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Democratizing social work: from New Public Management to democratic professionalism

Introduction

In this chapter we analyse the consequences of the implementation of NPM-inspired instruments, especially performance accountability, on the relationship between professionals and people who need social care or social support. NPM promised to democratize professional practices, among them social work: it promised to take citizens seriously: they should be listened to and to have influence on what social workers offer. Although this democratic promise covers not all of what NPM promised, it is a crucial element in the embrace of NPM in the field of social work. The promise of performance accountability is that "performance information is not merely managerial useful, but also contributes to the quality of democratic debate and to the ability of citizens to make choices." (Pollitt 2006, p. 52)

The critique on social work as undemocratic practice preceded the rise of NPM. It was uttered fervently from the mid-1970s onwards and can be summarized in four points: social work was disempowering, paternalistic, self-centred, and unaccountable. NPM was put forward as more democratic practice, giving citizens empowering voice and choice, to serve their demands and to be accountable. The core question of this article is to what extent NPM manages to fulfil this democratic promise in social work. Our empirical data are derived from interviews with Dutch social workers and social work managers. The Netherlands is an interesting case, as we will argue, because the attack on social work from the 1970s onwards was particularly harsh, while the entitlements of citizens concerning these services have been relatively weak, compared to entitlements in health and social care (Duyvendak and Tonkens 2003).

We will first have a closer look at these criticisms and argue why they can be understood as attacks on the undemocratic features of social work. Then we will discuss how and why NPM was offered as a more democratic alternative. Our own empirical research work will be used to analyse how this promise works out in practice in local social work in the Netherlands. Our study is linked to the first of the 'candidate contradictions' that Pollitt and Bouckaert (2004, 165 – 167) put forward: how is it possible that NPM simultaneously empowers consumers, frees managers

and strengthens political control. "In a perfect world the three objectives might be compatible. In the real world public managers usually find themselves facing trade-offs or even downright contradictions." (ibid, p.167). We will argue that in most respects, NPM tends to strengthen political control and in doing so undermines rather than promotes democracy in social work.

We will go on to discuss the notion of democratic professionalism (Dzur, 2004, 2008) as a way of giving citizens more voice, direct professional accountability towards citizens and move accountability from output measurement towards democratic practice. The notion of 'democratic professionalism' is still a rather vague notion but we will try to give it some more flesh and blood on the basis or our empirical data of experiences with NPM in social work.

As opposed to various other articles in this volume (Van der Krogt and Hupe, Van der Veen), our focus is not on a possible decline in professional autonomy, as we do not consider professional autonomy as such as something to be cherished. Professional autonomy has been successfully and rightly attacked in the 1970s as paternalistic and undemocratic, and we want to take it from there: since then, efforts have been made to democratize professional practices, and NPM can be understood as one way of doing so.

Criticism of social work

We focus on the criticism of NPM of public services as undemocratic, although we are conscious of the fact that this term as such is not much used in NPM and that NPM covers a broader range of issues concerning public sector management than its democratic character. In the 1990s NPM built on this criticism, applying it to 'bureaucracy' more generally. NPM- theorists were not particularly interested in social work but merely in the public sector more generally. NPM-theorists fuelled their attack more broadly towards non-marketized, state-related 'bureaucracy'. Pollitt (2003) identified eight elements of NPM that are generally recognised: a shift of focus from input to output, a shift towards measurement and quantification, a preference for flat organizational forms, a preference for contracts instead of hierarchical relations, a wider use of market mechanisms, an emphasis on service quality and consumer orientation, a blurring of the frontiers between public, private and voluntary sectors, and a shift from equity and universalism towards efficiency and individualism (Pollitt 2003, p. 27-8). By democratization we do not point to strengthening democratic boards or democratic procedures, but to giving more voice and choice and thereby power to citizens. The first six elements of the eight that Pollitt identifies as together forming NPM, can be understood as also meant to amount to democratisation in this sense, even though they are combined with other aims beyond the scope of this article, such as lowering costs, improving efficiency and raising quality.

NPM can be argued to build on earlier criticism on the lack of democracy in the public sector, including social work, that already arose in many western welfare states during the 1970s. We will have a closer look at this critique of social work being undemocratic in four respects: as disempowering, self-centred, paternalistic and unaccountable.

First, during the late 1970 the empowering presumptions of social work were under attack. It was argued that the growth of social work was uncontrolled and did not match the needs of citizens but an expression of autonomous policy developments regardless of the needs of citizens. It was also argued that social work

failed to empower people and merely deepened their independence (Clarke and Newman 1997, Duyvendak and Tonkens 2003).

During the 1990s, NPM built on this rhetoric. NPM was introduced in the mid nineties in the public sector, in many Western welfare states. NPM started off as a criticism of government but was soon more broadly applied to bureaucratic ways of governing in public sector organisations. In their bestselling book *Reinventing government* Osborne and Gaebler echoed the criticism of disempowerment: government was blamed for keeping 'clients' of government passive and deny them choice (Osborne and Gaebler 1992, p. 169). Bureaucratic state institutions were considered sluggish because of their hierarchical chains of command, and their preoccupation with rules and regulations (Peters and Waterman 1982, Osborne and Gaebler 1992). The government is out of date as a dinosaur and slow as a snail, and thus not at all responsive to the needs of its clients, Osborne and Gaebler argued.

Secondly, during the 1970s, social work was also criticized for being self-centred: social workers were accused of being more occupied with themselves than with citizens (Tonkens and Van Doorn 2001). Sociologists criticised social work for lack of accountability: they were attacked for not serving the needs and demands of citizens but merely being occupied with their own needs, wasting time with endless meetings and not achieving much. If social work wanted to be meaningful at all, it should organise activities that citizens asked for. Professionals were blamed for being solely motivated by self-interest (Clarke and Newman 1997). Sehested (2002, p. 1516) describes how in Denmark professionals in public organisations were seen as motivated by self-interest and as only fighting for more resources to increase their own status and prestige. NPM developed this criticism further, by criticising the lack of accountability of government and the public sector more broadly (Du Gay 2000)

A third 1970s criticism on social work partly contradicted the second: it was argued that social work was but paternalistic and patronizing (Duyvendak and Tonkens 2003); a criticism that also struck other social professionals such as medical doctors and psychiatrists (Tonkens and Weijers 1999). Not self-centred this time, but rather other-oriented, be it in a problematic manner. Social workers would be 'exercising power over would-be customers, denying choice, through the dubious claim that "professionals know best" and 'undermining personal responsibility' (Clarke and Newman 1997, p. 15). Of all social professions, this criticism hit social work hardest, because more than e.g. nurses, doctors or teachers, social workers claimed to empower and liberate citizens. Therefore social workers were most seriously struck and silenced by this criticism. Social workers were blamed for having ideas of welfare and wellbeing that have very little relation with the ideas of citizens themselves. The government had imposed social work onto its citizens, it was argued. Social workers were criticized for being authoritarian specialists who came to authoritative judgements on the basis of their expertise without tolerating participation nor dispute (Duyvendak and Tonkens 2003). Again, this was taken up by NPM, arguing against the self-centredness of the state and the public sector more generally (Du Gay 2000, Osborne and Gaebler 1992).

Fourthly, the 1970s' critique of social work dismissed its goals as too vague and thus unaccountable to democratic control; it was not clear what social work amounted to. Social workers were 'the new exempted' whose work escaped accountability and control (Jordan and Jordan 2000, Tonkens and Van Doorn 2001), a critique again taken up and generalized by NPM (Power 1997, Marquand 2004).

The criticisms summarized above were not responded by a self-assured defence from the side of social work – neither during the 1970s nor during the 1980s.

On the contrary, social workers were baffled, as this criticism hit the core of their work: empowerment was their main reason for existence. The criticism of social work professionals helped to legitimate budget-cuts during the 190s and early 1990s and these in turn further weakened and silenced the sector (Marquand 2004).

NPM's democratic promise

NPM offered an alternative to these criticisms by a fourfold promise. The new public sector (including of course social work) would provide service, choice and voice to citizens, mainly in their role as consumers. The idea was to 'launch a customer revolution' (Peters, 1987) 'which involved turning organisations and management assumptions upside down.' (Clarke and Newman 1997, p.107)

To combat disempowerment, NPM promised to empower citizens as clients who would have the power to choose and thus also to dismiss organisations. Just like customers on the market, citizens would have exit options. If a service did not satisfy their needs, they should be able to turn their backs and go somewhere else. To combat self-centredness, citizens were redefined as consumers whose wants and needs are to be served. Their demand would force social workers to become client centred and deliver what citizens ask. Demand steering gained popularity in social work in many Western welfare states from the mid 1990s onwards (Clarke and Newman 1997, Rodger 2000, Marquand 2004), including the Netherlands (Duyvendak and Tonkens 2003, Tonkens and van Doorn 2001).

As alternative for paternalism, NPM promised to refrain form judgement and simply deliver what was asked (Marquand 2001, Jordan and Jordan 2000). To serve rather than patronize, with a smile rather than a sermon. Social workers would be positioned in a serving, client-dependent manner, so that clients' needs, complaints and desires could never again be dismissed: those who would bully clients, would loose their contracts. Clients were setting the rules now by way of 'demand steering' Pollitt 2003).

Thirdly, NPM also promised citizens voice-options. Performance measurement would give citizens both exit and voice options. Performance measurement would provide citizens the necessary information to see for themselves that a service was failing, and if so, to leave. Indirectly, performance measurement would empower citizens and give them the information to choose between providers (Power 1999).

Fourthly, to make social workers accountable, accountability-mechanisms, such as standards, targets and performance measurements were set up. The efforts moved from input and processes towards output and outcome (Power 1999, Jordan and Jordan 2000). There was also a 'shift towards measurement and quantification, especially in the form of systems of "performance indicators" and/or explicit "standards" (Pollitt 2003, p. 27). In order to be accountable by external parties, public service organisations should formulate their results in terms of measurable outcomes, understandable to non-experts. Clearer targets and better performance measures would make it easier for politicians to judge if public sector organisations were achieving what they are aiming at (Pollitt 2003).

In sum NPM promised democratisation by strengthening choice, service orientation, voice and accountability. We now turn to our empirical data to see how these promises turn out in the daily practices of Dutch local social work today.

NPM in practice of Dutch local social work

Our empirical research was carried out in seven welfare organisations responsible for social work in The Netherlands. The Netherlands presents an interesting case, because the criticism on social work hit social work particularly hard during the leate 1960s and early 1070s, as part of the comparatively successful attack on authoritarian practices during that era in this country. As the American-Dutch historian Kennedy noted, the reigning elite was very receptive to the critique by on authorities as it fitted a self-critique that was already (partly latently) present (Kennedy 1995). Today, NPM is firmly rooted in the Dutch welfare sector, with practices such as contracting out and performance measurement. Welfare organisations are responsible for social work, under authority of local government. Devolution of social work to local government started in the 1980s and was strengthened by a new law, the WMO ('Social Support Act'), introduced in 2007.

We analysed reports from individual organisations, their umbrella- organisations branche and local and central government. We also conducted in-depth interviews with social workers, youth workers, social cultural workers, community workers (total 57), middle and general managers (13), and citizens who work as volunteers (5) between November 2006 and November 2008. In the interviews we discussed their experiences with and views on accountability and client participation in social work. In three organisations we followed efforts to mould performance information to better fit democratic purposes: to reform performance information in such a way that it would be a more informative tool for discussing results with colleagues. What did NPM actually mean for democratization of social work of these organisations? We again discern three themes in which this democratic turn was expected: service, voice and choice.

Service-orientation

NPM's promise to be more service-oriented by modelling welfare organisations after modern business and positioning citizens as consumers, was mirrored in policy documents of organisations and central and local government.
In Dutch local social work a major rhetorical shift took place in the 1990s towards service orientation and demand steering and demand orientation (Kremer and Tonkens 2006). Services were redefined in terms of 'products', clients were redefined as 'consumers', the name of the umbrella- organisation of welfare organisations changed into 'Social Entrepeneurs Group'.

On the level of welfare organisations however, this shift never really took place. Citizens' demands did not come into view at all. Local governments act in their name. Under the influence of NPM rhetoric local governments now contract social services on behalf of clients. As a consequence, welfare organisations do not adapt their services to the demands of clients, but merely at the demands of local governments. Rather than demand steering we witness government steering. Paternalism is not replaced, but the actor has changed: now the main source of paternalism is government rather than professionals.

As to demand orientation (of professionals, on the individual level), a more ambiguous picture arises. Our respondents argue that they operate in a service and demand oriented manner. NPM in a way did stimulate a more attentive attitude to the

voices and needs of individual clients, as other research shows as well (Van der Steege en Van Deur, 2002). Social workers are more active in figuring out, together with clients, which help and activities they need.

However, it must be stressed that social workers reject the notion of citizens as consumers, and even reject the idea of serving their demands. This, they argue, underestimates the peculiarities of social work. It denies the vulnerability and dependence of a lot of clients who turn to social work for help. They often fail to have clearly defined demands; they merely have problems and needs. Even if they have demands, social workers consider it part of their professionalism to also make their own judgements. A social worker:

> "Sometimes someone may say I think you should do this or that, for that's my question, but I also have thoughts of my own. And if I think, based on my expertise of and experiences with the problem, that something else should be done, I bring it up. OK, then you have to explain why. Precisely because people come to you in a dependent situation. And these people are often vulnerable. People simply have problems; otherwise they would have stayed at home." (social worker, 16-04-2007)

Welfare clients should also be invited, activated, cared for, corrected or educated, rather than served only. The market discourse of services, products, customers and consumers does not recognize this, social workers claim.

Voice

NPM does reduce social workers' possibilities for voice, but again, it does not give them to citizens but to local governments. Local government contracts welfare organisations, and evaluates the performance of social work organizations (De Boer en Duyvendak, 2004). One could argue that citizens do get more voice in this manner, but in an indirect, democratic manner: as voters and tax payers, represented by the local politicians and the government. Social workers complain that local government cannot represent citizens voices as it is much too detached from and unfamiliar with social work practice. They feel disempowered. A youth worker:

> "The increased power of local government is frustrating. You have to deliver this and that, but they don't know what they are talking about. But you can't ignore them anymore because they may in response contract another organisation. (…) So sometimes you feel as powerless as the youngster for whom I'm working. (…) so sometime you wondering, for whom I'm working?" .(youth worker, 26-03-07)

This strengthened voice of local government not only disempowers social workers, but also citizens who receive their support, social workers and managers argue. A middle manager:

> "This new Law with the tendering (..) this is anonymous, isn't? Well, it's really terrible. Today, the top of the organization is only interested in what the local government wants. If we receive signs from clients about demands and problems they experience and we want to formulate a policy in response, there is no space and time. But if a policymaker of the local government has

an idea, we have to implement it tomorrow, regardless whether it is a good or bad idea". (middle manager, 10-01-2007)

Citizens as service users should not only be represented by local government but also by client councils. Welfare organisations are obligated to install such councils since the new law (WMO) was introduced, in January 2007. However, none of the organizations involved in our research has a client council. This is no coincidence; client councils in local social work are rare (Tonkens 2010). Considering the traditional mission of social work to empower citizens, it is striking that they keep users silenced concerning their own policy.

One of the explanations of this intriguing contrast lies in the position of welfare organisations. Welfare organisations are afraid to be squeezed between the demands of the empowered local government and the demands of client, would there be a clients' council. A middle manager:

"Local government wants us to provide a front office where citizens can drop by all day and pose questions. That's consumer friendly, indeed. But we can only organize this with the front office employees who are cheaper than social workers. But clients want to talk directly with social workers. So in these times as social work organization you sometimes really feel you're being squeezed. And if we had a client council, what will it say about it? I mean, can we say something about it ourselves?". (middle manager, 26-3-07)

The same feelings of powerlessness we observed at the executive level:

"I have to reach a certain amount of customers according to the performance indicators that management arranges with the local government and I have to work in line with some standards procedures. Well, to be honest, that's more than enough; I don't want another party which stands far away from my work to tell me what I should do".
(social worker, 10-1-07)

A few middle managers have a different view on clients' councils. They do see client councils as potential allies who can be useful in countervailing the increased power of the local government:

"The customer-user should take the floor and local government and the top of this organisation should take a big step backwards. So it wouldn't be wrong to have some kind of client council that can provide some counterbalance".
(middle manager, 24-01-2007).

Another way users can make their voices heard concerning the way they are treated by professionals is by sending in complaints. Complaint procedures have been introduced over in social work over the last years. However, they are rarely used, as clients feel too vulnerable and dependent on social workers, different respondents explain.

Yet another tool to strengthen the voices of citizens is the introduction of quality management systems to catch the 'perspective of the customer'. When such a system meets certain criteria, an organisation gets a certificate, like the HKZ (Harmonisatie Kwaliteitsbeoordeling in de Zorgsector: Harmonizing Quality

assurance in the care domain), that should guarantee quality. In Dutch local social work (as well as in health and social care) the HKZ certificate is introduced on a large scale. HKZ is an extensive system that covers many aspects of quality, such as what should be registered, at which moments the service has to be evaluated, etc. The aim of HKZ is 'to stimulate working on quality from the perspective of the consumer' (website visited 10-11-08). One of the aspects of HKZ that according to respondents are supposed to strengthen citizens' voices are the obligatory evaluations that clients give of the support of social workers they have received. Social workers welcome these standards as contribution to working in a professional manner. Inviting feedback from clients and taking action on the basis of this feedback is part and parcel of a professional attitude:

> "It is a good development that after four meetings, you explicitly have to give people space to talk about how they experience the support. Of course you often try to figure that out anyway, but I think this break makes you more aware of it and you can learn and discuss another strategy if the client has the feeling your support doesn't work. And of course always fine to hear what you're doing well".
> (social worker, 21-3-2007)

What they consider to be meaningful are separate evaluation reports by clients. It gives them the opportunity to reflect and discuss on their professional methods the use in their work and to learn (see also Hoijtink and Oude Vrielink 2007. However, these reports barely play a role in professional accountability. The main reason for this seems to be a lack of managerial staff. While there is an ongoing debate in the Netherlands about the abundance of managers in the public sector, at the expense of professionals as street level bureaucrats or front line workers, in practice social work seem to suffer from a lack of managers, according to some social workers and managers we interviewed. Wiendels et al (2004) compared the staff of social work organizations with other organizations in the public sector and concluded that the staff is smaller in the social work organizations. Social work lacks the managerial capacity to meet the contradictory terms that welfare organisations are faced with, as Huijben et all also found (2003). As a consequence, meaningful accountability in which such evaluations would be discussed is not organised. Secondly, managers tend to be overwhelmed by external demands, particularly from local government

However, more important than any formal system, social workers argue, are daily informal ways of strengthening citizens' voices. Social workers report to put a lot of effort in giving clients a voice in the support they receive and the activities they organise. Social workers argue that seriously taking the voice of clients into account is at the heart of delivering 'quality':

> "You always do it together, you and your client. (…) It is a process in which both of you participate. I am not the only one who defines what the problem is; your client has thoughts about this as well. And very good ones, because he is the one who experiences the problems. Not every client enters the room saying: "I'd like to talk about this problem". Some people have a whole bunch of problems. In that case you help them to summarise and to get things straight. And then you ask: "what is your most urgent problem?" So it is always interaction; you and your clients collaborate closely to help them overcome their problems. That is a joint responsibility". (social worker, 16-04-2007).

Social workers, community workers, social cultural workers and youth workers report they are continually fine-tuning: exploring how clients and client groups experience their analyses, interventions, aid and assistance, and figure out if anything should be omitted, adapted, supplemented, or changed. To this end, clients and client groups are continuously invited, challenged and tempted to voice their experiences:

> "Many migrant women who come to the women's centre in the neighbourhood are not assertive. They have never learned to open their mouths. They will not participate in a client council, no way. They neither tell me that they don't like an activity nor tell they prefer other courses. As a socio-cultural worker you have to sense this, ask between the lines, with a cup of tea. You have to fish for it. What do they think about the course, what do they need? That is how we started cycling lessons for migrant women here."
> (socio cultural workers, 22-01-2007).

Summing up, we can conclude that NPM strengthens rather the voice of local government than the voice of citizens as service users. However, there is also an undertow of informal communication, which silently strengthens citizens' voices. As none of this is documented so it cannot be proved to outsiders. The same counts for the voice of clients at the organisation level. Professionals discuss experiences from clients with policy reforms with their managers and if this gives rise to adjustments, they will try to convince managers and together seek to incorporate the voice of clients (Duyvendak, Hoijtink and Tonkens, 2009).

Choice

NPM- instruments as contractualisation and competition in order to provide more choice are key elements in the new Dutch law, the Wmo. But again: for whom? Choice was indeed introduced, but only for local government as representative of citizens, not for individual citizens directly. Choice is made by a spokesperson; the local government that acts in their name. Citizens who receive support of local social work cannot choose. Their home address determines which organisation they should turn to in order to receive support. In health and social care citizens gained consumer power by way of personal budgets, but this never happened in local social work. Organisations now have to compete with each other in order to gain contracts and this has directed the attention from management towards local governments and the performance indicators they set. Social workers complain that what counts is not quality of their work, but the performance indicators set up by local government. For example, some youth workers complain what counts are the amount of youngsters they reach, while there is ample attention in the organizations for professionalization and the needs from youngsters themselves.

Accountability

The fourth issue in democratization of social work by way of NPM was to make local social work more accountable. This democratic promise was the main reason why accountability became so popular in social work. Around the turn of the century, social workers and their managers had high expectations of accountability: they

hoped that accountability systems would help to prove that their work was valuable. This would put an end to the persistent suggestion that their work was unprofessional and futile (Tonkens and Van Doorn 2001).

These hopes were not fulfilled at all, our research shows. On the contrary, social workers and their managers experienced accountability systems as a disillusion. Social workers argue that reports that count are meaningless: not only the evaluations already mentioned but also numerous registrations of work processes, such as the amount of telephone calls, the activities they perform per fifteen minutes. Social workers and their managers experience these as meaningless:

> "I often discussed with my manager why we have to deliver such information. I asked: why on earth is our financier interested in how much telephone acts I have performed in a particular client contact? Or why should I register it because of these quality standards? It has nothing to do with quality, you know. My manager agrees, but she argues we need a certification, because the financier demands this and there are also good standards. Okay, I'll do it, but don't to me come with complains I see not enough clients, because then I will be angry". (Social worker, 21-3-2007)

> "In a sense the local government has no idea what is really going on behind the output figures, the amount of customers reached, customers trajectories that are finished or all those tables with numbers of short contacts. But it has become important, because we make performance agreements, set output goals in this way and are accountable for it. So we have to deliver periodically thick rapports full of those tables. But we try to pimp it up with stories and words in order to get it alive because in a sense its, well, you want a feeling it's useful, it make sense". (middle manager, 20-12-06)

Some workers argued that registrations were made to match the performance criteria and registrations are also manipulated to meet standards performance agreements while at the same time upholding professional values. In order to deal with unintended effects - sometimes with the support of their managers – social workers develop different kind of strategies to meet both the demands and needs of their clients and the accountability demands of the local government. They e.g. manipulate registration:

> "Some clients take so much time because they have so many problems on different domains, relation, work, debts. Well, for each single demand you create than a new dossier so it counts for two or three, you get it? You have to be a little bit, I call that creative".
> (social worker, 10-01-2007)

Even without manipulation, this performance measurement does not mirror the results of social work. Both social workers and managers argue they want to be held more accountable for the results of their work. Neither service users nor partner organisations play any role in public accountability.

> "In daily practice the reports we periodically produce aches only reach one policy officer from the local government". (general manager, 14-10-2006)

Research indicates that local governments do not use all this information much. "It seems reasonable to conclude that most aldermen do not consider output-oriented performance information available in the planning and control documents of their organisations very informative and that they use it only infrequently." (Bogt, 2006: 241). Politicians gain information mainly by talking to senior officials, other politicians and other influential people – not by reading reports. (Pollitt 2006)

In short, accountability does bring transparency and democracy, but only in relation to local government and also in a problematic way; it seems not only to create new vagueness, but also fuelling time consuming bureaucracy at the expense of accountability to professionals and service users. Opportunities to use forms in a more promising way are neglected because of a lack of managerial capacity and local government steering.

NPM's democratic promise

So what can we conclude concerning the democratic promise of NPM? At the institutional level organisations become more government- steered rather than demand-oriented. NPM strengthens with contracts, standards en performance measurement the voice of local government at the expense of the voice of citizens as service users. The fact that there are no client councils only adds to this imbalance. NPM did not wipe out paternalism, but merely replaced it: now it is local politics that tends to patronize citizens. For ten years Lawton et al (2000) in reviewing the reforms in NS in UK came to the same conclusion. They cite a health authority manager: "If thy [the employees] have been displaced as the most powerful stakeholder, their place has been taken by the government, not the patient." (Lawton et al, p. 17). So choice was indeed introduced, but only for local government as representative of citizens, not for individual citizens directly. Local governments' influence is what is strengthened. You could call this democracy in the sense of representative democracy, but then it is a very constrained elitist version of democracy (Hanberger 2006).

At the level of services delivery so it seems to be NPM did stimulate a more attentive attitude to the ideas and needs of individual clients. However, it must be stressed that social workers reject the notion of citizens as consumers, and even reject the idea of serving their demands. This, they argue, underestimates the peculiarities of social work. The NPM related market discourse of services/products and customers/consumers does not recognize this.

Accountability does bring transparency and democracy, but again only in relation to local government, not to professionals and service users. Moreover, it creates new vagueness, and fuels time consuming bureaucracy. Social workers try to incorporate accountability norms that fit their professional values and neutralize those that threaten these values. They try to minimize disturbance to their day-to-day activities. Opportunities to use forms in a more promising way are neglected because of a lack of managerial capacity and local government steering.

Democratic professionalism

This somewhat gloomy picture raises the question if an alternative way for democratizing local social work can be developed. There is of course an impressive body of practices as well as research around the notion of *participation* in public service provision (Cawston and Barbour, 2003; Cornwall and Gaventa, 2001) local democracy (Fung en Wright, 2003), civil initiatives and Asset Based Community Development (ABCD). Participation tends to start from the perspective of the client; the interaction of with professionals is hardly in view. This is different in *civic professionalism* (Sullivan, 2004) or *collaboration* (Vigoda, 2002) that starts from the perspective and tasks of the professional. Civic professionalism departs from a rather traditional idea of professionals as set out by Elliott Freidson (2001). Professionals are understood as possessing and maintaining specialised knowledge about their field, and exchanging this knowledge with colleagues, thus expanding the shared knowledge of the profession as a whole. Professionals are expected to be driven by (possibly secular) calling, rather than by status or money. A calling to serve a transcendental aim, like health, justice or equality. Professionals are expected to engage in democratic exchange with clients as well as with the broader audience (Sullivan, 2004). Professionals must 're-engage the public over the nature and value of what they do for the society at large.' (Sullivan 2004, p. 19). Professionals must be 'in real dialogue with their publics and open to public accountability.' (Sullivan 2004, p. 19), thereby 'inviting public response and involvement in the profession's effort to clarify its mission and responsibilities.' (ibid.)

The most promising perspective starts from neither the client nor the professional but from the interaction between professionals, aiming at a maximizing the democratic character of this exchange. Albert Dzur coined this *democratic professionalism* (Dzur, 2003, 2004, 2008). The 'democratic' in democratic professionalism takes shape in face to face relation between professionals and clients. Democracy is not just an instrument; it is a value in itself. We will try to sketch the promises of this model by rearticulating it in the terms used above: service orientation, voice, choice en accountability.

Dzur does not explicitly contrast democratic professionalism with NMP's promises such as service orientation, but we can argue that from the perspective of democratic professionalism, service-orientation fails to recognize the issue of professional authority. The notion of service orientation even turns the authority relation upside down: by presenting professionals as service providers, the authority lies with the consumer whose demands should be served. Professionals, Dzur argues, cannot and do not function without professional authority. We cannot wipe this out; yet citizens also have authority, based on experiential knowledge. Dzur quotes Dewey who points out that 'the man who wears the shoe knows best that it pinches and where it pinches, even if the expert shoemaker is the best judge of how the trouble is to be remedied' (Dewey 1927, p. 364, cited in Dzur 2004 p.10). Democratic professionalism is not about complete equality between professionals and clients. While some theorists of participation argue that 'traditional boundaries between expert and lay become blurred;..' (Cawston and Barbour 2003, p. 721), democratic professionalism maintains professionals both exercise authority and share it' (p.12). Professionals must 'be in real dialogue with their publics' (2004, 19) but also 'take public leadership in solving perceived public problems' (p.18). They must 'both exercise authority and share it'. (Dzur 2004, p.12) This double task is what makes democratic professionalism so complex, Dzur argues.

These two sources of authority demand that authority is shared by professionals and citizens. Democratic professionalism is about 'sharing authority in public life' by way of dialogue, both on individual, group, and collective level. Knowledge is not only exchanged with colleagues but with clients as well. Professionals explain their views and procedures, acknowledge the knowledge that clients possess themselves and come to a shared view of problems and solutions. Democratic professionals are task sharers, not task monopolists (Dzur, 2008, p.105)

Voice of citizens is thus crucial, but not primarily in boards or panels. Professional authority and civic authority meet primarily in daily interaction; thus democratic professionalism should shape exactly there. Informal participation is therefore more important than formal participation, just as the social workers and managers we interviewed claim. This can of course be backed up by formal participation; but formal participation only makes sense if informal participation is well established, because informal participation provides the signs and signals that formal participation builds on (Duyvendak, Hoijtink and Tonkens, 2009). For professionals good social work means that they incorporate the client's voice in their support. For social work this means that the informal democratic practices in social work we sketched above, deserve recognition and should be linked to formal democratic procedures like client councils and accountability systems. Also, the idea of a professional calling should be recognised and cherished within the organisations, because without a firm idea of what the purpose and meaning of their work is, social workers cannot really enter dialogue (Kremer and Tonkens 2006).

Choice, thirdly, is important too, but as a steering mechanism to correct professionals, nor as something professionals should keep their hands of in then name of citizens' autonomy. Democratic professionals are concerned about the effects of their expertise on the lay public's ability to make self-confident choices both inside and outside a particular professional domain. As to social work, our interviews make clear that the provider-purchaser split meant to augment citizen's choice merely augments the choice of politicians. It does not promote citizen's choice nor dialogue between social work and its social surrounding.

There is no less weight attached to accountability in democratic professionalism than is the case in NPM, but this too is a shared task. Accountability is not about external control of professionals who are in turn trying to hide from the public gaze and do their own thing; it also demands something of professionals to begin with. It demands an inquisitive, critical attitude from professionals. Dzur builds on Dewey here: 'Dewey's social scientist promotes the growth of critical thinking by challenging common sense views, encouraging abstract thinking, and by embodying certain habits of mind and character.' (Dzur 2004, p.11) For social work, this demands that knowledge exchange and criticism of colleagues and clients should be welcomed.

For social workers to become democratic professionals, it is necessary that they themselves and their managers leave the self-victimization we also wittness. It prevents them from doing what they believe in even though no one forbids them, like discussing individual evaluation reports. Social workers and their managers could show more public leadership (see also Kim Putters, 2005). If local social work acts more proactive and innovative in setting up these dialogues and placing themselves at the heart of the debate on social quality in society – comparable to the way in which housing corporations place themselves at the heart of the debate on social housing and neighbourhoods. This might also strengthen their legitimacy in society.

Conclusion

The democratic promise of NPM we reconstructed and analysed in this article was not met in the practice of Dutch social work. We broke this promise down into four elements: service orientation, voice, choice and accountability, and concluded that NPM in Dutch social work strengthens neither of these in citizens. It merely strengthens the voice and choice of politicians and policy makers, and accountability towards them. This kind of accountability does not do justice to their professionalism, social workers argue quite convincingly; however, we also came across self-victimization of social workers and managers: some of them tend not to take the discretionary space they do seem to have, e.g. to organise ways of accountability that suit them better. On the other hand we also examples that social workers did develop voice among citizens, but more in an informal manner. For professionals good social work means that they incorporate the client's voice in their support.

We also argued that democratic professionalism can serve as an alternative model to develop democratic promises not met by NPM. Democratic professionalism does not negate or try to abolish professional authority. It rather seeks ways to combine professional and civic authority, recognizing the tension involved in both exercising and sharing authority. This ideal could lead the way beyond NPM democratic failure and self-victimization of social workers and their managers.

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