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**Powers behind control: An essay on democracy**

**Peter L. Hupe**

Department of Public Administration  
Erasmus University Rotterdam  
hupe@fsw.eur.nl

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## **Abstract**

In contemporary Western democracies the role of government is not what it used to be. In the public discourse some authors claim to observe a 'relocation of politics', while others speak of a 'democratic deficit' in general. In this essay the relationship between democracy and governance is explored on a macro-level. The argument is that performance in the public domain and the decisions underlying it no longer in a direct way can be traced down to expressions of societal demands. This is because both the relationships between society and democracy and between politics and performance have become looser. In particular, the hierarchical relation between democracy and government has been replaced by a more horizontal pairing of democracy and governance. As the latter has multiple dimensions, entailing a range of activities performed at various spots by a variety of actors, it appears that democracy, as well, cannot appropriately get substance and form in a singular way anymore. Enhancing the visibility of who is involved in the processes leading to public decisions, combined with enlarging possibilities for accountability, 'multi-localisation' provides a conceptual perspective for rethinking contemporary democracy.

## **1. Introduction**

There once was a time in which the representative organs of democracy were seen as firmly anchored in society. In and around these organs, politics functioned as the intermediary process between society and government. The realisation of the collective goals agreed upon was taken care of by political authorities guiding public administration.

Of course this has always been a fairytale. Now, as a mirror image rather a horror scenario sets the tone. In many Western democracies the voting turn out has declined more or less dramatically (Andeweg and Irwin, 2002). Politics is said to be in crisis. The traditional political institutions lack the societal support they used to have. In the news media the leadership qualities of modern statesmen are criticised. According to contemporary observers the state itself has become 'virtual' (Rosecrance, 1996; Frissen, 1996, 1999a) or even 'empty' (Frissen, 1999b).

In this context one of the great issues in the present Western world is what is circumscribed as the 'democratic deficit'. At a general level this notion seems to refer to a shortage of legitimacy in society for what the Executive Power is doing. But in more concrete terms it largely remains unclear what is the nature of the problem. Solutions propagated to address the deficit, such as referendums, therefore particularly seem to be political claims. Objective of this essay is twofold: assessing the characteristics of the perceived democratic deficit and, after that, identifying some principles that may be helpful to address that deficit.

In the second section developments related to the perceived problem are explored. Next, the relocation of power and some ways addressing that phenomenon are exposed (third section). In the fourth section the problem of the democratic deficit is restated; accordingly a few principles are identified from which the restated problem can be addressed. Finally conclusions are drawn (fifth section).

## **2. Postmodernity and beyond**

When one wants to position the perception of the problem of a democratic deficit as well as its backgrounds, it seems sensible to make observations beyond election results and voting turnouts. Contemporary observers have been trying to capture the *Zeitgeist* around the beginning of the third millennium in various catchy concepts, if possible turning them in best-selling monographies. Looking at the literature produces the sight of a range of publications with a varying background: social science, journalism, and novel writing. Without a claim of presenting an exhaustive overview here, a distinction between economical, managerial, sociological, and politics and state focused arguments can be made. A special category is the meta-trends.

The globalisation of markets of products and capital flows is the generally accepted notion stemming from economically oriented essays on contemporary developments.

Goods move all over the world, while money is transferred from behind a computer screen. Observing global financial integration makes O'Brien (1992) speak of 'the end of geography'. In the traditional division of economic sectors the commercial delivery of information-related services has been booming. The number of sorts of communication media has grown, while their impact on the lives of the mass public has become almost unlimited (Gitlin, 2002). The continuous supply of fun and events via such media and of entertainment in general, has become an industry. It makes people behave like actors in the film of their own lives, or even as the directors of it (Gabler, 1998). Thus an entire 'entertainment economy' has arisen (Wolf, 1999).

The first to discover the meaning of image in modern society was Daniel Boorstin (1962). It was him and Marshall McLuhan (1962) stating that the medium was the message who, in fact, conceptualised the possibilities of the commercial use of communications technology. Later, Ritzer with his notion of the 'McDonaldization of society' (19PM) showed the functionality of a modular organisational design as a management tool.

A specific category of exposes about contemporary developments is the one focusing at the meta-level of trends with a trans-global range. The notion of the 'global village' (McLuhan, 1962?; Bauman, 1998) is one of the relatively oldest. The so-called electronic highway, nowadays called the Internet, has literally connected the lives of people to people living at the other side of the world. Frissen (1999a) distinguishes 'transformations' that can be observed on a world scale: horizontalisation, autonomisation, deterritorialisation, and virtualisation. Earlier, Naisbitt and Aburdene presented ten 'mega-trends' visible with an universal scope (1990). They mentioned the changes from an industrial towards an information society; from imposed technology towards technology processing; from a national economy towards a global economy; from a short term orientation towards a long term orientation; from centralisation towards power sharing; from assistance towards self help; from representative democracy towards direct democracy; from hierarchies towards networks; from north towards south; and from limited choice towards multiple choices (Naisbitt and Aburdene, 1990).

While surfing on the world wide web and permanently connected with their mobile phones especially younger people have got used to make many choices in a short time and select what they think is useful for the moment. At school the 'Googlification of education' may lead to the 'Googlification of knowledge' (Vanheste, 2004). This eclectic kind of behaviour can be observed in other domains of life as well. In the category of broad views with a sociological character the notion of a 'network society' in the 'information age' has been widespread (Castells, 1998). Traditional social bonds have lost much of their relevance. Modern citizens act primarily as consumers of goods and services on a market and are addressed correspondingly. The hierarchical influence of Great Institutions as the state, the church, and the father has diminished. Especially the younger generations are seen as having a more cynical attitude towards life: not only goods but also social relations are consummated in a random way (see Douglas Copland's Generation X, 19PM). The habitus of shopping has becoming a general way of approaching one's existence (Fortuin, 2000). Particularly younger people are zapping themselves through life. The 'copy-paste generation', born after 1985, has been raised in a world stuffed with electronics and is used to copying, deleting and replying. Younger people select what they prefer and

thus compose not only their own outfit and compact discs but their entire lives (Van der Velden, 2004).

Also the older generations, however, are not what they used to be. Continuous economic growth after the Second World War has resulted in a higher general level of prosperity, a higher general level of education, a better health and a longer life expectation for many. The number of well to do 'senior citizens' with a good pension and much leisure time has risen, enhancing an entire categorical entertainment industry with a huge marketing potential. In the age segment below that, people in their early fifties, 'self-actualisation is what educated existence is all about' (Brooks, 2000, p. 18). 'Bourgeois bohemians' combine the material wealth they enjoy with the Romantic ideal of artistic self-expression: in their Sports Utility Vehicle they drive to their yoga lessons. As such they can be seen as the new upper class (Brooks, 2000). They, but they not only, enjoy a relatively stable existence that produces a limited sets of excitements and accordingly a chronic, slumbering feeling of discontentment. Therefore constantly new thrills are sought, though within a controlled setting. Boutellier (2002) speaks of the 'culture of the bungee jumper', seeking a utopia of safety.

Seemingly more directly related to the democratic deficit are the treatises about the contemporary state of politics and the politics of the contemporary state. After the fall of the Berlin Wall Fukuyama (1992) could write about the perceived ideological victory of liberal democracy. Guehenno (1993, p. 8) stated: 'The year 1989 marks the end of the era of the nation-states' (see also Ohmae, 1995). In this postmodern condition not only the end of history could be proclaimed, but the *raison d'état* literally had ceased to exist, it seemed. The state was said to be 'virtual' or even 'empty' and could afford it merely to be so (Rosecrance, 1996; Frissen, 1999a, 1999b). But, again, the times were changing soon already. Crevelde (1996), military historian, warned that the claim of the state for its monopoly of the use of violence was contested by small, radical groups and this would be more so in the near future.

Though far from comprehensive, this overview of arguments about 'universal' trends provides a background for our focussing on the democratic deficit. At stake in these arguments are various ways of *Zeitgeist*-watching. Most of the contributions are eye opening, often well written and certainly inviting for reflection. Sometimes they are based on data, but not always is explicitly made clear in which way these data are used as evidence and empirical basis for the argument. Catching the broad lines about phenomena perceived as contemporary trends seems what authors here are aiming at, rather than, for instance, middle-range theory formation and the *ceteris paribus* testing of hypotheses. In some cases this means that, obviously, at least the evidence is contradictory. On a world scale, the proclaimed end of the nation-state, for instance, rather seems a political claim than that it is unambiguously proved on the basis of empirical evidence. The importance of regional economies, opposite of 'globalisation', and the pushing power of certain nation states behind it makes Weiss on the basis of empirical research speak of the 'myth of the powerless state' (Weiss, 1998). Another idea, generally accepted in certain member-countries of the European Union, is that 'Brussels' produces many new rules and regulations for the nation states. Both De Jong and Herweijer (2004) and Bovens and Yesilkagit (2004) prove empirically that the influence of the EU administration on the level of regulations is less than usually expected. Though the findings of these two researches about the

number of new rules and regulations in a country like The Netherlands stemming from policy decisions in the European Union differ, they underline the ambiguity of data on the idea of great “Brussels’ influence”. It is this ambiguity that makes Van Schendelen (2004) warn for replacing one myth by another.

Yet, even a fiction may fulfil functions. Therefore it particularly is worthwhile to explore the idea that power has fled away from national government more in detail, as well as some remedies presented for that ‘relocation of power’.

### **3. The empty looks of the centre**

*The relocation of politics (Bovens et al., 1995)*

In 1995 the think tank of the Dutch Labour Party published a 61 pages report called ‘The relocation of politics’. In this ‘pamphlet’ (p. 11) Mark Bovens and four co-authors wanted to give a description of the contemporary problems of democracy. They argue that there still is a democratic deficit, but not as much in ‘The Hague’: political power and political struggle partly have moved to elsewhere. ‘More than ever the debate and decision making about important developments in society take place outside the traditional arenas: in the main offices of large international corporations; within consultation organs and during negotiations between civil servants; in the corridors of European and other supra-national organizations; in the national and international courts; in research departments, hospitals, and laboratories’ (p. 13 – translation PH). The authors identify six directions of the relocation of politics away from Westminster or the Binnenhof. Internationalisation means that many decision-making and rule making has been relocated towards the European Union. ‘The relocation of political power, as far as Europe is concerned, not yet has led to a proportional relocation of political accountability and control’ (p. 14). Regionalism implies an ongoing decentralisation of tasks towards local government. Bureaucratisation means that Cabinet members more and more come into play in the end stage of the political process: a relocation towards intra-civil service committees has taken place. Growing technocracy, a relocation of power towards organisations in society, implies, for instance, that actors without an explicit mandate and on grounds that are unclear often make decisions about environmental and safety risks. Individualisation refers to the emancipation of citizens in their relations with institutions: the relocation towards the private domain. Expanding juridicracy, finally, means the relocation of politics towards the Judicial Power.

Bovens et al. observe a loss of relevance of the traditional, representative organs, which may even lead to an undermining of the democratic *Rechtsstaat*. They confront these developments with two normative principles that they call social-democratic. The first one is that the exercise of power has to go along with accountability. The second principle is that the exercise of power should not be restricted to a social elite. Power sharing and the protection of those without social power therefore are seen as an essential element of the social character of the *Rechtsstaat*. Confronting reality with the latter two normative principles produces a problem then, because ‘the relocation of politics in many cases particularly entails a relocation of societal power; rather than, or not yet, a relocation of democratic control’ (p. 21). What Bovens et al.

call the ‘problem of the many hands’ here means that in the public domain many organisations are active and also a variety of actors is involved in policy processes. This situation makes it very difficult for citizens and other outsiders to state ‘who to which extent can be addressed about the outcomes’ (p. 22).

The authors see three strategies to deal with this situation. They speak of the ‘parliamentary-democratic way’, the possibility of the democratisation of other societal arenas, and the creation of new forms of public debate and decision-making. As far as the latter is concerned Bovens et al. refer to the concept of ‘horizontal governance’ in which government and parliament on the one hand and private organisations on the other are living apart together and practise partnership (Huysse, w. y.).

Despite of the formal status of the report the notion of the relocation of (in fact) power as introduced by Bovens and his co-authors has been quite influential in the public discourse about politics and administration in the Netherlands. And also the remedy they propagate with their three ‘strategies for ‘democratic renewal’ can be traced in the follow up of that discourse. Without any claim on exhaustiveness three later publications can be addressed here, each of which in its own way, actually, presents an elaboration of the three strategies, in the order presented.

*Back to the political centre (the Kohnstamm Committee, 2004)*

The present Balkenende Cabinet in The Netherlands in 2003 asked a committee formed around Jacob Kohnstamm, former deputy minister of the Interior, to give advice how to deal with so called quasi-autonomised organisations (quango’s). Main conclusion of the Committee is that the expectations in the past years aimed at with the autonomisation of government tasks have not been realised. ‘The problems have become greater because it was not a well-circumscribed task but especially the organisation that was placed at a distance. This has led to the structurally returning discussion: “Is this something the minister has formal competence about, or not?” (Kohnstamm Report, 2004, p. 6 – translation PH).

The Committee states that the Dutch state system is based on the principle of *no authority exercised without accountability*. This means that all exercise of power goes hand in hand with holding oneself accountable: authorities always are to be addressed for what they do and not do. Confronted with the empirical situation sketched above, on the basis of this principle the Committee pleads for a restoration of the primacy of ministerial responsibility. Again it must become possible for Parliament to hold members of the Cabinet accountable for the way in which tasks belonging to government are being fulfilled. ‘It should not be necessary to maintain all autonomised organisations. In principle government must be able to fulfil government tasks within its own organisation’ (p. 8). ‘The founding or maintaining of a quasi-autonomous organisation often is a proof of the inability of national government to let political control and the performance of public tasks go hand in hand’ (p. 9). To realise this – again new – situation a ‘turn around’ is necessary (p. 7).

*Ahead to the election of sectoral appointees (In ‘t Veld and Kruiter, 2002)*

The present system of representative democracy is bankrupt, Roeland in 't Veld and Albert Jan Kruiter (2002) state in a substantive newspaper article. The present representative organs and their members lack any form of vitality. Modern citizens are at least as competent as their (formerly) 'noble representative who provides surplus'. Internet enables direct communication as well as mass customisation. Besides, there no longer is a one-dimensional territorial basis. And, finally, because the value patterns of citizens have become fragmented, an overarching weighing of interests no longer is possible.

So a radical form of democratic renewal is abolishing these organs and with that, the principle of representation itself. In the view of In 't Veld and Kruiter democracy without representation is a better alternative, because policy formation can take place in an interactive form, while no representatives are needed. Second, implementation requires checks and oversight, but no representation. And third, inspectors and market masters can be elected directly, while thus acceptable checks and balances are being created. In a situation of value fragmentation interactive policy making more acknowledges the characteristics of that situation than decision making via representation. In fields like education, care, police, the direct election of executive authorities may enhance political passion, In 't Veld and Kruiter claim. In this way not only implementation but also the external checks on it can be made democratically accountable. Only two layers then suffice for general representation. An elected General Audit checks the elected Cabinet. At the local layer the Committees of Mayor and Aldermen are directly elected, while the municipal council is abolished. The task of these single organs of general – opposite of functional/sectoral representation - is twofold: designing the functional relations between the various authorities, as well as fulfilling roles of process designer in interactive policy making (In 't Veld and Kruiter, 2002).

*The relocation of democracy (Van der Meer and Ham, 2001)*

When power has been relocated, then democracy immediately should follow; that is the leading notion in the book Jelle van der Meer and Marcel Ham wrote as a follow up of the publication of Bovens et al.. Journalists by profession, the authors have looked at recent developments in four policy domains: primary education, public housing, agriculture, and media. 'What in practice is actually happening with public interests when a specific policy sector is being placed at a distance of national government?' (p. 9) In their concluding chapter Van der Meer and Ham observe three kinds of problems. First, it proves to be difficult for government actors to impose demands when one does not do the implementation oneself. The authors refer to the relation between city governments and housing associations that are addressed as 'hybrid organisations' nowadays. Not doing the implementation means having no adequate floor knowledge and therefore being in the defensive. Second, the autonomised implementers want as much discretion as possible and they have a power basis to realise that. Third, there is a problem of measurement. 'The need for control leads to imposing objectives which can be measured, and those not always are the (only) relevant objectives' (p. 108). If vertical steering via hierarchy does not work, what can be done horizontally then, the authors ask. And can such democratically, that is: in a weighing of interests that is equitable and justifiable?



Van der Meer and Ham mention a few aspects of public accountability. Autonomy means particularly autonomy for the professionals involved. Therefore the building of countervailing powers is important, of users as well as employees. Organisations of parents, tenants and so on, can be built up locally but also supported at a regional or national level. But how to prevent that the public interest (good education) only is split up into particular interests (good education for my child)? Oversight and inspection remain necessary government tasks. And organising the legitimacy of these overseers seems a meta-task here. Furthermore, transparency by making yearly reports and publishing them and so on, is important. The specific forms this repertoire of creating countervailing powers of users and employers, the construction of inspection arrangements, and the improvement of transparency, may vary per sector. In the view of Van der Meer and Ham there is a remaining task for national government, however. First, the creation of, eventually legal, frameworks for these kinds of arrangements. Second, establishing consensus about more substantive points like objectives and criteria. These can be formulated within the sector itself, but are to be presented to (local) government. And third, the role of government is that of the final overseer who sees to it that the rules of the game remain being followed. Government may also point at forgotten and new interests and can intervene when power relationships are too unequal. In short, it is the ultimate task of government 'to guarantee the democratic weighing of interests at a lower layer' (Van der Meer and Ham, 2001, p. 113). Autonomisation thus not only means the relocation of implementation, but the spreading of democracy within the framework of the national system of political-societal relations. Requisite then is not as much continuous participation – which nowadays seems an unrealistic desideratum more than ever -, but rather the possibility of intervention.

In the second and present sections of this paper the problem of the democratic deficit has been positioned in, respectively, its societal context and in the public discourse, finally focussing at ways of dealing with the relocation of power. Let us now try to restate the problem in such a way that its various dimensions as addressed in the particular contributions presented above can be seen as related to each other in a specific way.

#### **4. Democracy and governance**

The generally accepted view on democracy this paper began with, normatively anchored as it is, in fact implies a very particular view. The essence of this view is a triple hierarchy; a hierarchy which collides with (post)modern reality. The empirical undermining of the three-fold primacy to be sketched provides a key to understanding the perceived democratic deficit but also one to reflect on possibilities of overcoming it.

##### *Broken vertical connections*

First there is the relationship between Society, Politics, and Democracy (with capital letters, because the terms are used here in a metaphorical sense, on a macro-level). In the broadly spread view on liberal democracy legitimate power stems from the people

(Held, 2002). What members of Parliament or Congress come up with on behalf of the Common Good, what the Legislative Branch agrees upon to be done by the Executive Branch, is rooted in the problems as seen by the members of the *polis*. Politics is the designation for the process via which this translation takes place. The relationship between these Great Institutions fundamentally is one of agenda setting: what comes on the political agenda in the organs of democratic representation stems from society. Within this agenda setting stage summarised as ‘democracy’ (with a small letter) one could speak of the primacy of Society.

Once the political agenda has been formulated, it is up to the institutions of the Executive Branch to produce the desired results. In particular the relation between Politics and Administration is involved here. As a follow up of the logically preceding agenda setting (‘democracy’) now the stage of policy making is present. Also this relationship fundamentally has a hierarchical character (Wilson, 1941; see also Frederickson and Smith, 2003). The hierarchy within this relationship summarised as ‘government’ traditionally has been addressed as the primacy of Politics.

In what can be seen now as, in fact, a stages model at a macro-level, there is a third and final hierarchy, namely between the agenda setting stage of democracy and the policy making stage of government. The general assumption used to be that democracy plus government leads to legitimate government performance, as a dependent variable. However, things seem to have changed now.

In the traditional, or perhaps ‘modernist’ view on democracy the relationship between Society and performance in the general interest in fact always has been a hierarchical one: democracy has the primacy over government. Nowadays in the context of developments sketched above this linear, chain-like connection has been cut through at two spots. First, between Society and Politics: the lower voting turn outs and the diminishing involvement in party politics are seen as the major expression of a smaller basis of legitimacy of what politicians are doing. This is the essence of the so-called democratic deficit in a narrow sense. Second, the connections between Politics and Performance have been cut or in any case made looser; that is the essence of what has been called the relocation of politics. What one can observe now is that *government* performance has become *public* performance, because ‘government’ has become ‘governance’, making often unclear who are the deciding actors and in which way they weigh interests.

When thus the hierarchical chain between Society and Public Performance has been broken at two places, a legitimacy problem appears to arise. The de facto collectively binding character of certain decisions made in the public domain stands opposite of the lack of explicit public weighing of collective interests as the basis for such decisions. Then the problem is twofold: Who are involved in these decision-making processes and which weighing of interests takes place? And next: On behalf of whom those actors participate and weigh? Together the problem is one of legitimacy. The dual problem appearing as, on the hand, a democratic deficit and, on the other, as the relocation of politics now can be restated. On the government side there is a shortage of *visibility*. If (central) government in policy processes no longer can be supposed to be the central and leading actor, who then are de facto governing actors and on which grounds do they make their decisions? On the agenda setting democracy side there is a problem of *accountability*: who is held accountable to whom?

If the replacement of government by governance forms an important aspect of this problem, in any case that of visibility, it may also provide ways to deal with the new situation. Or: when the relationship is no longer the hierarchical one between democracy and government, the relation between the former and governance, instead, - multiple horizontal and vertical as the concept of governance is – may supply ways for rethinking new forms of democracy. How would these look like and how the problem of visibility and accountability thus could be addressed?

### *Multiple governance*

According to O'Toole (2000, p. 276) the concept of governance is designed 'to incorporate a more complete understanding of the multiple levels of action and kinds of variables that can be expected to influence performance'. Conceptualising this performance in the public domain as governance has consequences. First, the focus is action, rather than government as institution. Who is the governing actor becomes an empirical question; it may be a public or a private one. Second, where the various actions takes place also is empirically open; differentiating between administrative layers and levels of action is important. Third, in the concept of governance the separation of policy from management has been abolished. Governance implies both, while the act of managing can be observed in all loci of political-societal relationships (Hill and Hupe, 2002).

Taking their lead from Kiser and Ostrom's (1982) 'three worlds of action' Hill and Hupe distinguish a structure-, content-, and process dimension of the concept of governance as a focus. Each of these refers to a broad set of related activities: those concerning institutional design, giving direction, and getting things done. Respectively, Hill and Hupe (2002) speak of constitutive, directive and operational governance. Different from the traditional 'stages model' each of these activity clusters can be observed at any administrative layer. Both the number of acting actors and of potential action situations can thought of as infinite. Categorizing the number of action situations Hill and Hupe speak in a summarising way of three loci in political-societal relations: the locus of the system, that of the organisation, and the locus of the individual. In fact, the vertical stages view on the policy process thus has been replaced by a multi-dimensional framework for the conceptualisation of the policy process as multiple governance. In this conceptualisation governance essentially is both 'mixed-focus' and 'multi-local'. Not only it involves giving direction (cf. the stage of policy formation), but also managing activities (cf. the stage of implementation) and even designing institutions, while each of these activity sets can take various forms according to the specific action situations (loci) in which they take place. What then may be the consequences for democracy?

### *Multi-local democracy*

When the normative principles of the Rechtsstaat and democracy remain valid, but power, with more or less legitimacy, is being exercised at many places in the public domain, the consequences of the latter for the institutional position of democracy needs to be reflected on. In the third section of this paper three remedies for the

related problems of the relocation of power and the democratic deficit were presented. If they are assessed now – too quickly, that is certain - the functionality of the first remedy of returning to the centre, in the context of developments like the ones pictured can be disputed. The second remedy, a proposal to move ahead to the direct election of sectoral functionaries, appears to imply too much a breach with the traditions of liberal democracy yet. The third argument, called the relocation of democracy, points at relevant empirical phenomena. How do they relate to the perspective presented here?

It seems that, for instance, the rise of professional associations not only of the traditional professions like medical doctors and lawyers but also of so called street-level bureaucrats like police officers and social workers can be seen as a direct countervailing power – an essential institutional feature of liberal democracy – in the system-locus, opposite of and giving structure to random behaviour of single practitioners. The formulation of codes of conduct, certification procedures, citizen's charters, etcetera also can be addressed as structure-oriented activities of governance taking place with consequences for systems (of police, social work, and so on) as a whole. The same goes for appeal procedures. Councils of parents at school, of clients of social services around a Municipal Social Services Department, of tenants around a housing association, of patients suffering from a specific disease; in general, forms of organising of users, customers, clients, or other direct stake holders, can be seen as institutions practising checks on the exercise of power as well, though in a different locus, that is the one of single organisations. There also organisation-bound complaint procedures can be localised. In the locus of inter-individual relations phenomena like peer review function as mechanisms limiting the uncontrolled exercise of power. Addressing the structural 'democratic devices' like the ones mentioned here enhances both the visibility and accountability side of the problem as restated above.

Looking at the agricultural sector in the Netherlands Van der Meer and Ham (2001, p. 68) propose the foundation of what they call regional 'Public Agricultural Councils'. Participants would be farmers, environmental and nature preservation organisations, the Water Boards, Chambers of Commerce, groups of inhabitants, project developers, corporate industry, supermarkets, and etcetera. Government, both in The Hague and Brussels, then would be expected to formulate only minimum rules and granting a sum, leaving the regional Councils as mentioned the room to deal with one's own affairs on a mutual basis. If such a 'thought experiment' (ibidem, p. 69) would become reality, its functioning as aimed for could be seen as giving direction in a specific sector/region context. In terms of the concept presented above we would be talking about the system-locus of the content-dimension of governance. Interactive policy making on specific subjects of a local character, for instance, can be addressed in the same category, though rather in the organisation locus. In the locus of inter-individual interaction a phenomenon like giving a second opinion can be seen as a countervailing power towards the possibility of random decision making in the treatment of individual cases: directive governance 'at the street-level'.

With the third set of governance activities, called operational governance, the possible vertical and horizontal counter-pressures of the alternative spending of time, money, and personnel may be at stake. In the system-locus these pressures, for instance, may involve the choice between a form of project-management in a case of high priority versus regular attention for managing 'normal' policy processes. In the locus of the

organisation standard bureaucratic politics can enlighten the action choices related to managing inter-organisational relations. Clients expressing their rights or co-workers making alternative judgements at the work floor, in the locus of the individual may fulfil roles as checks towards the unlimited exercise of power.

All these examples highlight that around the various dimensions of governance, practised as it is in different action situations, horizontal checks are working that have a restraining effect on the random use of public executive power. Of course, we are not used to call these checks 'democracy'. Furthermore, it is obvious that these mechanisms cannot be traced down to a singular democratic institution. At the same time, they seem to fulfil functions similar to the ones democracy once was said to fulfil in the hierarchical relationships of earlier days. If recognised as such, these checks can enhance the visibility of the way power actually is being exercised: the decision making in a specific case becomes apparent, including the weighing of interests that takes place. Second, the decision makers involved can be held accountable.

By thinking through the various foci/loci combinations, the ways in which democracy can match governance are turned into practical 'solutions'. Some of them, like the suggestion of Van der Meer and Ham for the agricultural sector, may be innovative; others may regard a matter of making existing forces explicit, while others again, like enhancing the further professionalism of street-level bureaucrats, would imply further steps. Essential is that on the basis of the principles of the Rechtsstaat and democracy, the consequence of the replacement of government by governance, with the multi-dimensional, mixed-focal character of the latter, would be that democracy can be conceptualised in a matching way, that is to say: multi-local. The multi-localisation of democracy than would mean, first, the acknowledgement of the empirical fact that often more participants are involved in certain sets of activities of *governance* than on normative grounds regarding the traditional democracy/*government* relationship would be expected. Second, making the variety of these actors, action levels, actions situations and administrative layers visible in specified contexts, can be seen as a precondition, not in the least for governance research. Third, new possibilities for holding public actors accountable may be detected. As far as accountability is concerned, these possibilities no longer exclusively are to be sought in the traditional centres of representative democracy. For the mixed-focal character of the concept of multiple governance also implies that direct participation of citizens and other not-thus far-involved-parties in processes of public decision making not always is the only requisite that can be thought of. Apart from the probability that many contemporary citizens will get involved politically (in the narrow sense) again, co-direction on the layers of government now has got alternatives, particularly in the action level of constitutive governance. Following Van der Meer and Ham here, it no longer seems as much and only the intervention as such that counts, but the *possibility* of intervention becomes more important. The institutional design of democracy arrangements at the various spots in which governance is practised enables citizens and other not-permanently involved actors to engage in the making of decisions in the public domain at places and moments they deem relevant.

## 5. Conclusions

That a democratic deficit is perceived in a context in which governance has become the dominant discourse about political-societal relationships appears to be not a coincidence. It is because in the stages ordering at a macro-level the linear linkages between Society and Public Performance at two points have become looser. First, between Society and Politics the primacy of the former has become the subject of pressure because of looser ties between citizens and institutions in general. This broken vertical connection is the cause of the democratic deficit in the narrow sense. Besides, the relationship between Politics and performance has become diffuse: this is addressed by the notion of the relocation of power. In the latter relationship the emergence of governance has produced problems of visibility and accountability. No longer is clear who is making the decisions underlying public performance, and on behalf of whom this happens. Essential here is the replacement of the hierarchy between democracy and government by the more horizontal pairing between democracy and governance. This same pairing, however, also offers a key to rethinking democracy as a variety of checks to the exercise of power; checks that, 'multi-localised' as they are, can take various forms.

As always contextualisation remains needed. In situations like the ones Creveld (1996) has pointed at, certain modes of governance, practised from certain action spots, are more appropriate than other ones. Unfortunately or not, the twelve years between the end of the Cold War till 9/11 when postmodernity flourished, are over. Governance may sometimes have to take the form of straightforward central control again. But also then, substantial powers behind that control are needed. Perhaps then even more, for great powers require great checks. Otherwise totalitarianism is lurking; and with that, indeed, the end of democracy.

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