Organization theory, public administration, democratic governance

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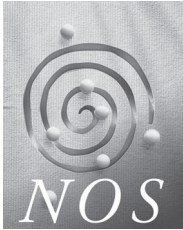University of Oslo
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SCANDINAVIANS – HOW SPECIAL?

Some clever person has argued that any group of people can be divided into two: those who believe that any group can be divided into two, and those who don't. Given the importance of the fourfold table in the discipline, one could assume that a political scientist such as me would support the idea that scholars of organization can be divided into Scandinavians and the rest of the world. There have also been attempts to portray a special Scandinavian way of doing organizational research (Czarniawska and Sevón 2003). Yet the huge variance in approaches to organizational studies both within and outside Scandinavia makes such a claim difficult to defend. It would also be surprising if internationally well-connected scholars such as the Scandinavians were to develop an approach completely different from that of their international colleagues.[1]

I do, nevertheless, believe that scholarly work to some degree reflects where authors come from geographically, and that over the last few decades there have been strands of organizational research that have had a more central place in Scandinavia than in the international mainstream. I will in particular call attention to what, with a little generosity, may be called "the Bergen approach." This is an organization theory-based approach to the study of

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public administrative behavior, institutions and developments in the context of democratic governance. The approach combines an interest in the preconditions and consequences of different administrative forms and processes with an interest in theories of democracy, assuming that an improved understanding of public administration is essential to a comprehension of political and societal life in general.

The following should be read as personal reflections made within a frame of time (at the colloquium) and space (in this journal) that render impossible any ambition of covering all contributions to "the Bergen approach." I apologize for leaving out local administration and governance. I am also aware that my focus upon one of several strands of research following up the original program may invite fair criticism that I am giving too much weight to developments that I have been involved in myself. I proceed in the following manner: First the international and local contexts of the "Bergen approach" are outlined. Then the program's foundational ideas are presented, followed by a discussion of some key theoretical ideas and controversies. Finally, the question of whether the program is still alive and kicking is addressed.

THE INTERNATIONAL CONTEXT

During the 1960s there was great international optimism concerning the future of organization theory. There were competing voices, but the rational-instrumental conception of formal organizations had a strong position. Organizations were then seen as instruments for making and implementing rational decisions – a conception celebrating the will, understanding and control of organizational actors, or rather, of organizational leaders.

Formal organizations were portrayed as a special type of organized context, different from other forms of social organization, such as families, neighborhoods, social groups and classes. More often than not, "organization" meant a Weberian bureaucracy, and a key concern was to improve the understanding of how organizational structures and processes contributed to performance. Two ideas were of special importance:

- "The formal structure of the organization is the single most important key to its functioning." (Perrow 1986: 260)
- formal organizations are malleable instruments for leaders, "consciously planned, deliberately constructed and restructured." (Etzioni 1964: 3)

The conception of leaders as (means-end) rational actors and formal organizations as instruments generating purposeful, coherent, consistent and efficient action had much in common with the 1960s' view in Scandinavia of policy-making as a strategic activity and planning and social engineering as

key processes in improving society and building a welfare state. Both planning theory and organization theory embraced deliberate organizational and institutional design and reform. Actors were assumed to:

- *know what they wanted.* That is, actors were assumed to have clear, consistent and stable objectives or normative criteria over the time period studied. These criteria were supposed to define tasks, performance failure, improvement, and progress.
- *understand what it takes to achieve their objectives.* That is, organizational form was assumed to be a significant determinant of performance, and actors were assumed to know how alternative organizational forms affect performance.
- *have the authority, power and resources needed to achieve desired results.* Choices made by organizational/political actors were assumed to be the most important determinants of organizational form.

In spite of parallel agendas and shared assumptions, organization theory and political theory have, nevertheless, been in a state of mutual disregard for years, not seeing each other as particularly relevant, interesting, or important. A standard complaint from political science has been that generic models of formal organization have not taken into account the specific properties of governmental and political organizations and the specific influence of political-democratic environments (Olsen 1991). Using standard handbooks of organizations as an indicator, the two fields have also moved away from each other, rather than coming closer since the 1960s (March 1965, Nystrom and Starbuck 1981, Clegg, Hardy and Nord 1996).[2]

The decoupling of organization theory, public administration and democratic governance occurred in spite of the fact that leading scholars of formal organizations, such as Herbert A. Simon and James G. March, held degrees in political science, and contrary to the aspirations during the post-WW II period of bringing the fields closer together. Arguably, Norwegian scholars of formal organizations have, more than the research reports in mainstream international organization journals, continued to work on the relations between organization theory, public administration and democratic governance (March 1997). By relating their work to some enduring issues in the study of public administration and democratic governance, they have also called attention to problematic aspects of the rational-instrumental assumptions of the dominant organizational models.

THE BERGEN CONTEXT

Let me first briefly mention some personnel and organizational and financial conditions making "the Bergen approach" possible:

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- *Knut D. Jacobsen, who founded public administration as an academic dis-cipline in Norway when he moved from Oslo to Bergen at the end of the 1960s and brought several of his former students with him.* Jacobsen, who may not be very well known outside Scandinavia, was the entrepreneur and motivator.
- *The cooperation with James G. March since 1968.* This cooperation has been of crucial importance for developments in Bergen and in the Nordic countries in general. The argument for a "Bergen approach" can only be upheld if March is considered an honorary Norwegian and Bergenese, as he, of course, is.
- *A high-quality academic context in Bergen with exposure to world-class standards.* The social science milieu included leading international schol-ars such as Stein Rokkan in comparative politics and Fredrik Barth in an-thropology. There were many "star" visitors from abroad, and Bergen at-tracted a number of young, ambitious scholars.
- *Strong growth at the University of Bergen at the end of the 1960s and first part of the 1970s.*
- *Funding that allowed a long-term planning perspective, including the possi-bility of center-building and research programs of up to 10 years' duration.*
- *A fairly widespread belief in the benefits of team-work.*

THE START

The ambition of the research program initiated by Jacobsen was to link or-ganizational and substantive aspects of administrative-political life by using an organization theory-based approach to public administration, democratic governance, professions, their clients and organized groups. This was to be done by studying how public administration is organized, how it works, how administrative institutions are maintained or changed, the preconditions for different forms and processes, and their consequences for policy outcomes and for the life chances of individuals and social groups.

The program borrowed March and Simon's ideas about organizational decision-making and bounded rationality, Weber's conception of bureauc-racy and bureaucratization as part of large-scale historical transformations towards modernity, Easton's analysis of political systems, Gross' work on so-cial indicators, and ideas from scholars of formal organizations and public administration such as Blau, Crozier, Etzioni, Mayntz, Perrow, Scharpf, Scott, Selznick, and James Thompson. Norwegian colleagues in law and sociology of law, organizations and professions, primarily Aubert, Christie, Eckhoff, Lysgaard, Løchen and Mathisen, were also a source of inspiration, in partic-ular for the analysis of the interface between public administration, profes-sions and their clients (se also Bleiklie et al. 1985).
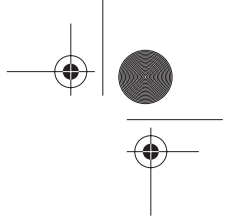
The *Credo* was that public administration acts in organized contexts characterized by complex and not easily reconcilable expectations with regard to which values, norms and interests should be given priority. Administrators are supposed to attend to the demands made by democratically elected governments; the *Rechtstaat's* requirements of a neutral and impartial administration, due process and the rule of law; professional claims for autonomy based on expertise; and organized client groups' expectations that their welfare should be accommodated. One result of this is that public administration is given discretion and becomes an active participant in the preparation, formulation, implementation and enforcement of public policy. In turn, properties of the staff, their institutional roles, and the institutional frameworks within which they act impact how discretion is used. These factors influence what is defined as a collective responsibility, how rules, norms and situations are interpreted, how tasks are defined and solved, and which individuals and groups are to benefit from public programs.

Consistent with the behavioral revolution in political science, the program expressed skepticism to public law's formal-legal concept of public administration and government. The behaviors of administrative staffs were assumed to be influenced by, but not determined by, laws and formal-legal rules. Scholars of public administration had to go beyond describing administrative-political institutions on the basis of their legal status and also go beyond the liberal-democratic assumption that public administration is perfectly governed by omnipotent legislatures. Consistent with ideas about bounded rationality, the program expressed skepticism to models inspired by economics, assuming omniscient rational actors. Administrators had to be perceived as less-than-perfect calculation machines, possibly following other forms of rationality than simple means-end rationality. One implication of this was that it became imperative to study in detail the organizational properties, standard operating procedures and actual practices of the "living institutions" within which policies are formulated, executed and enforced.

Scholars of public administration, furthermore, could not look solely at the internal organizational properties of public administration. They had to understand how public administration adapts to and influences political and societal change, and to attend to possible consequences of the shifting relations between public administration, elected politicians, professional colleagues and experts, courts of law, and client groups. In particular they had to analyze how the role of public administration is affected by changing power distribution and shifting levels of societal conflict. For example, it was hypothesized that in time periods and sectors characterized by consensus and harmony there would be a tendency to delegate discretion and power to administrators and experts. In periods of increasing tension and conflict there

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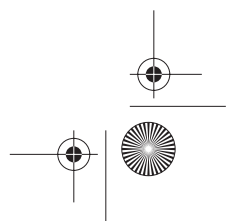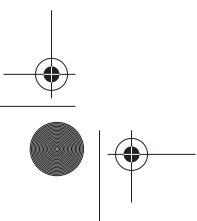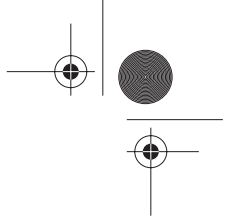
would be a tendency towards political mobilization and concentration of power in democratically elected institutions (Jacobsen 1964).

It is beyond the scope of this paper to summarize how different elements of the research program have developed and what the main insights have been.[3] Attention is limited to some theoretical ideas and controversies relevant to the program. Organization theory, public administration and democratic governance all involve human action in formally organized settings. Different approaches, however, make different assumptions about human actors – their will, understanding and capacity for social control – and about the nature of "living" administrative-political institutions and how they function and evolve.

THE TROUBLESOME "R"S

In the following it is argued that the Bergen approach typifies a *communal* conception of democratic governance, celebrating the sovereign demos as a corporation of equal citizens, while more recent administrative reforms typify an *individualistic* conception, celebrating the autonomous individual (Olsen 1990). Both conceptions contain elements of instrumental action, yet they interpret action within formally organized settings differently and assign different importance and explanatory power to political institutions. The communal conception understands a democratic polity and society as a configuration of fairly enduring institutions, rules and roles. The individualistic conception sees political and social life as organized around the interaction of a collection of autonomous individual actors pursuing prior preferences by calculating future outcomes (March and Olsen 1989, 1995). The co-existence and historical tensions between the two can be illustrated by some troublesome "R"s: rationality and reason, rules and roles, randomness, responsibility and responsiveness, resources, reforms, and results.

Rationality and reason

Historically, great diversity in human motivation and logics of action has been observed. Actions have been seen as driven by habit, emotion, coercion, formal-legal rules and calculated expected utility (Weber 1978). In the context of modern formal organizations, rational actor models have played an important role. Yet, the basic ideas of "bounded rationality," assuming that people are acting upon simple models of the world, have gradually influenced large parts of organizational research, as well as economics and other social sciences (March 1992).

Within an individualistic perspective, bounded rationality has usually been treated as another set of constraints upon the calculation of expected utility and a "logic of consequentiality." Within a communal perspective there has been a more fundamental change, as a "logic of appropriateness"
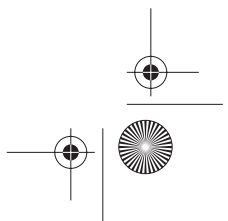
has come to supplement or replace a logic of consequentiality. Formally or-
ganized political organizations, institutions and systems of governance have
been seen to provide a context where most of the time behavior is rule-
driven, that is, governed by routinized, experience-based standard operating
procedures defining what is normal, acceptable, reasonable and appropriate.
Actors are then enacting rules embedded in the duties and obligations of in-
stitutional, professional and group identities and roles (March and Olsen
1989, 2006 a,b). The concepts of communicative rationality and delibera-
tion (Habermas 1996) have also reminded scholars of formal organizations
that there is more to human intelligence than a good means-end under-
standing. In brief, *rationality*, as an individual process of calculating ex-
pected utility, has (again) been challenged by *reason* based upon social proc-
esses, defining and interpreting what are reasonable ends and means within
a community and culture.

An implication of the "rediscovery" of the diversity of human logics of ac-
tion is that theories of formal organization, public administration and dem-
ocratic governance are more likely to be helpful if they take into account a
repertoire of possible logics of action than if they *a priori* assume a single
dominant behavioral logic. Theories are also more likely to be helpful if they
view the character of actors as variable and flexible and not universal and
constant. Furthermore, theories are more likely to be helpful if they take into
account that different conceptions of actors are linked to different concep-
tions of organizational and institutional structures.

Rules and roles

Administrative-political life has, through the ages, taken place in a diversity
of organized structures, types of collectivities and social relationships. In
modern society, however, special attention has been given to properties of
formally organized structures. Typically, such structures have been under-
stood differently within different research traditions.

Within an individualistic perspective, rules, roles and structures are usu-
ally seen as external to human actors, providing an opportunity and incentive
structure affecting the calculation of expected utility. Administrative-politi-
cal organization enables and constrains actors differently, and the challenge
for practicians is "to get the incentives right" in order to achieve desirable
outcomes. Within a communal perspective, it is assumed that rules and roles
are internalized. This view harks back to the old idea that citizens and officials
may, through intellectual and moral education, inculcate and become carri-
ers of a sense of political community, civic virtue and loyalty to the common
good. Structures are then seen as legitimate, and citizens feel an obligation to
obey laws and policies produced through appropriate processes. Socializing
actors, recruiting actors with desirable dispositions, and disciplining actors
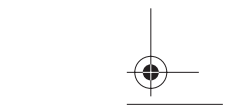
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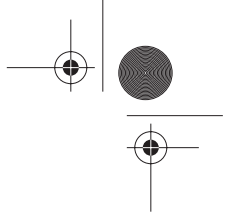
through structural means, are mechanisms that may supplement each other (Lægreid and Olsen 1978).
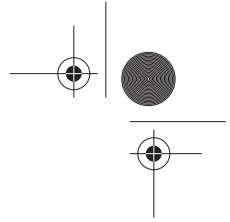
In contrast to the currently popular idea of a world dominated by post-bureaucratic and post-hierarchical organizations, networks and markets, it can be observed that even moderately complex polities use a repertoire of organizational structures. Hierarchies, rule-, bargaining- and expert systems, networks and markets co-exist and have all had their ups and downs of popularity. An implication is that scholars of formal organizations, public administration and democratic governance need to understand how to differentiate between organizational structures, institutions and orders. What are their key characteristics? Are they applied under different circumstances and for different tasks and objectives? How do different forms interact, supplement each other or compete? Consider first the relevance of fairly open organizational structures and weakly institutionalized settings.

Randomness

Formal organization signals rationality, control, order and predictability. Scholars of public administration and government in action, however, have observed that administrative-political life may be more or less structured. In some contexts activities are organized around well-defined boundaries, common rules and practices, shared causal and normative understandings, and resources adequate for collective action. In other contexts the system is relatively anarchic. Relations are less orderly, boundaries less well-defined, and institutions less common, less adequately supported, and less involved (March and Olsen 1998: 943–44). In such contexts, characterized by open structures, ambiguous goals, badly understood means-end relations, and unstable participation and social control, one may observe a fortuitous flowing together of actors, problems, solutions and decision opportunities due to their coinciding arrival. Random, situational events and a logic of temporal sorting may then come to dominate the logic of consequentiality and the logic of appropriateness (Cohen, March and Olsen 1972, 2007, March and Olsen 1976, 1989).

An implication is that conceptions of "structure" cannot be limited to tightly organized arrangements. We have to include more "open" or "anarchic" structures, in particular because contemporary organizations confront internal and external environments that differ from those assumed by traditional organizational models. Organizations face not only a risk society with tractable probability distribution, but also unique events and fundamental uncertainty. A limited understanding of "the generators of reality" gives a weak basis for probabilistic calculation, and history creates great punctuations in our conceptions of political life and in our faith in existing theories, methods and assumptions (Blyth 2006). Within an individualistic perspec-

tive, individuals are likely to make attempts to adapt to chance events in order to achieve personal gain. Within a communal perspective, the most likely response is the use of an existing standard operating procedure or attempts to improvise collective arrangements in order to gain better control. Chance elements and chaotic processes then challenges traditional conceptions of responsibility, responsiveness, and accountability.

Responsibility and responsiveness

The concept of organizational accountability as a formalized relation and process has gradually been supplemented with, and even replaced by, the wider and more diffuse concepts of responsibility and responsiveness. The latter refers to being accountable, in the sense of having to explain and justify one's behavior and performance, not only in relation to hierarchical orders, constitutions, and laws, but also being responsible in a moral sense and responsive to citizens' needs and expectations.

Making office-holders accountable is a basic concern in the study of formal organization, public administration and democratic governance, but the concept is typically perceived differently within different research traditions. In an individualistic perspective, autonomous actors are seen to make choices and are regarded as responsible for the consequences of their decisions. In principal-agent relations, attempts to ensure responsibility include monitoring behavior, measuring performance, rewarding compliance, and sanctioning deviance from rules and contracts. Control mechanisms include legislative, judicial and administrative supervision, institutional checks and balances, ombudsmen, citizens' direct participation, and exposure to competition. Responsiveness is primarily society-centered, and implies attention to customers and clients and the ability to discover and accommodate market signals. A communal perspective tends to put more emphasis upon an internalized sense of collective responsibility and responsiveness towards shared institutions, principles, standards, and procedures. Responsibility and responsiveness are defined as part of being a citizen and a member of a democratic community. During normal times, trust based on established social relations and experiences makes monitoring of performance and continuous control less central (Behn 2001).

The tension between hierarchical responsibility and accountability, on the one hand, and responsiveness to customers, clients and participatory networks, on the other, has for quite some time been an important theme in the public administration literature. The observed significance of randomness and a logic of temporal sorting further complicate the discussion. Normative democratic theory prescribes that actors should not be made responsible for events they can not control or influence. An implication is that the more an organizational setting is characterized by complex interactions, interdepend-

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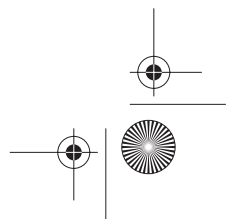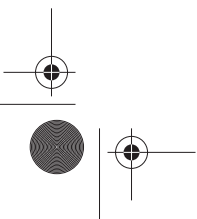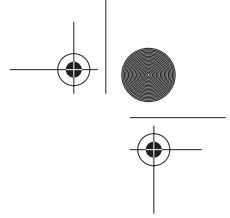
encies, ambiguous compromises and chance elements (rather than clear and consistent goals, commands or rules), the more there will be multiple and fuzzy responsibility relations. And the more difficult it is to disentangle the influence of a single actor or institution, the more likely it is that the concepts of responsibility and accountability will lose much of their traditional content. Democratic responsibility, responsiveness and accountability, therefore, are closely linked to the distribution of relevant resources and to whether actors control resources that make it possible for them to act adequately on relevant preferences or rules of appropriate behavior.
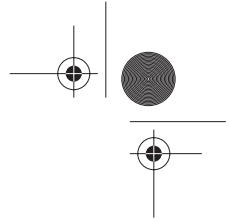
Resources

Capacity for action and what different actors can accomplish depend on organization and how different forms of organization distribute resources. "Bureaucracy" and "democracy," for instance, imply norms for arranging authority, power and resources (e.g. in terms of legal competence, staffs and budgets) that enable and constrain different actors differently. Resources are, however, held by individuals and societal groups as well as being embedded in common institutions. The balance between public and private resources is also a contested issue in normative democratic theory, with an individualistic perspective emphasizing the primacy of private resources and a communal perspective giving priority to resources embedded in common institutions. How the actual public-private power balance can best be described is also contested.

With roots in Weber, "the bureaucracy" is sometimes portrayed as the servants of elected politicians. At other times, bureaucrats are described as the masters of politicians, the servants of a ruling class or some organized societal group, or the carriers of expertise or constitutional rules and principles. Democracies struggle to maintain public administrations that are vigorous yet responsible and responsive, and the importance of having a professional or full-time administrative staff to protect one's interests and values has been acknowledged. Public programs are based upon different assumptions about what citizens are able and willing to do, and the more a program assumes that the citizens involved are informed, resourceful and active, the less likely it is that individuals with few personal or group resources will benefit as much as more resourceful groups (Jacobsen 1964, 1965).

Clearly, the liberal-democratic vision of the legislature as the center of political authority and power, on the grounds that legislative authority is derived from the people through electoral institutions, is hardly telling the whole story about resources, capabilities and capacities in democratic welfare states. Rather, "votes count but resources decide," and studies of numerical democracy have to be supplemented by studies of the institutional arrangements of "corporative pluralism" (Rokkan 1966) and the many "channels" between cit-

izens and public authorities (Olsen 1983). While citizens try to influence public administration and government through many channels, public authorities try to balance the wish to involve those affected by policies with the wish to avoid letting administrative agencies be captured by well-organized groups.

An implication is that studies of actors' motivation and "models of the world" must be supplemented by detailed studies of their capabilities and capacities (March and Olsen 1995: Chapter 4). It can not always be decided *a priori* who are principals and agents, and there is a need to study more or less successful attempts to mobilize and institutionalize resources and capabilities. Studies are needed to define which resources can be legitimately used in which institutional contexts, and studies are also needed of the interaction of individual, group and institutional resources. Examples are how the impacts of public policies are affected by an uneven distribution of individual and group resources, and how the use of public resources may both intensify and counteract the importance of private resources. One possible area in which such studies could be carried out is that of administrative reform attempts in different institutional contexts.

Reform and robustness
Administrative-political life achieves and loses structure over time, and the nature of the societal order changes in a variety of ways. The basic units are constituted and reconstituted, and so are their relationships (March and Olsen 1998: 943–44). It is less obvious through which processes institutions are established, maintained, changed and abandoned. Normative democratic theory assumes that citizens and their elected leaders can design and reform institutions at will. In organization theory it is also commonplace to see structures as stemming from reflection and choice. However, it has not always been assumed that actors simply choose structures. For centuries the question has been asked: What *is* the role of human intention, reflection and choice in the development of administrative-political institutions? To what extent and under what conditions is form of government a matter of choice (Hamilton, Jay and Madison 1787, 1964:1, Mill 1861, 1962:1)?

Over the last two to three decades, many administrative reform attempts have been framed within an individualistic perspective. Increased flexibility and adaptability have been key concerns, and change has taken place. Many reformers have, however, rediscovered the old tension between wanting flexibility and adaptability, on the one hand, and stability and predictability, on the other. They have also been reminded about a lesson from a communal and institutional perspective: that well-entrenched institutions during normal times have some robustness. History is "inefficient," in the sense that institutions do not adapt rapidly and costlessly to deliberate reforms or environmental changes (March and Olsen 1989). It has also been observed that

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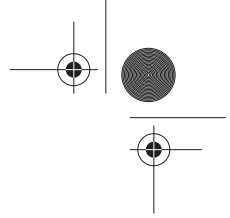
competitive selection, deliberation, experiential learning and adaptation, diffusion and copying others are, like design and reform, usually less than perfect processes. They do not guarantee improved functional performance and increased survival value under all conditions.

The reform literature suggests that the importance of reflection and structural choice varies across institutional contexts, and that change is rarely dominated by a single process. Often several processes interact in complicated ways, making it difficult to specify precisely the conditions under which each process is likely to work as assumed in textbooks. An implication is that attention has to be directed towards ecologies of internal and external change processes and their interaction, rather than viewing different processes as exclusive alternatives. A distinction can be made between changing formal rules and incentives and changing organizational identities and cultures; and between changing formal structures and achieving intended substantive results by changing structures. A hypothesis is that the capability to change formal structures, rules and incentives is usually more developed than the ability to change identities and cultures; and that the capability to change formal structures is more developed than the ability to achieve intended substantive results through reorganization.

Results

The idea that formal organization matters in administrative-political affairs is rarely contested today. There is less agreement when it comes to what kinds of effects are important and what consequences follow from different organizational forms. A major distinction is between (1) those who primarily see results in terms of what difference administrative-political structures and processes have for policy outcomes, economy and efficiency, and who-gets-what-when-and-how; and (2) those who see results in terms of how administrative-political structures and processes affect the kinds of persons who are selected and formed, and how political community, ties, cohesion, loyalties and trust are developed, maintained and lost.

Scholars working within an individualistic perspective usually perceive formally organized institutions as instruments for achieving preferred policy outcomes with a minimum use of resources. Scholars working within a communal perspective tend to take more interest in effects upon persons and community. In doing so, they hark back to older theories that gave priority to understanding how different forms of government could help foster desirable moral and intellectual qualities in the members of the community (Mill 1861, 1962: 32).

Within this perspective the development of meaning – a sense of purpose, normative and causal beliefs, identities and belonging – through education and socialization is a process of equal importance to making choices (March and Olsen 1976). Education, training and socialization take place in a variety

of organized settings, for example in administrative agencies as part of on-the-job experience and selective exposure to information, in democratic institutions of government and civil society, and in educational institutions. Therefore, it becomes important to explore in which organizational settings actors learn to become self-seeking calculating egoists, and in which settings they learn empathy, to become law-abiding democrats and consensus- and compromise-seeking citizens and officials. At issue is what kinds of actors are needed for political community and good governance, and what morals, interests, intelligence, and resources are vested in administrative-political institutions in order to fashion democratic citizens and officials and make them voluntarily comply with laws and policies. Under what conditions is it likely that formal organizations become institutionalized, in the sense that they are infused with value beyond the technical requirements of the task at hand (Selznick 1957: 17)?

A research challenge is to explore what factors impact the relative weight given policy results compared with results in terms of effects upon persons and political community. A hypothesis is that in small and homogeneous countries, where actors meet fairly frequently and in several contexts (such as Norway), results in terms of future consensus and community will usually count more than immediate policy benefits.

STILL ALIVE AND KICKING?

Over the last 40 years there have been competing conceptions of formal organization, public administration and democratic governance. Two trends are, however, of special relevance. *First*, the "Bergen approach" was conceived during the heyday of the Scandinavian social-democratic era. Long-term processes of state-building had generated a considerable central administrative capacity for penetrating society, embedded in cultural community (the nation), political community (mass democracy) and socio-economic community (the welfare state) (Rokkan 1999). Since the end of the 1970s this societal model has been challenged, and neo-liberal ideas celebrating individual choice and market exchange have conquered the international center stage. *Second*, and in parallel with the first trend, the belief in a world governed by human will, understanding and control has been impaired, and trust in public planning, foresight and calculation has been replaced by trust in mechanisms such as evaluation, experiential learning and competitive selection.

Does, then, the organization theory-based "Bergen approach" to public administration and democratic governance have any relevance today? Is it likely to help improve our understanding of how administrative-political life is organized, how it works, what consequences it produces, and how formally organized institutions are maintained and changed in democratic contexts? Doubts have been raised as to whether the program is still alive and kicking,
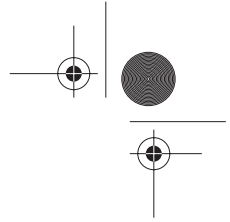
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and whether a new Norwegian research program can bring the field forward by combining an interest in public administration with a concern for democratic governance (Hernes 2004).

This skepticism can draw support from three international trends. *First*, the global triumph of market ideology has almost made "organization" synonymous with private enterprise in competitive markets, and models of administrative-political actors have increasingly been borrowed from economics. New public management-inspired administrative reforms, for example, portray administrative leaders as entrepreneurs and service providers, and citizens as consumers (Christensen and Lægreid 2001). The transfer of the professional basis of organization theory to business schools (March, forthcoming) has probably also contributed to the mutual alienation of organization theory and political science. *Second*, there has been an international "rejuridification" of politics. For example, in the European Union, with its strong public law tradition, administrative-political structures are usually described in formal-legal terms. Even political scientists often accept legal institutional descriptions as a proxy for "living institutions," generating a *déjà vu* experience for those of us who witnessed the behavioral revolution in political science 40 years ago. *Third*, the distinction between formal organization and social organization in general has, possibly, become less clear-cut, and a sociological perspective suggests a society-centered view of organizations more than a focus upon formally organized political institutions. The 22nd EGOS Colloquium – "The Organizing Society" – may illustrate this trend, arguably as part of a general development in studies of organizations and organizing (Clegg, Hardy and Nord 1996).

Whether there has actually been an abdication of democratic governance and a retreat from formally organized administrative-political institutions, or just a repositioning, is unclear. The claims that "the average citizen seems to find the exercise of political rights burdensome, boring, and often lacking in significance," and that citizens tend to underestimate the value of political community, are far from new (Wolin 1960: 353). Nor is there much new in the claim that public authorities are dependent on resources controlled by social groups, and that hierarchical public authority is therefore impossible. Democracies have always been dependent on the laws and policies that strong societal groups have been willing to accept. Yet, it is also likely that public policies, administrative-political organization and government in the foreseeable future will impact our lives in significant ways. The Scandinavian model of society has recently had a renaissance in Europe, at least at the verbal level; and is it not inconceivable, either, that the virtues of competent, impartial and non-corrupt Weberian bureaucracies will be rediscovered (Olsen 2006).

My interpretation of recent administrative-political developments is *not* that there has been an inevitable and irreversible move from democratic pol-

itics to markets and from social-democratic welfare states to neo-liberal *laissez faire*. Often new structures and procedures have been added to old arrangements rather than replacing them, making administrative-political systems more complex. There has also been a re-balancing of two co-existing traditions of democratic governance – one communal, the other individualistic. The autonomous individual tradition emphasizes individual freedom, rational choice and voluntary exchange in the pursuit of self-interest; structures as based upon external incentives and arrangements for monitoring and enforcing laws and contracts; random events as occasions for possible individual adaptation and gain; individual responsibility and responsiveness; resources as primarily in private hands; deliberate reform as structural choice; and results in terms of individual substantive gains and costs, usually also seen as generating socially beneficial outcomes by its advocates.

The sovereign people, communal tradition emphasizes collective reason and a logic of appropriateness consistent with collective identities; structures as based upon internalized principles, shared beliefs and trust; random events as occasions for collective response; responsibility as collective; resources as organized around common institutions; deliberate reform as time-consuming and difficult to achieve, in particular when reform plans challenge key identities and what citizens think is true and morally right; and results in terms of impacts upon existing commitments to community, civic virtue and the common good, and the prevention of destructive conflicts.

The conclusion, then, is that while ideas from economics, law, and sociology may contribute to our understanding of administrative-political life, there is also a role to play for an organization theory-based political science approach. Democratic governance poses fundamental organizational questions, and the study of administration, government and politics needs good organization theories. Organization theory may also benefit from taking a serious view of the special characteristics of public administration and democratic governance and politics as a context for understanding formal organization and organizing in general. Balancing the two democratic traditions, including possible future rebalancing acts, typically involves political, and not technical, processes. In this context, the original ideas of the "Bergen approach," as well as later elaborations, are likely to provide important insights.

One possible source of inspiration for further development of the research program is the emerging multi-level and multi-centered political order in Europe, in particular the European Union. One challenge is to study how the new order is organized, how public administration and democratic governance function beyond the territorial nation state, and with what effects (Egeberg 2001, 2006, Jacobsson, Lægreid and Pedersen 2004, Olsen 2007). Another challenge is to explore how interpretations of "democracy" – in terms of shared rights and obligations – are developed in an international context,

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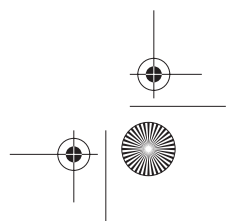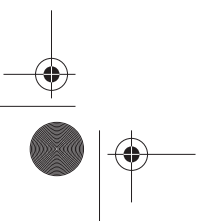
such as the EU, which is characterized by considerable political, socio-eco-
nomic and cultural diversity (Eriksen 2005). Coping with these challenges is
likely to require a repertoire of models of administrative-political actors, in-
stitutions and institutional developments, rather than a single model based
upon a single set of assumptions. The challenge, then, is to specify the organ-
izational settings in which competing models are most likely to be fruitful,
rather than to choose between such models.

NOTES

1. This paper is an expanded version of remarks presented at the 22nd EGOS Colloquium:
The Organizing Society, Bergen, 6–8 July 2006: sub-panel on *Organization Theory: the
Scandinavian Way?* Thanks to Per Lægreid for constructive comments.
2. Looking at it from the public administration angle, however, the index of a recent Hand-
book (Peters and Pierre 2003) has several references to "organizational …" and "organiza-
tion theory."
3. For an overview, see Christensen and Lægreid 1998, 2004. These reviews overlap to some
degree. Yet both are included because the older one has a longer bibliography than the
more updated one.

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