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14. Collaboration in the Spirit of Democracy

- A Method to Tackle Complex Challenges

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Introduction

This chapter deals with collaboration between sectors and organizations as a method for social change. With this chapter, we want to describe a particular method for collaboration, as well as reflect on its possibilities and challenges. The method has been developed by Sensus study association (Region Skåne-Blekinge), which is one of the major organizations that constitute the non-formal and voluntary educational system in Sweden called 'folkbildning'. The starting point for the method is that work procedures, work cultures and how we organize work must change in order for collaboration between organizations to be inclusive, equal and sustainable, and to better respond to today's complex societal problems. In this way, the method appears as an alternative to the hierarchical and mechanical organizational structures that are common and where decision-making is centralized, work procedures are uniform, and formal rules govern the work.

The content of the method has been developed through experiences from Forward Malmö, which is a local arena for collaboration, as well as models and materials developed by Sensus' collaboration partner The Outside¹, which works for equal systems change. The theoretical base of the method is derived from the scientific fields of systems thinking and transformative social change². Systems thinking can be described as a way of seeing and analyzing, for example, an organization or an ecosystem as flows or relationships, in and between parts, and the mutual influence these "flows" have as a result, rather than focusing on categorizations of parts. An

¹ For more information, see: <https://www.findtheoutside.com>

² Further references are found in the chapter when specific perspectives/methods are mentioned.

example of a transformative social change is when an individual or a group begins to think, feel and act in a new way, as a result of the participants profoundly changing their views and understanding of something.

The method can be understood as part of a trend in policy processes from government, i.e. hierarchical central control where the public makes decisions taking into account the perspectives and interests of different stakeholders, to 'governance' or 'network governance'. Governance and network governance are used as synonyms in the text to describe a form of public governance that takes place in collaboration with non-public actors (Olsson et al. 2019). Emphasizing the collaborative elements of governance, it has been described as a form of governance where public organizations directly engage non-governmental stakeholders in a collective, decision-making process in the implementation of public policy (Ansell & Gash 2007). Especially in the area of integration, collaboration has been requested in order to create better conditions for a successful establishment of newly arrived refugees (RiR 2014).

By policy we mean "public policy", i.e. the goals and means of the public organizations that are used to control and administer various policy areas. Often a policy also specifies the direction towards which the management or administration should be steered. Policy can be about managing the activities that already exist but also about changing them or improving them. Sometimes new policies may also be needed to meet new societal problems (Olsson et al. 2019). New societal problems do not have to be new phenomena, but can be about old phenomena that have recently been formulated as societal problems and require the public's attention, and therefore a new policy.

Hence, policy can look very different depending on which political or administrative level it originates from. The policy is connected to the organization's mission and responsibilities. If we take segregation as an example of a societal problem, a national-level policy from the government's side would look very different from a municipal-level policy. The decision-making process would differ as the state and municipality are governed in different ways, and also the content of the decision would differ as the state and municipality have different types of resources, instruments and measures at their disposal. Somewhat simplified, it can be said that at the municipal level the policy becomes more concrete and focused on what the municipal administration, in cooperation with other actors, can do regarding the issue of segregation.

The possibilities of cooperation between sectors have been increasingly highlighted in the development from government to governance. The need for collaboration in policy processes can be linked to normative positions that democratic decision-making processes require the

participation of the actors affected by the policy, i.e. the stakeholders. These stakeholders can be both public, private and non-profit organizations. Including stakeholders also has more practical advantages, as their knowledge contribute to better policy formulation, and as the decisions have higher legitimacy when taken in consultation with those it affects. Furthermore, implementation is likely to become easier when the stakeholders are already "at the table" (cf. Olsson et al. 2019). A shared ownership can also contribute to effects of the process being attended to long after the work on the policy is finished.

But there are also extensive descriptions and analysis of the challenges that collaboration poses to organizations. Some of these challenges can be linked to different types of power relations, especially where there is a clear imbalance in power and resources, so-called "asymmetrical relations". Co-opting is a term coined to describe when a weaker actor adapts its basic values and objectives to more closely mimic those of the stronger actor in order to gain certain advantages, for example to be included in a policy process (cf. Meeuwisse & Sunesson 1998). For example, an organization that is critical of current asylum policy may risk being co-opted by the state if it chooses to cooperate in the work with people who are awaiting deportation. The organization could easily be seen as supporting a policy that it is actually critical of and would like to change (Scaramuzzino & Jönsson 2017). Different types of conflicts between actors based on different ways of functioning or differences in ideology and values must also be dealt with, for example what view one has of integration if collaboration takes place around the establishment of newly arrived refugees (ibid).

Depending on which administrative level (local, regional, national, European) and phase of the policy process is intended, different frameworks and methods for cooperation have been developed. At the national level, there are several examples of dialogues, councils and formalized agreements that should create conditions for cooperation (Johansson, Kassman & Scaramuzzino 2011). At the local level, we find similar trends, but also forms of collaboration that are more focused on practical implementation of policy, for example collaborative projects, idea-based public partnership (IOP) and more (Jönsson & Scaramuzzino 2016).

Many of these aim to meet the need for more inclusive approaches to policy development and implementation, where the participation (and influence) of citizens and civil society organizations is enabled. From this also comes an idea of co- production of welfare services.

In order to understand why Sensus chose to work with this collaboration method, we will first give a brief account of 'folkbildning' (cf. adult education), study associations and Sensus' democratic mission in Sweden. This makes it possible to better frame the context in which the

method is developed. Next, we describe the method itself and how it is used. We who are the authors of the chapter both have experience of collaboration in different ways. Sandra Hedman has previously worked with collaboration between the idea-driven and the public sector within the framework of the integration project NAD, and today works, among other things, with applying and developing parts of the method we describe in this chapter within the framework of the collaboration project 'Malmö Together'. Roberto Scaramuzzino is a lecturer in social work and has researched the collaboration between public and civil society and teaches in the sociology program about policy processes and social policy. In this chapter, we use our respective perspectives from the practical work with the method, as well as research and theory within some of the scientific fields it touches on. With the text, we want to reflect on opportunities and challenges with the method and relate it to theories about policy processes consisting of different phases (Olsson et al. 2019) in order to understand the method's place in such a process. We will also use different theories of governance to reflect on and discuss opportunities and challenges.

The Democratic Mission of 'Folkbildning'

Sensus study association is an important actor within the field of Swedish 'folkbildning', and it has emerged from three study associations with different orientations. These study associations were all founded between 1929 and 1935: YWCA-YMCA's study association, Sweden's Church Study Association and the study association of an umbrella organization for trade unions called the Confederation of Professional employees. That the method is emerging within the 'folkbildning' framework is completely in line with its certain position in Swedish civil society, but also in Swedish democracy. The term 'folkbildning' has its basis in the concept of 'bildning' (cf. German 'Bildung') which aims at the individual's development process that occurs when the individual's own experiences meet the collective experiences of humankind (Gustavsson 1992, p. 20).

The early 'bildning' movement during the first half of the 19th century was formed in an elitist, patriarchal and conservative spirit to gather and form the peasant class. During the industrialization and the development towards parliamentary democracy, the popular movements grew and increased in number, as did the 'folkbildning' institutions. The role of 'folkbildning' increasingly came to aim at empowering and mobilizing people into active

citizenship. This meant, among other things, fostering democratic minded (and law-abiding) citizens who could protect the democratic construction of society (Abrahamsson 2019, p. 7). It was no longer just about education 'for the people', but also 'through the people'. The first study circle was organized in 1902 and in 1912 the first study association, ABF, was started. Today there are ten study associations in Sweden. During the rise of the welfare society, 'folkbildning' became a given and fundamental activity (Gustavsson 1992).

The pedagogical methods that lies at the heart of 'folkbildning' aimed, and still aims, at offering forms that make it easier for the participants to put their experienced everyday life into words and thereby exchange realities. Partly in order to strengthen the feeling of belonging, but also to show how the social value generated could be considered greater than the sum of individual needs satisfaction (Gustavsson in Abrahamsson 2019, pp. 7–8). It was not so much about a knowledge where one could decide what was right and wrong, as in the compulsory school's focus on facts and years, but rather about getting clarity on what was going on and why (Gustavsson in Abrahamsson 2019).

During the second half of the 20th century, the state's funding of people's education contributed to an increased focus on regulations, finance and administration, and the activities were commercialized as the quantity of study circles became increasingly important for the economy (cf. Abrahamsson 2019 and Gustavsson 1992).

The four purposes of the Swedish state's support to 'folkbildning' actors today are expressed as follows in Section 1 of the Ordinance (2015:218, Ministry of Education 2015):

- 1) Support activities that contribute to strengthening and developing democracy,
- 2) Contribute to making it possible for an increased diversity of people to influence their life situation and create commitment to participate in societal development,
- 3) Contribute to equalizing education gaps and increase the level of 'bildning' and education in society, and
- 4) Contribute to broadening interest, and increasing participation, in cultural life.

The goal of the 'folkbildning' policy is described as follows: "'Folkbildning' should give everyone the opportunity to, together with others, increase their knowledge and education for personal development and participation in society" (Education Department 2013). Thus, it is still about contributing to shaping and educating citizens who have the knowledge and conditions to participate and work.

Hence, as part of Swedish 'folkbildning', we can understand Sensus work in developing a method for cooperation in relation to today's complex social problems. There is a clear connection between, on one hand, the self-imposed mission of 'folkbildning' and Sensus Region Skåne-Blekinge in society and the state's expectations of its role, and, on the other hand, the knowledge actors in society need to be able to participate in policy processes and thus be able to contribute to better policy.

The Method

The method³ we look at in this chapter is developed by Sensus study association Region Skåne-Blekinge, one of six regions within the organization. Sensus Skåne-Blekinge consists of 5 different units, of which the Sustainability Unit mainly works based on the method, while the other units work more with traditional 'folkbildning' activities. The work of the Sustainability Unit focuses on Agenda 2030's Global Goal number 11: Inclusive and Sustainable Cities and number 17: Implementation and Global Partnership.

The method can be understood as a concept development based on the role of 'folkbildning' in giving people the opportunity to develop the knowledge and skills needed to be able to understand and meet today's complex societal challenges.

The concept contains perspectives and methods that can be used both to initiate and build larger collaboration processes, as well as to take on challenges in existing collaboration processes. Something that distinguishes the method is that it has been developed to meet challenges and problems that are characterized as complex, i.e. problems made up of so many interconnected factors that the problem becomes "unmanageable". This starting point is motivated by the Cynefin framework⁴, which argues that problems need different approaches in relation to their nature. In comparison, when it comes to problems defined as complicated, it is possible to analyze underlying relevant causes. Complicated challenges, such as building a house, can be solved by hiring experts while complex problems cannot be solved by expert

3 The method is a concept development based on experiences from Forward Malmö, models and materials developed by Sensus' collaboration partner The Outside (<https://www.findtheoutsides.com/courses>), as well as the scientific fields of "systems thinking" and transformative social change.

4 "The Cynefin framework" was developed by Dave Snowden. For more information about the framework: <https://thecynefin.co/about-us/about-cynefin-framework/>

analysis. Instead, the approach must be one of testing and learning in order to jointly increase our understanding of the root causes of the problems, and in order to move us in the direction of sustainable solutions.

The starting point for the method is that society must begin to deal with societal challenges as part of, and in relation to, a larger system (cf. systems thinking). Despite the fact that many societal challenges we see today consist of a number of different underlying challenges, definitions of - and solutions to - individual challenges are often created in ‘silos’. This means that they are created in a hierarchical system in a defined part of an organization, as if the challenges were isolated from each other. In practice, societal challenges also involve several levels: individual/group, organization and structure, something that research on systems offers theories and methods to handle. Despite this, today's organizations and work procedures are rarely designed and adapted to provide space for inclusive methods, or for a wide range of organizations to actually collaborate around different solutions. Despite a rapidly changing environment, the work procedures neither provide room for continuous reflection on whether the structures we operate within are appropriate, nor reflection on whether the structures at all can meet the societal challenges we are facing.

The knowledge and competence that the method aims to increase is according to Sensus expected to contribute to a system change. A system change as social actors and organizations get greater opportunities to work and collaborate in new ways that better meet complex societal challenges than the prevailing forms and work procedures of collaboration. A basic assumption for the method is that more actors need to be given the opportunity to participate in identifying and exploring solutions to challenges, participate in the creation of social innovation, and contribute to what must inevitably be long-term work towards the goals of Agenda 2030.

In order to offer an alternative to the generally prevailing mechanical organizational structures, where decision-making is centralized and formal rules govern work, the method aims at building more organic organizational structures. Organic structures refers to work cultures, work procedures and organizational forms that make organizations more flexible and better at handling complexity.

The organic organization entails increased room for action for employees, decentralized decision-making and co-creative working methods, and bases processes on systemic thinking (systems thinking) and design methodology. Briefly, systemic thinking can be described as a holistic approach where analysis takes into account cause-effect relationships at several levels simultaneously (for example, individual and organization), and not least at the structural level.

Design methodology, in turn, is based on a so-called iterative logic, which means that the work takes place in cycles where prototypes for specific contexts are developed and tested in order to quickly be able to add to the process experience-based learnings and improvements, which then become the basis for the next prototype.

In order to create long-term conditions for the development of more organic organizational structures, the method provides support for co-creating platforms and meeting places where organizations and sectors can collaborate and develop shared work procedures and shared organizational structure. Furthermore, the process management has a capacity-building approach to support individuals and groups to understand and lead themselves in complexity, among other things by creating shared knowledge across organizational boundaries and disciplines.

The method also contains specific models that are used, among other things, to build a common trust-based and sensemaking work culture (the Shared work-model), and create prototypes for new work procedures (Chaordic Stepping Stones).⁵

Examples of How the Method Can Be Used

The use of the method is often initiated by Sensus' process managers calling in a small group of people (a coordination group) who have expressed an interest in developing new ways of working to meet a complex challenge. The method has so far mostly been used at the employee/activity level, but works just as well for management groups/organizational level. Thereon, the coordination group identifies people who are affected or should be affected (for example from different sectors/levels) by the work concerned and invite them to form an initial working group. The working group then expands as more people are invited to join, and, if necessary, the working group is divided into several. In relation to the group's needs, the process managers spend different amounts of time on supporting the group in developing skills for an increased understanding of complex problems.

Furthermore, the Shared Work model is introduced, which aims to shape a common work culture based on common perspectives. Such common ground makes it easier for a group to

⁵ Shared work and Chaordic Stepping Stones are models and materials developed by Sensus' partner The Outside, for more information: <https://www.findtheoutside.com/courses>.

build sustainable relationships and focus on working together on the challenge that brought them together. The Shared Work model is based on the following perspectives:

Relationships as a frame = even if it gets uncomfortable, we stay in the relationship

Questions as answers = we focus on exploring the questions and avoid the habit of looking for quick solutions;

Seek diversity = we treat each other as ‘whole’ persons including our different roles, identities and perspectives, not as representatives of an organization;

All levels – all the time = we have an understanding of how the personal, group, organizational and structural levels influences all the time;

Power matters = we understand that power affects our relationships, how we understand an issue and how we act, and we deal with this fact.

The point of the Shared Work model is to contribute to raising awareness of factors that a group will need to return to in order to deal with many of the obstacles that may arise in collaboration. The obstacles can be, for example, bad relationships/personal chemistry, one-sided perspectives and power factors, all of which can take focus away from the content at the core of the collaboration; the shared work.

A simple design theory that supports the group to take on different parts of the shared work is the Diamond, which consists of the following steps: ‘Explore the need/challenge’, ‘Discover what can be done about it’, and ‘Focus on what will be the group's next steps’.

As an important part in the development of new work procedures, the Chaordic Stepping Stones (CSS) model is used to design and document processes. This model offers a generative structure that allows work to progress efficiently, but at the same time with room for creativity and the ability to take advantage of the learning and ideas that arise during the process. CSS consists of nine steps: Needs, Purpose, Principles, Networks, Concepts, Limiting Beliefs, Structure, Practice, and Learning. All steps include questions that guide the design of a meeting or process.

The method was tested in 2021 through two collaborative projects in two different contexts: ‘Sustainable Helsingborg’, financed by Delmos, and Malmö Together, which is financed by the Swedish Agency for Economic and Regional Growth/ERUF. In ‘Sustainable Helsingborg’, the method is used more comprehensively, while in ‘Malmö Together’ it was used to shape the

processes that specifically aim to tackle complex challenges. ‘Sustainable Helsingborg’ was initiated in 2019 and is mentioned by the City of Helsingborg in its Voluntary Local Review 2021 - a voluntary report to the UN of how the municipality works for Agenda 2030, as an example of how the city works for Goal 17: Implementation and Global Partnership (Voluntary Local Review of Helsingborg 2021).

Another Kind of Knowledge and Phronesis

Sensus’ method is based on the understanding of societal challenges as complex problems about which only limited knowledge can be achieved. Furthermore, the method tackles the complex problems with the help of cross-sector collaboration and shared responsibility. The starting point is that it takes several attempts to gain the knowledge and learning that can eventually lead us towards more sustainable solutions. Through the use of design methodology in the shared work, the identification of shared problem definitions is enabled, and potential solutions are gradually developed as they are tested against reality, and as new knowledge is gained and new experiences are made.

One way of understanding the possibilities of Sensus' method based on its perspective on knowledge and learning can be linked to the concept of ‘phronesis’ which can be described as ‘practical judgment’ or ‘practical wisdom’. If we assume that value pluralism is an unavoidable condition in society, i.e. that our values are formed based on our norms and our practical reasoning in relation to a specific context, then it becomes clear why the concept of phronesis is highly relevant when working with policy processes. If value pluralism is a fact, it becomes important to assess knowledge based on how relevant and useful it is in a specific situation. This evaluation process of what is relevant knowledge, that is, phronesis, takes place in social interactions between people. If we want to have good conditions for shared knowledge production and shared learning, it is therefore important that policy processes are based on a ‘correct procedure’, i.e. not only that they lead to good results. In other words, it becomes important that the procedure is designed so that knowledge that is politically relevant reaches the policy process (cf. Abrahamsson 2019 and Hajer & Wagenaar 2003).

For democracy to work, not only knowledge is required, but also social trust and the ability to handle differences and conflicts. For this to work, we need to get better at contributing and handling more perspectives so that we together can create a well-thought-out knowledge of how

reality is constituted (cf. Abrahamsson 2019). This is also a prerequisite for a successful collaboration where the mutual knowledge of different parties/partners' conditions, perspectives and interests is crucial, especially when the collaboration involves actors from different sectors (Scaramuzzino & Jönsson 2017).

Sensus' method emphasizes the importance of the knowledge-base in that the process management is clearly needs-centered and has an emphasis on the use of 'warm' (cf. qualitative) data. As an example of what can become the focus of knowledge production when Sensus' method is used, we look at 'Sustainable Helsingborg's' co-created documentation of the process during the autumn of 2021 that aims to tackle the challenge of 'segregation'. The process includes actors from different organizations and sectors. In their shared work on the issue of segregation, the group has chosen to prioritize the generation of more knowledge about needs, and a shared identification of what the focus of the group's work should be. It is emphasized that attention is paid to both the structural, organizational and individual level and that it is important to identify and work with the underlying causes of segregation, as opposed to alleviating symptoms. The group's collaboration is expressly organized around sharing experiences and information "to understand as much of the problem as possible together". To collect needs, analysis ('cold' data), experiences and activities ('warm' data) are being used (Roadmap of Sustainable Helsingborg, 2022).

The Connection to Governance, Decisions and Politicians

More opportunities with the method become apparent when we look at some of the challenges that are usually associated with 'governance'. As the core of policy processes has shifted towards more network governance, an institutional 'void' has been created in the space between sectors, where there are not always given rules for who is responsible, who has authority over whom, or what kind of accountability that can be expected. Each organization enters with its own institutional expectations and routines. Thus, it is rarely only about the issue when individuals from different sectors meet, but also about the rules of the game and credibility dynamics. (Hajer & Wagenaar 2003)

Here, possibilities can be discerned with Sensus' method as the 'void' or 'what happens in the gap' between organizations, is offered a shared and sensemaking narrative. Through the Cynefin framework model (see previous description), the need for new work procedures to face

complex problems is justified, as the work procedures of today's organizations are often designed to deal with complicated problems. Moreover, the models Shared Work and Chaordic Stepping Stones lends hope for, and direction towards, more appropriate work procedures for collaboration. All together, these models contribute with a kind of 'minimum common order', offering a structure that is easy for everyone to use, and a transparency which makes the shared work apprehensible.

From this perspective, by using the method in the 'void' between organizations belonging to different sectors such as the public sector, business and civil society, the method can contribute to recognizing the existence of network governance. But it can also create opportunities to understand it, and hence contribute to the development thought out forms of network governance (cf. Abrahamsson 2019 and Hajer & Wagenaar 2003).

Where the method has mainly been used, in both Helsingborg and Malmö, civil servants have taken part in the collaboration with the mandate it entails to work based on politically made decisions and policies. When civil servants work to implement policy, there are some possibilities to develop work procedures in collaboration. Not least in connection to certain activities or how the policy should be implemented. As an example, a process carried out with 'Hälsa-, Vård- och Omsorgsförvaltningen', the Health and Care Administration, within the City of Malmö, can be mentioned. One of the missions of the Administration is to counteract involuntary loneliness among the target group, persons aged 65 and above. At the time of writing, 'Malmö Together' is facilitating the shared work of a team, in relation to one of the city's Meeting Places for the Elderly. The team consists of a unit manager, pedagogues for the elderly, a project manager who works across several meeting places and a secretary for innovation. The purpose of the process is to build shared knowledge of work procedures for collaboration and to develop prototypes of innovative solutions supporting their mission.

Hence, the method should not be interpreted as the public opening up decision making processes through new forms of governance. Politicians have not been included in the contexts where the method has been used to date. Thus, the transformative potential of the method does not focus on more people participating and making decisions in processes where the public sector previously had a monopoly through representative democracy. Rather, it is a matter of gradually changing prevailing ways of thinking and working within intersectoral cooperation. The focus is on the level of employees as well as at that of managers, with the aim of clarifying and deepening the democratic potential in network management. A potential not only based on

a normative stance, but above all based on an empirical observation of what society looks like (Hajer & Wagenaar 2003).

It can be assumed that an increased focus on changed work procedures, shared knowledge production and an improved ability to solve complex problems at the management and employee level, would also have an effect on political decision makers. In the roadmap for 'Sustainable Helsingborg', the ambition is expressed as "to create knowledge and learning by testing solutions, which become the basis for recommendations to decision makers."

Considering the reduced interest in party politics in society, a revitalization of the policy process's relevance and sensemaking for the everyday life could increase citizens' political interest and the interest in representative democracy (Hajer & Wagenaar 2003). It could potentially increase engagement in the political life of both individual citizens and collective actors such as groups, networks and organizations.

Power within the Process: How to Create Broad and Inclusive Participation

Network governance offers great opportunities, including the obvious one of coordinating autonomous actors with different interests around something they have in common. But there are also some challenges with a flexible form that is designed as the process progresses. Networks can bring problems in terms of recruitment, decision making, management skills and accountability. Conflict management also becomes problematic when there is a lack of a clear decision making process that can resolve the disputes (Hedlund & Montin, 2009).

In Sensus' method, the form of who or how many should be included in a platform or a working group can look different. The motto "invite everyone who we think has a need and interest in joining" provides guidance. In practice, 'everyone' here implies individuals those who lead the process, as well as the group's current participants, are aware of and judge to be relevant to the context in question.

Neither is there any formal form or routine for decision making, such as voting. The Shared Work model, which aims to set the framework for the work culture in a team or on a collaboration platform, does not specify responsible persons or any form of accountability.

Rather, the model symbolizes and emphasizes the necessity of an organic and non-hierarchical work culture.

Since iterative work procedures and the creation of prototypes pervade the method, the method can provide scope for developing solutions and different forms according to what the shared work requires. Hence, this also applies to questions of participation, recruitment, conflict management and decision making.

A Method for Governance?

Our starting point was that we can understand Sensus' method as part of a trend in policy processes from government to governance where public governance increasingly takes place in collaboration with non-public actors. From this perspective, we can compare the method with a definition of collaborative governance or cooperation-based network governance. According to Ansell and Gash (2007), it is a governance approach in which one or more public organizations directly engage non-governmental stakeholders in a collective decision-making process that is formal, consensus-oriented, and deliberative and that aims to create or implement public policy or manage public programs or assets.

Ansell and Gash (2007) specify their definition of collaborative governance through six criteria: (1) the process is initiated by public organizations and authorities, (2) participants include non-governmental actors, (3) participants engage directly in decision-making and are not only "consulted" by public organizations and authorities, (4) the process is formally organized and based on collective meetings, (5) the process aims at consensus-based decisions (even if consensus is not achieved in practice), and (6) the focus of collaboration is public decisions and public policy.

We find several similarities between the theoretically described model of collaborative governance and Sensus' method, especially regarding criteria 2, 4 and 5, i.e. the participation includes non-governmental actors, the method requires formalized organization and collective meetings, and the goal seems to be to reach a form of consensus. Concerning the remaining three criteria: 1, 3 and 6, we find that Sensus' method has a wider point of entry than the model. It can be initiated by anyone but is mainly initiated by the civil society. Participants are not directly engaged in political decisions but takes part in the decisions relevant to the collaboration in question at the level of the manager or civil servants concerned. Also, the method can be used even when the goal of the collaboration is not public policy.

The fact that the method differs from the model could be due to it being developed by a civil society organization that sees the opportunity for actors other than public to take initiative, but which at the same time has not developed it with only the public sector and public policy in mind. Considering the design of the method, i.e. as a method to facilitate, or manage, collaboration, it should be able to "dock into" several phases of a policy process.

From a policy process perspective, the method could be used in the initial phases of a policy process, for example where societal problems are to be transformed into policy problems, put on the political agenda and the policy issue to be 'framed', and possible causes and solutions defined (Olsson et al. 2019). From a policy process perspective, these phases are crucial based on the opportunity to participate and be able to influence. Here you can compare being allowed to participate in a process where segregation has already been framed as a democratic issue, or a security and order issue. It creates completely different conditions for which potential causes become possible to discuss and which solutions become relevant (cf. Olsson et al. 2019). Participating in an early phase of such a process can be compared to being invited at national level to sit in a dialogue to design an investigation as opposed to being invited to act as a reference on the finished proposal that comes out of the investigation itself (cf. Scaramuzzino & Suter 2019).

However, there are more differences from the theoretical model, as Sensus' method has a clearer societal focus, where influence is only part of its purpose. The distinguished educative function of 'folkbildning' permeates the method, which aims to create the conditions for a more inclusive process, both by creating more inclusive work procedures, by strengthening relationships, and by increasing the knowledge of social actors to be able to participate actively in public life.

Conclusions and discussion

Sensus' method can be understood as a flexible tool that enables collaboration through a reflective process where the framework for collaboration is not set from the beginning (as is often the case when collaboration is initiated). The method is designed to be applied mainly at the local level. However, we see in its design no direct obstacles to it being applied at other levels, something that would provide more insight into the method's possibilities and limitations.

The method enables the advocacy of a view of knowledge that harbors value pluralism by emphasizing the importance of local situations and contexts and the realization that knowledge and sustainable solutions must be allowed to develop gradually. The method also has the potential to fill the gap, or "void", between sectors and organizations with a sensemaking narrative that contributes with direction, transparency and gathers actors around a structured shared work.

For the civil society, the method means a chance to influence policy at an earlier stage (agenda setting) and to be able to combine influence over policy with societal impact, as well as a chance to influence municipalities' implementation of policy in a structured manner.

The method enables the development of work procedures and collaboration, which can increase the knowledge of societal actors, create better relationships between individuals and organizations and handle societal challenges in a structured way.

The method obviously also contains some challenges. That there is no clear form for recruitment, conflict management, decision making and accountability could be seen as such. Much of the solution to these questions lies in the method and process itself but also in the institutional logics in which the organizations find themselves and their fundamental responsibilities towards their members, citizens or owners.

From the perspective of civil society, it may be important to be aware of two risks that exist in connection with entering into a collaborative relationship with public actors. Firstly, to avoid so-called "token participation" where influence is not given and where participation only legitimizes political decisions and takes the edge off possible criticism of public policy and governance. This may be connected with a shift in civil society's role as counterpart to the public sector, towards the direction of a role as a partner. As a partner, a civil society actor can end up in a situation where the decisions are jointly owned with the public actor, because as a stakeholder, you have been involved in making the decisions.

Our hope is that this text has shown how the method developed by Sensus has the potential to both overcome some challenges, and be developed to be used in other policy areas and in relation to other societal challenges, but also at other administrative levels and in other phases of policy processes than so far. Unlike many governance models, which have been developed by the public sector to include more actors in policy processes, Sensus' method is designed from a civil society perspective. Moreover, the method is developed based on a more than 100-

year-old mission to contribute to shaping and educating citizens who have the knowledge and prerequisites to participate in, and influence, society and politics.

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