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Who is governing what?

Governing local technical systems – an issue of accountability

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Abstract:

The article discusses accountability of local policymaking regarding technical systems by comparing consequences when new forms of governance are developed. Governance steering demands and ensures a clear division of responsibility regarding *what* a policy network is responsible for, but not regarding *who* is accountable for the decision-making and implementation processes. On the other hand, in a steering context characterized by government, it is clear *who* is responsible and accountable for decisions, but the specific issues for which different actors can be accountable are not clear. We argue that the complex modern network governance demands new clarifications of accountability and this approach can be seen as a first step on that development.

Keywords: accountability, local governance, broadband, Sweden, municipalities, energy companies

INTRODUCTION

Local autonomy and self-government has historically been one of the cornerstones of Swedish government and political life (SFS 1974:152 ch1, §1; Gustavsson, 1996). Socio-technical systems, such as energy and information technology, are global and appear locally. In Sweden these systems have traditionally been municipal responsibilities, often locally organized in municipally owned companies (Gullberg & Kaiser, 2004). Public ownership has been, and still is, motivated by the fact that these socio-technical systems deliver public goods and aim to serve the public interest by securing utilities at low prices (Palm, 2004).

Energy politics has for long been organised in profit-maximising municipally owned companies (Palm, 2004) in a closed government structure. But the environmental discourses expressed through Agenda 21 are developed in a governance context and put pressure on changes in the energy system that still strongly relies on government. The complexity of introducing A21 into energy governance opens for more actors to participate in policy-making and relate to various local circumstances. The same sort of complexity characterizes the newer local socio-technical system broadband. It has been introduced and organised in more open governance structure and have easier to adopt to demands on for example co-funding and participation in open networks, compared to the energy field.

The governance structure of local technical systems may clarify *what* is governed but makes it more diffuse *who* is actually governing, compared to the former government structure. Contracts, in governance contexts, show what is governed, and also have to make the risks and responsibilities clear within the contract. Policy through contracts thereby changes the

norms of accountability. We argue that a demand for clarifications of accountability emerges from the complex modern governance. The aim of this article is to discuss accountability in governance of local socio-technical systems, applied on case studies of energy and broadband. The article proceeds with an introduction of the illustrative cases before a more theoretical and conceptual section. Then the cases are presented as socio-technical systems before they are compared regarding accountability. Finally, we highlight some lessons learned and implications for further analysis of accountability in governance contexts.

Our illustrative cases

The development of energy and broadband are important issues for the everyday life of citizens of the municipalities and both systems are often handled in municipal owned energy companies. Even if these technical systems often are grouped together in the municipal political practice, the systems differ in several aspects. One important factor is that these systems were established at different times with different conditions. The energy system has evolved during the past 100 years and is anchored in a government tradition. The broadband system is a new system developed in a society characterized by among all deregulations and governance structures. Still, both these system need to face the same challenges, which include evolving governing principle in society.

The case studies, as presented here, are reanalysis of several in-depth municipal-level field studies regarding IT and energy in broad terms, formerly presented in Swedish (Wihlborg, 2000; 2003; Palm, 2004; Henning & Palm, 2006). These cases were chosen since both are large socio-technical systems locally steered. As large socio-technical systems, both energy and broadband, consist of the technical components, individual actors and organizations, legal frameworks, and institutional and political structures. Characterizing for large socio-technical

systems is that changes made to one part of the system must be adjusted to the other existing parts to obtain a working whole (Hughes, 1983; 1986; Summerton, 1992). The older energy system was established in a clear government structure, but the more recent broadband system was set up through governance cooperation among different actors. The government is still the dominating norm of the energy system, even if there are impacts from governance trends. We will here use the two cases in general terms to illustrate the differences of accountability. We, therefore, may highlight differences of the cases more than the similarities, even if we are aware of the tendencies of governance in energy politics, as in many other policy areas, today.

The case studies were based on examination of written primary sources, such as government bills and Swedish Government Official Reports (SOU), local and regional investigations, minutes, and notes, as well as field works through interviews and observations. The in-depth interviews have been semi-structured and including local actors (e.g., local politicians, municipal officials, and representatives of the local energy company), private firms, and other related organizational bodies. The informants have been chosen through a network approach; by starting of with local key actors and than interviewing them they mentioned and related to.

ACCOUNTABILITY IN LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND GOVERNANCE

Accountability is multifaceted and complex, and in governance context it goes beyond rendering an account of the resources (Kluvers, 2003). In government context accountability is mainly seen as a chain from the electorate to the politicians and from the elected politicians to public administration. The new localism and complexity of governance structures make accountability intertwined and multiple (Stoker, 2004) and it has to be given new meanings.

From Government to Governance

Policymaking, in most western states, today is argued to be characterized by a process opening up government towards broader governance of partnerships and network-oriented decision-making in intricate interplay among public, private and non-profit organizations. The role of local government then changes – they become one player among many (Pierre & Peters, 2000). Governance structures have developed in response to the state's increased need to mobilize actors (and their resources) outside their formal context to formulate and implement public policy (Considine, 2005).

The traditional *government* approach highlights the formal steering chain of public organizations and top-down hierarchal decision-making by political actors. 'Government' implies that governing takes place within governments and their formal institutions and the state's monopoly on the use of legitimate coercion is in focus (Boyer, 1990; Stoker, 1998). In governance contexts networks are self-organizing and cannot be fully accountable towards the governmental bodies in the governance approach. Cooperation and coordination make governance horizontal, even if the state may take on a hierarchal role to express power. Legitimacy in governance is gained through the interplay of legal interpretations, common understanding and trust (Börzel, 1998; Peters & Pierre, 2004; Rhodes, 1997). The main differences between the governance and government approaches relates to structure and the actions of participating actors. The separation of structure and actors is complicated (Giddens, 1984; Rhodes & Marsh, 1992), but still it is useful to separate on a principle level, as shown in figure I.

Policymaking characterized mainly by:	Structure	Actors
↑ Government	Closed and formal structures	Roles given by the institutional settings
↓ Governance	Openness and networks	Negotiations and resource exchange

Figure I: Structures and actors in two steering approaches

Actors in a government structure are included or excluded according to their institutional given roles, defining a professional and/or democratic accountability. The broad distinction of government and governance is commonly used even if it is problematic since both approaches include several different models and they cannot be clearly separated. The chosen cases illustrate the principle differences of government and governance.

Accountability in governance contexts

The comprehensive distinction between governance and government indicates different forms of accountability. Accountability is formed already in the policy design, before policies are implemented, but its importance will be apparent firstly when implemented, evaluated or if a crises appear. In government contexts democratic accountability are institutionalized since the citizens can discern governments if they are not acting in the best interests of the public.

Independently if government or governance characterizes steering, accountability is much more than economic accountancy. Mitchell and Shortell (2000:259) argue that accountability is “defined as a process by which party justifies its actions and policies /and/ is a key aspect of governance”. The increasing complexity of governance through partnership opens for a broader understanding of accountability, including bureaucratic/hierarchical, legal, professional, political and moral/ethical dimensions (Dicke & Ott, 1999). Considine (2002:26) argues that in governance contexts the “use of contracts and contracting is viewed as an

efficient alternative to legal mandates, value-based collaboration, and hierarchy”. Contracting is than a way of handling the lack of adjustments in legal frameworks to meet the development of partnership and networked governance (Pierre & Peters, 2000:17). By combining these two arguments one could sum accountability up to three main categories: political, professional and contract-based accountability.

A basic question regarding accountability is “who is held accountable, for what, how, and to whom?” (Dicke & Ott, 1999:503). First one has to elucidate ‘who is governing what’, to be able to ask ‘to whom someone is accountable for something’. To combine the discussion of governance and accountability we will discuss both *who* (actors) *is governing* and *what* (content) *is governed* in a governance and government structure. Than the three dimensions of accountability relates ‘to whom’. We combine these three aspects conceptually in figure II.

Governance context mainly characterized by:	Governance and accountability clarified regarding...		Accountability clarified regarding...
	Who? (which actors?)	What? (content of the policy)	To whom?
Government: ↓	YES (Clarified)	NOT USUALLY (Include almost everything seen as obligations for the governmental body)	- Professional to the political - Political to the electorate
Governance:	NO (Not clarified)	YES (Through contracts based on negotiations and agreements)	- Among the contract partners

Figure II: Accountability in the two steering contexts

Considine (2005:222-223) launches six elements of *how* responsibility is arranged and accountability formed: *assignability* of goals and standards, *transparency* of publicity and results, *knowability* of consequences (among them involved), *reviewability* by supervisors and courts, *answerability* for failure, and finally *revisability* of programs. All these elements relate

more or less explicit to content of the policy issue (what?). However, ‘who’ is accountable is rather depending on the elements of knowability, since it relates to the individual or organisational actors ability to de-construct and interpret the issue and the content of the policy. Reviewability also relates to *who* can make interpretations of accountability. Answerability is made up in the interplay of *who* is responsible for *what*. The complex interplay of these dimensions will be shown through our comparison later on.

DELIVERING ENERGY AND BROADBAND IN A LOCAL CONTEXT

Each of the two cases compared here illustrates one of the steering approaches. Government characterizes the management of energy systems (since it was first forming the system) and governance is mainly characterized the establishment of IT infrastructure and broadband. This is the case both in our local cases and at the European level (Levi-Faur, 1999).

Technical infrastructure managed by municipal energy companies

Municipal energy companies are public organisations aiming to be competitive in the market (if there is one), where they may compete with private firms. The local energy company acting as a market provider is a common European model, and in many countries it has been an important source of economic resources for municipalities (Plees, 2005:55). A municipally owned energy company usually both produces and distributes goods and services and it had for a long in the government structure had a monopoly position. In municipalities with municipally owned energy companies these companies are often key actors, because the company is formally responsible for and owns the infrastructure, i.e. the power plants and distribution networks. If the municipality lacks an own energy company it acts mainly as a consumer of energy and IT, buying related services from private companies or other municipal companies. Then the municipality’s main steering capacity, besides as a consumer,

lies in its planning monopoly and its ability to steer through and within networks (Gebremedhin, Henning & Palm, 2006).

The municipal owned energy companies are limited companies; they have to follow the legislation for private limited companies, and, as such, each one has a board. Municipalities' steering takes place through the role of owner (of all or at least the majority of stocks) and owner instructions given by the Municipal Council and Municipal Board. The companies can act both as private and as public organizations. If a municipal energy company is organised as a limited company it can compete on the deregulated electricity market and is then exempted from for example the average cost charge principle for any other municipal organisation (SFS 1994:618). Thus these companies can be profit maximising, even if they are public organizations carrying out public duties (SFS 1990:900). The municipal owned energy companies are in Sweden strong actors in both the energy and IT fields. They often have easy access to customers, internal financial strengths, and have the legal and technical competence required to implement and organize a large technical infrastructural system. The companies combining public interest and market action and are in themselves contexts for policymaking (Palm & Wihlborg, 2006a). Thus we will discuss how they manage and handle accountability regarding to the issues of energy and broadband.

Energy systems developed by established energy companies' actors

The energy area in Sweden has a strong tradition of government, where local energy strategies often have reflected national strategies. For example, when the national government financed various conservation measures, the municipalities also prepared energy conservation plans and employed energy conservation advisors. When those government subsidies disappeared the energy advice bureaus in municipalities were closed (Palm, 2004). The integration of

environmental in the energy system has been handled similarly. In our case studies we have seen that environmental goals in the supply policy process were limited to keeping emissions within the limits determined by the government. The cheapest fuel was chosen, providing that prevailing emission standards were upheld (Palm, 2006). This government structure was made legible in the municipalities when the Local Agenda 21 (LA21) activities took form in municipalities.

The process of establishing LA21 was similar in several municipalities. We will here focus on the process in the municipality of Linköping, with 130 000 inhabitants and a municipal owned energy company established in the beginning of the twentieth century. LA21-coordinators were employed by the municipality in 1995, to engage citizens, companies and interests organisations in the work with the LA21-plan to support and complete the plan (Palm, 2004:106-108). The energy company was invited but did only participate in one meeting. The process engaged over 1 000 participants and resulted in a LA21-plan stressing that energy should be supplied by renewable energy sources and emphasised the importance of reducing energy consumption. It was emphasised that the energy needed in a sustainable society could be no more than that provided by renewable energy sources such as water, wind, sun, and bio fuel. In Linköping this resulted in open conflict between the local Agenda 21 co-ordinators and the energy company. The company board and management thought that it was not self-evident that Linköping should use bio fuel that was seen as a scarce resource considering the pollution abatement equipment that was installed in Linköping's energy plants made it possible to use other "less clean" fuel. The company's representatives also opposed the goal of lowering energy production.

The LA21 co-ordinator never succeeded in mobilising support from the boards of the local energy companies. The LA21-document was not a legally binding document for the company and the co-ordinators only weapon was arguments. In other words, all they could do was try to convince the energy company of the importance of following the goals established in the process involving all these citizens. The board and manager director of the energy company argued, according to the legislation for private limited companies, that their obligation was directed to the company's best interest and to implement the goals in the LA21-plan was not consistent with this comprehensive goal. Their production manager explained for example:

It is difficult to leave the oil we use when we produce electricity, because coal and oil are declared exempt from carbon dioxide tax.

When the Agenda 21 co-ordinator formulated new and different goals for the energy systems, the energy companies and its allies thought that the co-ordinator was trespassing on their turf. The local Agenda 21 goals of using bio fuel and installing new wind power capacity had no influence on the goals of the supply policy process. The two sides did not meet nor did they integrate in a common network. Rather, they represented two different interpretations of both the issue – how to develop sustainable energy systems – and accountability – how the energy company should act to justify their investment decisions after the LA21 plan had been enacted.

Broadband – new business for an old company

The Swedish national government decided in the mid-1990s to set up a commission on the use of information technology (IT) and stated that Sweden was a leading nation in the development and use of IT (SOU 1994:118, Gov. bill 1999/2000:86, p. 13; Gov. bill 2004/05:175). However, there were few concrete initiatives for implementing IT-infrastructure until the spring of 2000, when a generous governmental co-financing scheme

for broadband infrastructure was launched through the bill *An information society for all* (Gov. bill 1999/2000:86). The bill mainly made policy statements on inclusion, digital divides and availability of IT, although the related funding did not meet these rhetorical ambitions (Wihlborg, 2003). The most outspoken ambition was interpreted as if the government did promise broadband to all households in Sweden (Hall & Löfgren, 2004).

The Swedish national policies gave municipalities a specific planning responsibility according to their constitutional exclusive planning power. The municipalities were pointed out as coordinator and had to build partnerships of local private and public funding before applying for governmental funding. The national legislation also explicitly required that the established broadband networks should be open for competition, and that the municipality itself not be promised the profits from the use of the network (SFS 2001:349).

The operators cooperated with the municipalities since there was a potential to reach good market positions and they could also provide their own system solutions and often also build them (Wihlborg, 2003:63-65). The municipalities became the key actors since they had the coordinative responsibility and had to adopt the IT infrastructure plan (Palm & Wihlborg, 2005). The quasi-market gave them action space between the market and the local administrative bodies. It was especially apparent in the rural areas, where the national subsidies and European co-funding were more easily accessible and more extensive than in urban areas, where primarily market solutions were expected. In the rural areas – mainly Northern Sweden – community groups in the villages organized and united different interests and mobilized support, and even labour, from the citizens to establish broadband (Wihlborg, 2003).

In the cases where local energy companies were responsible for implementing and actually building the broadband system, the infrastructural plan was still a municipal responsibility (Wihlborg, 2003). The municipality coordinated the funding even though the energy company took the core economic risk. The municipal administration and leading political body could thereby transform the meanings of the infrastructure plan to fit into the division of technical and financial responsibility. However, in most cases the establishment of broadband was conducted in a complex partnership of the local government and national and local firms using the subsidies together. In many municipalities the local energy company had, for a long time, run the municipal computer network. In many cases these networks were eventually opened for private customers since the companies saw a potential use for computer networks in the private sector. Therefore, citizens have considered the issue of broadband to be important, and there is a great demand for this service. An open network welcoming most actors has characterized the implementation process. However, the resources were never pooled together to promote a completely well steered handling of IT infrastructure (Wihlborg, 2000; 2003; Palm & Wihlborg, 2006b). In this governance context the issue of accountability became diffuse, since the governance context never forced them to clarify basic hierarchal structures.

COMPARING LOCAL SOCIO-TECHNICAL SYSTEMS

Although both energy and broadband mainly were handled by municipally owned energy companies, as shown above, the governing structures differed and will now be compared and discussed with respect to *who* governs and *what* is governed. The energy case discusses the concerns emerging when the LA21 co-ordinators, used to act in a governance structure, had to mobilise support from the energy company board used to act in a government structure. The

broadband case illustrates more open governance through partnership and the analysis is based on several local case studies in urban and peripheral areas.

Who governs?

The municipally owned energy companies were key-actors in both cases. They acted both as private and public organizations. Thus they were generally expected to take on accountability based on legal and professional grounds as limited companies, as well as on bureaucratic, political and moral grounds as public organisations.

In both cases the local energy companies had strong implementation power over energy production goals respectively the infrastructure plan. The structural system of energy policy resembles a traditional governmental structure, with closed decision making involving few actors and giving few insights into democratic accountability. The energy company's decision-making process regarding energy was relatively closed and few actors had any influence over the actual outcome. Thus the board it self had to take on all forms of accountability.

In the energy case the energy company decided on most of the energy issues, without taking the outcome in the democratic anchored LA21 process into consideration. The energy companies formally own and are responsible for the infrastructure (i.e., production plants and networks). The LA21 coordinators faced a situation where the energy companies' decision processes were relatively closed and few actors were in a position to influence the actual outcome. One member of the board also explained that the company had no formal reason to take the plan into consideration:

But on the basis of the government of the company, the companies' objectives and so on, the board of the company is not supposed to take the [LA21] plan into consideration.

The LA21-coordinators emphasised that the company had been invited and also partly took part in the LA21 planning process and of that reason was obliged to fulfil its intention, but LA21 did not draw up a legally valid contract with the actors involved. Thus the company's board did not become accountable, since they did not consider either any legal, democratic or moral/ethical grounds for the LA21 demand of decreased energy use (Palm, 2004 pp 111-119). The different competences and pre-understanding among the LA21-coordinators and the company, highlights the importance of knowledgeability (Considine, 2005) as a basic pre-requisite for accountability. 'Who is governing' is challenging the professional dimension of accountability, since it is just legitimating accountability and confirming knowledge and interpretations within the profession and its knowledge grounds. Both parties here avoided accountability according to their lack of knowledge and even understanding for each others approaches.

Energy policy was kept in a government structure to increase political control and did not open for partnerships. Agenda 21 on the other hand did build on openness and empowerment. The chosen steering approach clarified who was accountable but not for what (increased (company) – decreased (A21) energy use, profit maximizing in the company – democracy in A21). The municipality as an owner of the company and organiser of LA21 became accountable for the conflicting policy aims, which were hidden behind an unclear division of responsibility within the municipality.

On the other hand in the broadband case several contracts among the actors were drawn up, which gave transparency in the division of answerability among them. For example, in Gothenburg, the second largest municipality in Sweden, the municipal energy company contracted several providers and has today one of the most extensive broadband nets (www.gothnet.se). Here the problem instead concerned who was responsible for the comprehensive policy goal – broadband to everyone. No one did actually take on this general ambition – democratic and moral accountability – that was rhetorical and political emphasized. This general policy ambition did not fit into the open governance structure, since it could not be divided into single contracts. The issue of *who* was accountable was obvious as long as the policy aims were possible to include in a single agreement.

Knowledge, not just technical but mainly social and political, of the socio-technical system of broadband became the defining resource for the actors. A representative from one operator said “... someone have to help us to understand municipalities, they are not as other customers...”. The competition with local energy companies with experiences from former large technical system changes became unfair (Wihlborg, 2003) and thus there were demands for coordination, and one local civil servant in small municipality said:

I have heard that some county councils help and teach people like me, but I haven't got any support. Maybe the Association of municipalities could take on such a role, or at least provide basic and simple advices so not all municipalities themselves had to find out everything.

Municipalities with a local energy company had an organisation possessing this form of competence, which could make them accountable professional on grounds. They had the *knowability* (Considine, 2005) to formulate good positions for themselves and through distinctive contracts avoiding to become accountable for anything else. Accountability was

clarified through contracts since the issues were within the competence and main objective of the company.

The problem of who could be accountable aroused mainly in municipalities where broadband networks not developed and where none was considered as accountable for the general policy aim. In small municipalities without municipal energy companies, mainly in peripheral areas in northern Sweden, community groups instead took on the broadband establishment and considered it as a basic issue for regional development. By their access to the European Union's structural funds they had unique openings for financial support, but they lacked professional competence and thereby had strong incentives for learning and understand the process. In Pajala municipality (7000 inhabitants in northern Sweden), the municipality even employed a coordinator to manage the community groups and provide technical competence. They saw the need for knowledge both to be able to conduct the project and to take on accountability in relation to other contracted partners as private firms. The difference of the actors in the contexts also brings in different forms of knowledge. Thus the awareness of different knowledge forms and interpretation has to be discussed in relation to accountability, since no part can uphold their interpretation simply based on hierarchal grounds.

What are they governing?

Both of these cases involve policies regarding local socio-technical systems delivering 'goods' to households and local firms. Thus, the basic issue of what they govern is quite clear – energy and broadband – but the content of these broad services are less obvious.

In the energy cases the municipally owned energy companies manage and took on accountability for the “whole” energy system. However, the company did not clarify the

policy content and thus neither followed the municipal policy goals concerning how to build a future sustainable local society. According to the law the company both acts in the interest of the company (profit-maximizing) and representing local political interests – legal and democratic bases for accountability. Thus the closed governmental structure did hide what issue the companies were responsible for and could be held accountable for. The municipality had to be responsible for all, even conflicting, policy aims and thus accountable for almost everything. In this case they both took on accountability for the profit of the energy company and decreased energy use according to LA21.

The content and understanding of broadband as a policy issue was given by a defined governmental scheme and by the private market suppliers. The national governmental scheme predefined how to establish the technical infrastructure, which became locally clarified through the local infrastructure plans. These plans closely followed the national legislation and were mainly technical. Accountability became clarified through the contracts. One local civil servant saw this as an advantage but indicated other hidden problems when saying:

... this was what we had to plan and we made it as simple as possible to be quick. But, of course we left out all tricky issues on usability, content and so on. We just handled the hard stuff in the contracts, since that is what we had to do.

The well-defined goals and standards for broadband, both national and local, also improved the assignability and facilitated the division of accountability. The content of the policy and its implementation became transparent, both by the forms for contracting and maps of progress in broadband access that continuously was produced by the national authority. Thus the content, more simply than in the energy case, could be evaluated and accountability regarding ‘what’ could be defined.

Conclusions and some implications learned from the case studies

Policymaking in energy company took place mainly in a closed process that were not open for negotiations, neither about who should be accountable nor for what they should be expected to take responsibility. There were no openings for influence from the LA21 actors, since the traditional governmental structure of the energy company could close any policy window for shared responsibilities. On the other hand, broadband was implemented in an open process that included many different actors and there were no clear definitions of how and why the technological changes should take place. This shows that the interdependence of actors can take very different forms irrespective of organizational structures.

Broadband was established through governance, were governmental actors also participated. The private actors were used to contracting and consulting and thereby simply integrated into the governance model. The quick establishment of broadband in Sweden can be explained by the open governance approach involving many different actors with similar ambitions and understanding of local conditions. The agreements between municipal company and market actors soon created a quasi-market. There was no need to superior coordination of resources and decision-making and implementation were distributed into different organizations. Thus the elaborations accountability was never aggregated and related to general policy making. Accountability was thus clarified through contracts and negotiations among included actors. However, no general political accountability was defined since the governance approach closed the opening for the government to act authoritarian.

The more closed government structure regarding energy in the municipal company restrained cooperation and openness towards changes. Thus the LA21 initiatives and its meanings were

excluded from implementation in municipal company's government organisation. Accountability could first be reached when they agree on the content of the policy (increased or decreased energy consumption) and who (the municipal council or the company) should be governing. In this case there was not just asymmetric information but also completely asymmetric interpretations of their obligations of the actors. There was no common policy aim that could be evaluated. Thus there were no openings for neither professional nor political accountability, nor any contracts among the parties.

ACCOUNTABILITY AN ISSUE OF WHO GOVERNS WHAT – CONCLUDING REMARKS

First we will point at the importance of understanding who is governing what is characterizing the policy field to be able to interpret who is accountable for what. The increased use of partnerships and governance steering has to be followed by a more profound understanding of accountability. It is essential to highlight and actually make clear policy statements regarding why a specific approach of steering and organisation is chosen for a local policy issue. If the presumptions of who is governing what is clarified also accountability will be made easier.

Since there is always more or less mixes of governance and government in public policy one has to be aware of the implications of such mixes. We saw in the energy case that when governmental bodies participate in governance their accountability is still based on political concerns in relation to their electorate and on professional grounds in relation to the public administration. Contracts among actors in governance structures could open for accountability on political as well as professional grounds depending on how the contracts are formulated. There is a potential for developing contracting to improve the elements of accountability.

Our analysis also indicates that the increasing influence of governance in general have to turn the focus of accountability from “who” into “what”. The energy sector is an example of such changes. Thus the energy system will face other and new problems regarding accountability, probably more similar to these emerging in the broadband system, when deregulation and market approached increases governance. The legitimacy of the policy area depends on the stakeholders’ ability to handle these changes.

Each and every local policy issue has to be elucidated regarding who governs what, but in the twin process of increased localism and globalism this will be an even more complicated issue. Local policy making bodies (governments and more) will be accountable for risks and actions far beyond their primarily action spaces. Global discourses – as Agenda 21 and Internet access – are given meanings through their local appearance and use, the governance steering has to relate local policy contexts.

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