named a broad process of co-creation. The Transdisciplinary Case Study Approach as applied by Scholz and some other approaches are described. The upheld pretention is, that the architecture of transdisciplinary research (should) hold(s) an unbiased position. The authors’ conclusions are that the mutual learning (for knowledge between scientists and dominant actors) style aims at enriching the decision-making process. This type of research can be exercised within the boundaries of the classical representative democracy. The co-creation style fits in deliberative democracy, and causes potential tensions with classical representative political bodies.
Jurian Edelenbos et al. analyse the synchronisation of knowledge. They focus on the interplay between experts, bureaucrats and stakeholders in the production of knowledge for decision-making. Their case studies relate to water management. In general they distinguish scientific or expert knowledge, bureaucratic knowledge and stakeholder knowledge. The latter is often grounded in experiences, and often is location- or context-oriented. It may be lay knowledge. As the cases show, sometimes the non-dominant stakeholders have to fight for influence, while the other two groups acquire influence more or less automatically. The roles of experts and bureaucrats differ, but they understand each other relatively well because of a common scientific background. The interplay between experts and stakeholders may appear to be more problematic, because models and instruments are expert-driven, and the application of these methods is often very rigid. In both cases the civil servants are not receptive to or responsible for the knowledge provided by stakeholders. Already available new approaches for process management leading to negotiated knowledge were neither accepted by the civil servants nor by the political principals. Experts and bureaucrats – because of common background – do cooperate better. More in general, according to Edelenbos – and contrary to conclusions by others – experts and bureaucrats do not acknowledge that stakeholder knowledge has the potential to improve either the identification of problems or the search for feasible solutions.

One may conclude that both in literature and in reality it is possible to distinguish between believers and non-believers in the “wisdom” of communicative and argumentative processes. The believers think that processes may enrich the solution of problems, and may produce results that no single participant could have come up with. The processes have added value. The non-believers are only willing to accept that processes may produce compromises.

2.9 Boundary work

So far we spoke about process architecture. Do we have to think about a specific process architect or just about a method? Jasanoff and others have argued that the communication between experts and bureaucrats should be furthered by boundary workers who speak the languages of both groups and understand the differences in roles and responsibilities. Some European nations have created public advisory organisations that play the role of boundary worker.

Rob Hoppe describes the recent development of the predominating political doctrine in the Netherlands leading to the destruction of boundary work organisations that aimed at bridging science and policy-making. The ministries themselves will from now on assign advisers and experts. Destroying these boundary organisations is based upon a simplistic view on their functions. The result is according to Hoppe “anorexia consulta”, because impact of advice is defined on the basis of unidirectional transfer of knowledge. A closer look into the internal structure of the advice process reveals that it is a myth that politics would only be concerned with values and interests, and scientists or expert advisors would only occupy
themselves with facts and causality. The traffic of information moreover proves to be not unidirectional at all, but reciprocal. Policy-makers and experts negotiate tensions and disconnects between the political-administrative worlds and academic-professional worlds. One part of boundary work is continuous demarcation, and the complementary part is coordination. Mutual dependence is the consequence. Hoppe distinguishes seven types of boundary workers and relates them to a $2 \times 2$ diagram describing problem structures. He introduces “policy politics” describing the combination of the types of cognitive processes (puzzling) and the types of competitive interaction (powering).

Successful arrangements for boundary work are identified: double participation, dual accountability, choice of boundary objects, co-production and last but not least metagovernance and capacity building. From Hoppe’s combination it becomes crystal clear, that a certain amount of boundary work may be found to be necessary in any high-level policy-making process but that the organisational shapes as well as the division of roles and tasks may vary considerably.

### 2.10 Roles of creativity and knowledge

*Stella van Rijn* and *René Tissen* have a thorough look at the roles of knowledge in decentralised government, in regions and cities. They concentrate on ideas and creativity as the crucial factor in regional economies almost immediately and therefore consider the viability of the ideas of Richard Florida. They interpret his theory in such a manner that businesses follow knowledge and therefore cities should attract creative citizens, the Creative Class being a super-creative core who realises meaningful new forms of living and working. Creative professionals combine with the just mentioned core. Knowledge becomes a competitive advantage. According to Florida the world consists of twelve mega-regions with powerful centripetal forces. The advanced city is concentrating on accumulating creative people and businesses. Departing from Tissen’s organisational design theory with respect to a threefold notion of necessary space, physical, virtual and mental space, the authors argue whether city governments should provide space to knowledgeable citizens. Participatory democracy might provide space in some respect. The authors try to define satisfactory conditions for a knowledge society and appear to accept transdisciplinarity as a natural way of life. So the traditional roles citizens play in city planning needs to change in the direction of much more participation.

### 2.11 Unwelcome knowledge

In the absence of boundary work many “traffic accidents” may happen in a system that is populated by scientists and bureaucrats. It is well known that policy-makers will hardly accept new knowledge that does not fit into their core belief systems, for instance their policy theory. But also other bottlenecks may become visible.
Louis Meuleman and Henk Tromp write two connected essays on the end-of-pipe bottlenecks after knowledge production. Of course the whole concept of “usable knowledge” is now well known since Cohen and Lindblom (1979). Louis Meuleman sums up many of the reasons why knowledge may not be usable for policy-makers. He applies the variety of governance styles – hierarchy, market, and network – to find different notions of usability. He recommends metagovernance: a conscious combination of styles. The framing of the policy problem under consideration is a crucial matter. The sense of urgency is a determining variable: the more urgent the problem, the more hierarchical the knowledge governance. Governance styles may also vary in different phases of the knowledge production process. Henk Tromp tells us about experiences with cases of unwelcome knowledge. The different techniques practised by policy-makers in order to neutralise unwelcome news are: to silence the messenger – who pays the piper, calls the tune – to distort the conclusions and recommendations, to put sanctions on the utterings of the researchers, etc. This author recommends among other things the build-up of a system of jurisprudence on the compromises reached in the cases of unwelcome knowledge.

2.12 Future research

Reflexivity, the predominant characteristic of all social systems, prohibits forecasting. The future cannot be known. However other forms of future research than forecasting are possible. One of the most promising activities is the design of a Horizon Scan. Victor van Rij describes the exercise in the Netherlands – other programmes were developed in Great Britain and later in Denmark. Horizon Scanning has been developed upon a tradition of foresight. A Horizon Scan contains a large collection of feasible threats and opportunities for the next half century or so. Each of them gets a mark for probability, seriousness of impact, and/or desirability. This exercise is extremely fit to enable wide participation by stakeholders and citizens. The exploration of threats and opportunities, but also the indication of impact, plausibility and desirability could be fascinating elements of interactive processes between different types of experts, bureaucrats, politicians and citizens. Moreover the results of Horizon Scans are valuable tools in strategic political decision-making.

2.13 Long term decisions

Louis Meuleman and Roeland in ’t Veld concentrate on the specific characteristics and peculiarities of long-term decisions. A general observation shows that politicians are often very competent in designing long-term visions, while hesitating at the same time to take decisions with benefits on the long term while sacrifices
have to be made today. The explanation for this hesitance generally is given in terms of a nearby political time horizon. The next elections necessitate producing political success beforehand. Disasters around PCBs and asbestos show the above-mentioned hesitance to take adequate action. The authors define two types of long-term decisions:

- Cases with a relatively long period between the policy intervention and the intended effects: a long lead time.
- Cases that demand a long-lasting series of interventions that as a whole is necessary to cause a favourable effect, following the “drop in the bucket” metaphor.

The first type demands firm leadership in order to collect sufficient momentum for the focal decision, the second type asks for perseverance and consistency.

As to long-term futures uncertainty and complexity prevail. In some cases we are able to forecast to a considerable degree, then we may anticipate. In the majority of cases we have to meet the existing uncertainty by concentrating on the acquisition of resilience.

The authors deal extensively with the roles of knowledge in long-term decisions and in particular formulate recommendations for sensible processes in order to integrate values, knowledge and political preferences in long-term decision-making.

2.14 Knowledge governance

The institutional framework of today’s societies consists of complex combinations of hierarchy, markets and networks, as Meuleman (2008) has pointed out. Within this framework crowds, publics and citizens may exercise influence, while top-down as well as bottom-up media enable and hamper nearly all functions in public decision-making. In this volume Wolfson has formulated a proposal for an institutional innovation leading to knowledge democracy by situational contracting.

Arwin van Buuren and Jasper Eshuis propose to introduce an additional fourth institutional arrangement, to be called knowledge governance. This arrangement is about purposefully organising the development of knowledge in order to deal with societal problems. The paper analyses the situations in which knowledge democracy may be a viable alternative for the traditional arrangements in order to provide adequate coordination.

Coordination is, according to the authors, the essential condition for collective action. Sometimes the three classical coordinating mechanisms fail. A case study illustrates this, in which the production of new knowledge served as a catalyser to reach consensus on a solution for a water management problem. The involvement of all actors in the design of an innovative research programme enabled them to learn collectively, and to redefine their framing of the problem. The voluntaristic character of the common efforts – no relation with future action or implementation
was visible in the beginning – appeared to accelerate the birth of consensus. Sharing ideas gradually enabled all parties involved to share initiatives for action later on.

2.15 Commissions as innovative boundary organisms

Boundary work is necessary in order to reconcile the paradigms and approaches of different scientists on one hand and the values and convictions of policy-makers on the other hand in an adequate manner. Boundary work may be performed by intermediate organisations indicated as such, but also by other organisms. Martin Schulz and Mark van Twist deal with commissions. A commission is a group of people with origins outside of government, which is set up to consider a matter of some kind within the public service. The core function of commissions may be advisory, but commissions may reach authoritative conclusions, may break taboos, and may find new solutions. Schulz and Van Twist discover three perspectives on changing roles and positions of commissions in a knowledge democracy. They had an almost exclusive role in the development of knowledge for policy until the sixties, and are gaining a position in power games and checks and balances since the 1980s.

Schulz and Van Twist observe that the boundaries between domains and between societal actors are fading, and as a consequence the role of commissions is fading. The authors indicate four major transitions in the functioning of commissions:

- From a “flat” structure to a multi-layered structure, to be called cascade commissions, provided with many sub-commissions that reach into the capillaries of society.
- From commissions of inquiry to citizens’ assemblies where citizens’ knowledge is appreciated besides scientific knowledge.
- From evaluation commissions to policy hubs, with the assignment to create new knowledge, and to establish connections across organisational boundaries.
- From political commissions towards conventions and network consultations, where citizens reveal preferences on government policies, creating “living documents” similar to a wiki.

Schulz and Van Twist define the future challenge for commissions as finding the balance between opposing values on the interface of organised relationships.
2.16 Political networks

Commissions consist of experts. New technologies enable everyone to communicate, also politicians and citizens. One may attempt to define networks that stimulate rich communication.

We indicated above in a general manner that the so-called bottom-up media are in full development. Chris Aalberts and Maurits Kreijveld analyse the knowledge exchange through online political networks. The relationships between politicians and citizens may change as a consequence of the application of Web 2.0 networks. The case the authors deal with, concerns the Dutch social network Hyves. Hyves can be compared with Facebook or MySpace. More and more politicians attempt to utilise Web 2.0 applications for communication with citizens.

The majority of the members of Hyves is sleeping, never visits the hyve. The hyves of politicians show only moderate participation by citizens. The membership of the hyves of two right-wing politicians is the most numerous. It appears that unless the discussion is very well-structured, the communication on Hyves tends to degenerate into small talk.

2.17 Knowledge democracy, innovation and sustainability

The final chapter is devoted to the relationships between knowledge democracy and sustainable development, the most focal global political issue.

Bert de Wit concentrates on the design of a societal innovation system that produces more sustainability. Having declared linear innovation models obsolete, he deals at first with innovation on the micro-level. He follows the suggestion of the Netherlands Scientific Council for Government Policy to create hybrid spaces for interaction between scientists, entrepreneurs and societal groups. On the meso-level De Wit has in the past analysed a number of sectors – food, energy, water – and concludes that the innovation system for sustainability within these sectors is deficient.

On the macro-level De Wit concludes that both government and the powerful intermediate research organisation, the Royal Academy of Science and the Netherlands Organisation for Scientific Research in the past have failed to produce either consistent viewpoints or courses of action regarding sustainability.

Klaus Töpfer and Günther Bachmann departed from the basic democratic principle “one man, one vote” and formulate an argument in favour of the recognition of “one carbon footprint”. De Wit recommends the above mentioned hybrid spaces and moreover “bypasses” in order to overcome the failures of the official organisations. These bypasses should be specific programmes directed at innovation in sustainability.
Knowledge Democracy
Consequences for Science, Politics, and Media
in 't Veld, R. (Ed.)
2010, XVI, 397 p., Hardcover
ISBN: 978-3-642-11380-2