Power and Democracy in Denmark.
Conclusions

The Democracy and Power Study

In March 1997, the Danish parliament decided to launch a power study, officially entitled ”An Analysis of Democracy and Power in Denmark.” The study is headed by an independent research committee. The results from the various research projects are published in a series of books by Aarhus University Press and a series of shorter works by the Democracy and Power Study.

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Magtudredningen

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Preface

The Danish Democracy and Power Study has published its overall conclusions in the book *Magt og demokrati i Danmark. Hovedresultater fra Magtudredningen* (*Power and Democracy in Denmark. Main conclusions from the Democracy and Power Study*) (Århus: Aarhus University Press, 2003). This book, which is published in Danish and English, is a slightly revised version of the introduction and conclusion of the book, and thus presents the final conclusions of the project.

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Chapter 1
The Democracy and Power Study: the Boundaries of the Project

The common perception in the 1970s was that Danish democracy was in a state of crisis – particularly following the national election of 1973, the so-called earthquake election.[1] This perception of crisis was articulated by Erik Haunstrup Clemmesen, a Conservative politician, during a debate in the Folketing in December 1974: "... if this parliament ... proceeds as we have seen for most of the one-year period that is now coming to an end, I am convinced that democracy in its present form simply will not survive this decade."[2] This type of perception of crisis is no longer heard in the Folketing or public debate. As the committee that recommended a Danish democracy and power study indicated in its report, it no longer seems "appropriate to talk about a crisis for democracy as a form of government."[3]

Despite this statement, the report does express considerable concern about developments in recent years that are "experienced as a tangible loss of democratic influence and hence diminished trust in the strength and relevance of democratic decision-making processes."[4] The democratically elected representatives felt that they were losing control of the development due to internationalization, decentralization and the formation of government-owned corporations. They also felt that it was more difficult to control the population because people "demanded greater individual influence on [their] own situation and opportunities."[5] All in all, conditions for political governance and control were deteriorating. So although it was exaggerated to speak of a democratic crisis, the prevailing perception was that things were headed in the wrong direction.

The committee also ascertained that voters and politicians alike "face a situation in which it is difficult to fully understand the consequences of the described development, which may lead to discontent and frustration."[6] On the basis of this report, the Danish Parliament decided in 1997 to launch a power study or, officially: "An Analysis of Democracy and Power in Denmark."

The assignment

A steering committee consisting of five independent researchers was assigned responsibility for the research project in early 1998. At the conclu-

sion of the project, the total publication list will comprise approximately 50 books and 30 shorter works.

The foundation of the study was the above-mentioned report, issued in March 1997 by the Special Committee regarding an analysis of democracy and power in Denmark. The report contained a catalogue of ideas for the project, but ultimately entrusted the steering committee to define the specific questions. The Steering Committee has chosen to interpret the report in such a manner, that we were bound by the general problems and issues discussed in the report, but not by the specific list of topics. Our assignment was therefore to analyze the state of Danish democracy on the threshold to the 21st century as well as the preceding changes.

The Danish Democracy and Power Study was inspired somewhat by the Norwegian power studies in the 1970s and Swedish studies in the 1980s. Publicly financed power studies are a Scandinavian phenomenon, and in contrast to Denmark, Norway and Sweden have a well-established tradition for public studies. It was therefore natural for us to look to our Nordic role models when we planned our project, but unlike them, the Danish project also includes the Folketing and the political parties as objects of research. In 1998, Norway launched a new power study, which has progressed parallel to the Danish study and within an almost identical formal framework. The new Norwegian "Project Power and Democracy" concluded its work in the autumn of 2003.

The conclusions of the Danish Democracy and Power Study are presented in the book, *Magt og demokrati i Danmark. Hovedresultater fra Magtudredningen* (Power and democracy in Denmark. Main conclusions from the Democracy and Power Study).[7] The intention is to provide general response to the question of how democracy is doing at the dawn of the 21st century. The book is primarily, but not exclusively, based on the main conclusions in the many books published by the Democracy and Power Study. The target audience of the book is the Folketing and interested members of the public. The book at hand contains slightly revised versions of the introduction and conclusion of the book.

We have chosen "change" as the overall theme for the book. Our question is how the political institutions and the political behavior of the population have changed over the second half of the 20th century. This picks up on inspiration for the Committee's report, namely that democracy is facing new challenges. We primarily describe the development since the end of WWII, but occasionally go even further back; at other times we remain closer to the present.

The main objective of *Magt og demokrati i Danmark* is to gather the existing knowledge about the development of democracy in Denmark in the second half of the 20th century. However, we also confront the development with normative conceptions of democracy. The book answers two related questions, each with empirical and normative aspects:

- What is the state of democracy in Denmark at the dawn of the 21st century, and to what extent does it live up to our democratic ideals?
- How has the democratic system in Denmark developed in the second half of the 20th century, and is the development positive or negative?

In other words, the empirical aspect concerns the distribution of power in Denmark, whereas the normative aspect concerns the extent to which the distribution of power conforms to our democratic ideals.

The distribution of power

The question about distribution of power concerns both the relationships between citizens and other political actors and the interaction between the various political institutions. From the development angle, there are two questions: *First*, have the individual citizen's opportunities to influence overall decisions in society and specifically their personal life conditions changed? *Second*, has power shifted between different institutions: between national and international institutions, between politically elected bodies and powerful special interests, between the Cabinet and Parliament, and between the courts and Parliament?

Responding to these questions, we must first define power. Power is one of the most controversial concepts in social sciences. Theory has shifted towards an ever more comprehensive conceptualization of power, including new aspects of power in the analysis. The authors who have contributed to the Democracy and Power Study have applied the power concept or concepts that they personally found most appropriate.[8] In this book, we include most of the forms of power that have been used in the vast array of projects. They can be divided into three main categories:

- power as possession or resource
- power as a relationship between actors
- structural power

Power as possession or resource is probably the most commonly used concept in everyday language. It is the concept behind the question, "Who has the power?" We imagine power as an object, which someone possesses in great quantities, while others have nothing – we are then able to name powerful persons. But it is also a power concept we draw upon if we are interested in the significance of power resources, e.g., the significance of financial capital, organizational strength or professional expertise. The reasoning is that people with significant financial resources, with a strong organization behind them, or people who possess specialized expertise are in a position to affect important decisions in society. Finally, we also use this power concept if we want to know who possesses the positions of power in society: Who owns the government power, who are the members of key boards and committees, and who are on the boards of the large corporations?

Mainstream political science has pooh-poohed this power concept for many years. Criticism has mainly pointed out that not all actors who possess these resources necessarily use them. So the question is whether resources are actually used to exercise power. Alternatively, power and influence have been defined as *relationships between actors*. According to Robert A. Dahl,[9] A has power over B to the extent that A can get B to do something B would not otherwise do. The actors involved may be individuals or collective actors, such as special interest groups, companies or states. Also, this power concept is closely linked to common language.

Dahl's definition of a relational power concept is clear and simple, but the difficulties arise when we apply it in practice. Researchers who otherwise stick to the relational power concept also point out that the exercise of power may be covert or indirect. It is often not even necessary for the powerful, who may possess vast resources, to actually do anything to make others follow their wishes. The other actors are aware that the consequences of not complying will be unpleasant, and therefore they adjust to them in anticipation. Exercise of power may also be expressed in the ability to define or restrict the political agenda. This is a means of keeping an issue off the political agenda and blocking a public debate or a formal decision.[10] Still others point out the limitations of the relational power concept vis-à-vis phenomena such as *structural power*.

Conceptualizations of structural power appear in several versions in power research. We can thus claim that power is linked to *institutional structures* in the sense that different sets of rules and norms produce different outcomes. For example, countries that – like Denmark – administrate unemployment benefits through union-related unemployment funds have a

high rate of unionization and strong unions compared to other countries. Likewise, the electoral system – i.e., proportional (Denmark) or majoritarian (US and UK) – is decisive for the strength of individual political parties. These were two illustrations of inherent structural power in institutions.

Another form of structural power is designated discursive power or power of definition. In this context, the concepts we use and the arguments that are perceived as legitimate affect the selection of political solutions. *The power of definition* is important in contemporary society. As an example, equal rights arguments are strong and legitimate arguments in the political debate in Sweden, but are much less prominent in Danish debates on, for instance, leave schemes.[11] Issue definition and debate climate differ in the two countries, and consequently so do the political solutions that are discussed. Anthropologists use a concept that is related to the concept of discursive power, namely the power of habits.[12] Both are power structures that are difficult for the individual to ignore or deviate from.

Most power analyses – and classic political science analyses in particular – deal with the form of power best described as "power over." The point of departure is a conflict between interests in which somebody or something has power over others by influencing their behavior. According to Michel Foucault,[13] power can also be perceived as "power to." Exercise of power is, for instance, regarded as a process in which the controllee makes the controller's project his own.[14] What is relevant here is "the transformative capacity of power."[15]

To adequately describe the power relations and their development in Danish society, we must include all the different forms of power described above. We must examine which actors possess a broad range of power resources, which actors are capable of affecting other actors' behavior in specific situations, how institutions define the boundaries for the political actors' behavior, and how problem definitions and political values limit the range of political solutions.

Democratic ideals

Assessing the state and development of democracy requires a certain consensus concerning the definition of democracy. The Danish debate has traditionally confronted two different views of democracy against one another: democracy as a method, a view associated with Alf Ross,[16] and democracy as a lifestyle with dialogue as the central element, a view associated with Hal Koch.[17] It is fair to say that the subsequent debates have

tended to widen the gap between the two views, which on the positive side demonstrates the scope of the concept of democracy.

To Alf Ross, a state is democratic to the extent that people have power through universal suffrage and majority votes. The ideal is a state form where the people exercise the political functions with maximum *intensity, extensity and effectiveness*. Intensity concerns the size of the electorate; extensity how many issues the people can affect; and effectiveness concerns the ability of the people to affect the final decisions.[18] For Ross, the manner in which the rules of the constitution are written as to the division of influence between citizens, representatives and bureaucrats is crucial. In other words, he focuses primarily on rights and capacities.

To Hal Koch, universal suffrage and majority votes are not enough to characterize a decision-making process as democratic. On the contrary, such an arrangement can develop into a majority dictatorship. He illustrates this with an example from a parish council: representatives from two parties have been elected; one party has four mandates, the other three. In this situation, the majority group can pursue its own interests without granting consideration to the minority group. For this system to merit democratic characterization, Koch says, it requires that the votes are preceded by public dialogue, where the opposing views are tested against each other, and where the best arguments win in the end. According to Koch, differences can be settled with the fist or through dialogue, but only the latter deserves to be called democracy.[19] Hal Koch's views are fairly similar to the modern definition of democracy, entitled *deliberative democracy*, which emphasizes the necessity of free, public discussion and opinion formation.

Other democracy theorists place greater emphasis on the actual participation of the population in politics, i.e., exercising political rights. What good is universal suffrage if many people do not vote or are not politically active? It is even worse if participation is unevenly distributed in society so that only the most resourceful make use of their democratic rights. From the point of view of participatory democracy, participation must be both broad and equally distributed in the population. This again requires a reasonably equal distribution of economic, social and knowledge-related resources.[20]

Democracy theory has mainly studied the processes of political decision-making or the demands on the decision-making process. There is a risk, however, that the emphasis on these demands becomes too one-sided. The result should also be effective solutions pursuant to the democratic decisions. As Fritz Scharpf, a German political scientist, says, democratic le-

gitimacy depends on the public authorities possessing "the capacity to solve problems that require collective solutions."[21] A democratic society requires effective solutions where the final competence rests with the people. As mentioned, the concern about decreasing ability to govern was a central element in the arguments of the Folketing to initiate a power and democracy study.

We can arrange these considerations about the aspects of democracy in four ideals for a democratic society:

- *Equal political rights*, based on universal suffrage, majority decisions and protection of minorities.
- *Free opinion formation*, based on open and diverse access to information.
- *Broad and equal participation*, which again depends on relatively large equality in economic and social resources.
- *Effective and responsible governance*, meaning that the public sector is capable of solving collective problems in an acceptable and effective manner in accordance with the politically formulated guidelines.

In recent years, the question of the state of democracy has often been formulated as a question of citizenship, i.e., whether all citizens are included as valid, equal and active members of society.[22] The citizenship concept is borrowed from T.H. Marshall,[23] and has given the democracy discussion a reinforced interest in economic and social resources, which are considered to be a precondition for political equality and autonomy. In addition, the citizenship approach brings its own focus on the cohesion of community and the values, orientation or identity of citizens. The question is whether the citizens exhibit tolerance and trust in relation to the political community and in relation to other members of this community.[24] Several studies under the Democracy and Power Study have focused on the quality of citizenship, rather than merely dealing with the rights and participation of citizens. We therefore formulate a fifth ideal by which to measure the Danish society:

- A society characterized by trust, tolerance and regard for the community.

In this book, we inquire as to the extent to which political life in Denmark lives up to these five ideal demands, and whether recent developments fulfill them to a greater or lesser degree. We could formulate many other – and

probably fair – ideals for the political life. It is, for example, difficult to imagine a well-functioning democratic society without a public sector that lives up to the ideals of rule of law, innovation and integrity.[25] However, we have not defined these and similar ideals as democratic ideals, as we want to adhere to a clear and simple conception of democracy. Still, other supplementary ideals will be included in the following.

Notes

[1] Svensson, 1996.
[2] Folketingstidende, 1974-75, 1. samling: sp. 2892.
[3] Beretning nr. 6, 1997: 5.
[4] Beretning nr. 6, 1997: 5.
[5] Beretning nr. 6, 1997: 5.
[6] Beretning nr. 6, 1997: 6.
[7] Togeby et al., 2003.
[8] See also Christiansen & Togeby, 2003a.
[9] Dahl, 1957; 1958.
[10] Bachrach & Baratz, 1962; Lukes, 1974.
[11] Borchorst, 1999; 2003; Dahlerup, 2002.
[12] Sjørslev, 2003.
[13] Foucault, 1979; 1982; 1988.
[14] Vallgårda, 2003a.
[15] Hoff, 2003.
[16] Ross, 1946.
[17] Koch, 1960/1945.
[18] Ross, 1946: 176ff.
[19] Koch, 1960/1945: 14ff.
[20] Pateman, 1970: Dahl, 1989.
[21] Scharpf, 1999: 11.
[22] Goul Andersen, 2002b.
[23] Marshall, 1950).
[24] Goul Andersen, 2002b.
[25] Beck Jørgensen, 2003b.

Chapter 2
Power and Democracy at the Dawn of the 21st Century

The past couple of years have provided many images symbolically illustrating the extent to which we live in a globalized world; and that Denmark has a role to play in it: Danish Prime Minister Anders Fogh Rasmussen, successfully negotiating the enlargement of the EU at the summit in Copenhagen in late 2002; six months later, the same PM being received at the White House, where President Bush thanks him for Denmark's active effort as USA's ally in the war against Iraq. Our images from the political victories 100 years ago are quite different: workers and peasants entering Parliament; the introduction of parliamentarism, whereby the King had to accept a government originating from a majority in Parliament; and it is "the first peasant in the king's council." And finally, there is the consolidation of the Danish nation state in 1920, when the Allied Nations arranged the return of South Jutland to Denmark, despite Denmark not having actually participated in WWI. Over those 100 years, we have moved from the project of consolidating both democracy and the nation state in our own country to a project of playing a role in the supranational cooperation in Europe and the world.

In the same period, Denmark has undergone a transition from an agricultural society over industrial society to a new type of society, which we – for lack of a better word – refer to as the information society. It remains difficult to provide a precise account of this new type of society, the properties of the information society, but some of the characteristics seem to include a great proliferation of information technology, flatter organizational structures, a highly qualified work force, an increasingly individualized and reflexive population, and a more media-dominated and unpredictable political life.[1] Before and along with this development, Denmark has witnessed significant growth in the public sector. Public institutions now structure a very large part of our daily lives.

Magt og demokrati i Danmark asks: What has happened to the distribution of power and democracy in Danish society in this period, particularly in the last couple of decades? How does the fact that we now live in a globalized information society affect the individual citizen and interplay between political institutions? What about the high degree of both political

and economic equality that characterized Denmark in the second half of the 20th century – have we been able to maintain this at the dawn of the 21st century? And has our consciousness kept pace with these relatively encompassing changes?

How has the distribution of power changed?

The distribution of power invites many questions. In the following, we will first examine the changes in the opportunities available to individual citizens to wield influence and at the relationship between the people and the elites. We will then characterize the changes that have occurred in the relationships between different political actors, and finally we will attempt to pinpoint how the exercise of power has changed.

Individualized politics

Comparisons of conditions in the Scandinavian countries in relation to the other countries of the world have always concluded that the Scandinavian countries are characterized by a great degree of political equality. The explanation has traditionally been that the strong political and trade organizations have empowered otherwise weak groups in society. In other words, collective, organizational resources existed that competed with individual resources such as wealth, education and status. This meant that there were strong popular organizations to battle capital and privilege of class.

However, collective organization has weakened over the past decades. The clearest indication of this is the declining membership in political parties, which has primarily hurt the old member parties, e.g., the Social Democrats, the Liberal Party, the Conservative Party and the Social Liberal Party. Moreover, the social composition of the voter bases of the parties is much more varied than previously. The Liberal Party is no longer an agrarian party, and the Social Democrats are no longer a party for the workers. The rumors of the impending death of the parties are, however, highly exaggerated – in fact a new equilibrium with fewer members seems to have been established – but the capacity of the parties for collective mobilization has largely disappeared. Many voters would appear to prefer to make up their mind from issue to issue.[2] The same is true for the union movement; it has not lost many members, but it no longer plays a role as catalyst of social change, which characterized the rise of the industrial society. Moreover, the new social movements that bloomed in the 1970s and 1980s have lost much of their efficacy, being replaced by less ambitious single-issue organizations.[3]

There has also been a shift towards more individualized forms of activism, some of which are oxymoronically referred to as "individualized collective activism,"[4] which includes signing petitions, donating money to organizations or actions, and so-called political consumerism. People participate in a common, collective action, but there is no personal contact among the participants. It is up to oneself to decide when and how to become active. Activism is increasingly situational and changing, not stable and long-term.

Some countries have experienced a drop in associational activity, where active membership has been replaced by support memberships or by money donations to organizations whose supporters are not even members. This development has not yet been detected in Denmark, where associational activity – excluding political parties – remains high; however, participation among young people is on the wane.[5]

At the same time, the activist objectives have changed. To some extent, the trend points away from collective issues towards issues that affect the individual and his or her family. The struggle no longer concerns the working class or women's rights, but rather conditions in our children's schools, new construction that ruins the view, or the closing of a local hospital. It is less about politics and more about user influence and influence on the job, and it is less about how decisions are made and more about how they are implemented. And one cannot simply replace the other. There is a difference between having influence on school legislation and on the conditions in 4th grade at your child's school. This does not necessarily mean that activity is narrowly and egotistically motivated, but the impact is more limited than was previously the case.[6]

All in all, it appears to be safe to claim that the era of the great popular movements is over. The unions and the coop movement no longer mobilize workers and peasants as they did at the beginning of the 20th century. Nor do the social movements mobilize the well-educated and women to the extent they did in the 1970s and 1980s. There has been a development from collective political activity to increasingly individual political activity, and individual resources have gained more significance than collective resources. There are two sides to this issue: On one side we see the outline of citizens who move more freely compared to communities past. This may, on the other side, bear a cost, namely increased political inequality.

Changes in relationships between people and elite

A common theme in the political debate is that the gap between people and elite is growing. This was the theme that Anders Fogh Rasmussen took up in his first New Years' speech as Prime Minister in 2002, when he disparagingly referred to opinion makers and experts who – illegitimately – determine what is right and wrong for other people. There are many versions of the people-versus-the-elite-notion: voters versus politicians, private citizens versus the public sector, average Joes versus experts, and less-educated versus well-educated. The existence of these cleavages is beyond doubt. The question remains, however: How deep are they, and have they grown in recent decades?

If we start by examining the descriptions of citizens in the large voter and citizenship studies, the conclusion is very clear: Danish voters are generally interested in politics, they are knowledgeable, and feel capable of grasping political issues, their attitudes are fairly consistent, and there is a high correlation between their attitudes and their choice of party. They also find it important to make up their mind from issue to issue. The validity of this is increasing. Moreover, their trust in politicians is growing rather than diminishing. It is fair to say that the voters have approximated the classic democratic ideals for sober deliberation. In return, the voters expect dialogue and responsiveness – and they react negatively if they are ignored or overlooked, regardless of whether it is the Folketing, as in a recent controversial case over arrangements providing for early retirement, or the party leadership, as in the recent election of Mogens Lykketoft as the new leader of the Social Democrats.[7]

The gap between the electorate and the political elite would appear to have narrowed in most respects. The similarity between politicians and the general population is greater than ever in terms of gender, age and education.[8] In terms of attitudes, the gap between politicians and people is small in most cases, with convictions pertaining to the EU as the most prominent exception.[9] Occasionally, however, the people perceive a great gap between themselves and the politicians. Likewise, the politicians indicate that they perceive a great gap separating them from the people, or at least they sense that the people perceives a great gap to them.[10]

The fact that this perceived gap is so relatively widespread is probably a result of the weakening of the channels that have traditionally connected politicians and people. The risk of communication failures has increased. The mass media have replaced the large member parties as the most important links between citizens and politicians. Being a politician is no longer a

position of trust that you qualify for after many years of training in the various sections of party organization. It is a profession (almost) like any other profession.[11] Politics has become professionalized, also in terms of the hiring of an increasing number of party employees, contributing to the perception of a gap.

In general, we must conclude that the power gap in Danish society has diminished. The state is no longer distant and superior, but instead at eye-level with the citizens. It has been transformed from an authority state into an everyday state. The public sector has expanded and is a large presence in the citizen's everyday life. Along with this expansion, it has strived to become more user or service-oriented, for example by offering the citizens a range of options.[12] This is a means by which to allow more space and autonomy for the individual citizens in their interactions with authorities. However, it is particularly advantageous for well-functioning and responsible citizens. Citizens whose behavior is not considered responsible, or who do not make the "right" choices, are met with tougher disciplinary measures.[13]

The reduced power gap also applies to the citizens' relationship with the experts, whose authority has faded. Nevertheless, an increasing number of experts have appeared in the media and boards and committees in recent years.[14] Expertise is crucial if we aspire to solve complicated problems in contemporary society; but it is not always neutral – especially in the case of knowledge stemming from the social sciences. Expertise can also be narrow, and it is always produced within a given, professional paradigm. But as the Prime Minister's statement about opinion makers illustrates, experts no longer enjoy the same authority or legitimacy as earlier. The experts have also descended to eye level.

The Internet offers enormous opportunities to break monopolies on expertise, both in relationships between citizens and public authorities and between users and the public service apparatus. Widespread Internet access provides citizens with more resources vis-à-vis the authorities and contributes to a further narrowing of the power gap.[15]

Much of the *people vs. elite* discussion does not even concern the actual elite or the experts, but rather the divide in the population between the well-educated and the less educated, between an upstairs and a downstairs. However, this is a significant expansion of the elite concept. 20 percent of the population has a higher education, and more than 25 percent has graduated from secondary education. In the younger generations, it is close to 50

percent.[16] If 50 percent of a cohort belongs to the elite, the term loses its meaning.

However, it is true that an educational divide remains in the Danish population. The well-educated are more politically active and feel more politically competent than other citizens, and their attitudes also deviate on a number of issues. There is not a great difference in the attitudes of the well-educated and others when it comes to economic policy, but the well-educated are much less critical of immigration, foreign aid and binding cooperation in the EU than the rest of the population. Moreover, the well-educated are less likely to vote for the Danish People's Party.[17]

Educational differences have become more important in Danish politics, and the well-educated gain more influence in relation to their numbers, because they have more resources and are more active. However, from a democratic point of view, it is even more problematic that there are groups at the bottom of the system whose participation and influence are significantly lower than those of the vast majority.

Denmark is one of the countries with the least economic inequality and fewest poor people, and in contrast to almost all other western countries, inequality does not seem to have grown in recent decades. So far, the increased educational demands of society have not caused greater economic disparity. One source of explanation is that the universal Danish welfare state is one of the most redistributive in Europe.[18]

This does not mean that all problems pertaining to marginalization in the labor market and social exclusion have been solved. It is difficult to precisely calculate how many are socially excluded. In a narrow sense, it is a small number; however, there are also many borderline cases. This group includes welfare benefit recipients with "problems other than unemployment," young disability pensioners with abuse and/or mental problems. Social exclusion is typically related to troubled childhood, early drug or alcohol abuse and failures in the care systems. Newly arrived refugees have similarly heavy problems. Both long-term unemployment and social marginalization (which should not be confused) raise the democratic problem that the affected groups are significantly less active and have far fewer resources than the general population. Their political involvement, self-confidence and participation are lower compared to other social groups. Social marginalization tends to lead to political marginalization.[19]

The overall conclusion is that while Denmark shows signs of people vs. elite contrasts in some areas, these contrasts have faded and the power gap has narrowed. The primary reason is that people are better educated, pos-

sess more political resources, greater self-confidence and make more demands. Rather than a divide between elite and people, there is a divide between the great majority of the population, who has gained strength, and the weakest groups in society, who have remained weak, and who have few political resources. In addition, the weak groups face increasing demands to conform to community standards.

On this background, it may seem curious that the question about the divide between people and elite occupies so much space in the public debate. It is also curious that the politicians merely accept this description of their relationship with the electorate. One explanation may be that both citizens and politicians feel that the communication channels between people and leaders are jammed. The mass media are a poor substitute for living social movements. Another, paradoxical, explanation may be that the strong and active citizens also make greater demands and express greater dissatisfaction when they are excluded from influence. So although the distance between people and elite may be smaller, dissatisfaction with the existing distances may nevertheless have grown.

Changes in relations between authorities

The question concerning the changed relationships between political actors can be subdivided into three issues: a) How have the relationships between the branches of government changed, and has there been change in terms of the relationships between the bodies of central government and the municipalities? b) How have the relationships between the public sector and other Danish actors such as organizations, corporations and the media changed? c) How have the relationships between the Danish state and its international surroundings changed? This section will examine the interaction between the three traditional branches of government – the legislature, the executive and the judiciary – as well as the relations between state and municipalities.

The separation of powers is stipulated in the Danish constitution, section 3: "The legislative power is jointly vested in the King and the Parliament. The executive power is vested in the King. The judicial power is vested in the courts of justice." "The King" today means "the Cabinet." In practice, the principle that dictates separation of powers has been modified by the parliamentary principle, which asserted itself in 1901, and which is now formulated in the section 15 of the Constitution. According to this principle, a government can only remain in power as long as a majority in the Folketing does not express a vote of no confidence. The Folketing is

thus the central link in the democratic chain of government. One might imagine that the power relations between the different government bodies had remained fairly constant since the parliamentary principle was entered in the Constitution in 1953. This is not the case, however. On the contrary, the discussion about the separation of powers has resurfaced in recent years.

One of the reasons for launching a Democracy and Power Study was that the Folketing was worried about losing power. If we examine the relationship between Cabinet and the Folketing, the development now seems to be in the reverse direction. First, the Folketing has strengthened its control over the Cabinet and hence the central administration, but it has also increased its influence on legislation. The government and civil servants – who prepare legislation – secure significant influence. This has not changed. However, with the introduction of the so-called standing committees in 1972, the Folketing improved its means to affect legislation. As a consequence, individual MPs specialize in certain policy areas and can accumulate significant expertise within their particular field of responsibility. At the same time, the Folketing can, through the so-called "common part" of the committees – which is not linked with legislative work – gain far more detailed insight into the work in the ministries than it had before. In the same period, the secretarial service has improved, which has improved opportunity in the Folketing to influence the contents of legislation and to impose more stringent control over the Cabinet and the administration. The great increase in the number of inquiries and questions shows that the MPs know how to use these improved control measures.[20] One factor pulling in the opposite direction, however, is the increasing significance of the EU cooperation (see below).

Government has also changed over the past 25-30 years. The ministerial rule is intact in the sense that the minister is still politically and legally responsible for his policy area and accountable to the Folketing in matters great and small. In most other Western countries, the Cabinet hires politically appointed officials or vice-ministers to advise and relieve the minister. This is not the case in Denmark; or it wasn't, at least. Tradition in Denmark has been to hire and promote civil servants according to their qualifications.[21] The ministers' top civil servant, the permanent undersecretary – sometimes joined by other leading civil servants – traditionally provided the minister with the advice necessary. This has also – and increasingly – included political counsel. The limitations to political guidance is that the civil service must not provide counsel in support of the minister during

election campaigns, just as advice concerning the minister's party is regarded as being illegitimate.[22]

Over the past 30 years, it has become increasingly common for various Cabinets to hire advisors who were not recruited via traditional channels. The question as to ministerial use of these advisors has been a constant topic of debate –the opposition having kept particular eye on use of them by the Cabinet – just as the question has been deliberated in special committees.[23]

A white paper from 1998 (Betænkning 1354) generated political support for a set of rules, the most important of which is that special advisors can only be hired for staff functions, meaning that they do not have authority to instruct the civil service, and their employment is of fixed duration. The current cabinet's numerous media advisors – i.e., spin doctors – were hired on terms that complied with the rules, but after several episodes in the Cabinet's first year, the Folketing felt compelled in the spring of 2003 to reclarify the role of special advisors. Another special committee was subsequently formed. A sporadic and largely unregulated phenomenon in the 1970s, the hiring of special advisors to the ministers, is now regulated and subject to intense political scrutiny. Effectively controlling the ministers requires that the Folketing is aware of the premises under which a minister receives advice from his civil servants. Questions regarding the behavior of media advisors therefore also touch upon the key question of the power relationships between Cabinet and Folketing.

There was a period in which it had become common to regard the Folketing as having been reduced to little more than a rubber stamp. Nobody says that anymore, at least not when speaking about domestic matters. The influence of the Folketing varies according to the parliamentary base of the government. The numerous minority governments since 1971 have strengthened the Folketing in relation to the Cabinet. It is more uncertain who has gained from the change in the parliamentary praxis, which until the start of the 1980s dictated that a cabinet must resign or call an election if it is outvoted in parliament. The bourgeois cabinets in the 1980s sustained – and accepted – a substantial number of lost votes without drawing the parliamentary consequences, i.e., to step down. This has not occurred since the cabinet change in 1993, however.

Regardless of the parliamentary base of the Cabinet, the Folketing has stepped up its use of various procedures for parliamentary control over the years. In addition, a trend over the past 25 years has given political accountability a more judicial touch through the use of judicial inquiries, tri-

bunals of inquiry and the court of impeachment.[24] All in all, developments over the past 30 years indicate that the Folketing has strengthened its position vis-à-vis the Cabinet.[25]

The role of the judiciary has changed in a way that has weakened the Folketing. Traditionally, Danish courts have not played a prominent political role, and the Supreme Court has been very cautious in reviewing the constitutionality of various acts. In recent years, the Supreme Court has, however, been more open to such reviews. This has shifted the balance between the three branches of government. The culmination thus far has been the 1999 decision in the so-called Tvind Case, which marked the first time the Supreme Court rejected a law on the grounds of unconstitutionality. The premise of the decision was that the very specific content of the Tvind Act was in conflict with section 3 of the Constitution regarding the separation of powers.

As early as 1849, the June Constitution empowered the courts to review the administration's compliance with the law. The development has gone towards strengthening this controlling function. Jens Peter Christensen concludes that "[f]rom a position as government branch equal with the administration, the position of the courts today is superior and controlling. And not only when it comes to actual legal interpretation, but to a large extent also when it comes to discretionary decisions made by the administration."[26] The Danish judiciary has increasingly taken on a lawmaking role, shifting the traditional balance between the three branches of government. It is just one of many indications that Danish society is becoming more "judicialized".

In recent decades, the balance between state and local governments has been transformed as well. After the Local Government Reform of 1970, tasks have gradually been transferred from the state to counties and municipalities. The same period witnessed a dramatic growth in the public service sector, primarily in counties and municipalities. The municipalities have also assumed many public regulatory inspection activities, e.g., in the implementation of environmental policy. With considerable consequences, policy has been to allocate tasks to the lowest level of political and administrative authorities that can manage them properly. The state has thus voluntarily relinquished a number of tasks, but up through the 1990s a "recentralization" has manifested itself in increasing standardization of municipal activities. Finally, there has also been a transfer of – small thus far – tasks to the state. As a consequence of the increased weight of the municipal sector, Local Government Denmark (LGDK, the association of Danish munici-

palities) has gained a strong foothold in the political system as an organization representing the interests of local government vis-à-vis the state. LGDK is occasionally referred to as the fourth branch of government,[27] or the second chamber of parliament. While these descriptions exaggerate LGDK influence, there is no doubt that there has been a transfer of power from the state to the local governments as a result of consistent decentralization over the past 30 years.

The fact that local government and the judiciary have gained ground may confirm concern in the Folketing about loss of influence. In contrast, the Folketing seems to have strengthened its position vis-à-vis the government and the administration.

Relationships between the government and organizations, business and the media

Concern in the Folketing about its weakened position does not merely – and perhaps not even primarily – refer to its relationships with other bodies of central and local government. It is far more about the possible loss of power in relation to the national and international surroundings, i.e., organizations, private businesses, EU and other international bodies.

Denmark has a long tradition of including interest organizations in binding cooperation in connection with the preparation of legislation as well as the administration of passed legislation. Corporatism was gradually established in Denmark during the 20th century, and culminated in the 1960s. From the mid-1970s, the corporatist system has gradually weakened. First, organizations are no longer included on the same formal and binding terms in legislative preparation as previously. Fewer legislative preparation committees and fewer decision preparation committees are being formed. More and more frequently, even the large organizations are not invited to join the committees that are formed. For example, it has become more common than earlier that major decisions pertaining to the labor market are made without including The Danish Confederation of Trade Unions and the Danish Employers' Confederation. In contrast, the participation of the organizations in the administration of current legislation does not seem to have declined.

The organizations continue to enjoy close relations with the authorities, and in many cases they have significant influence on legislation. While formal inclusion in legislative preparation – apart from hearings prior to presentation to the Folketing – has declined, informal contacts with civil servants as well as the Folketing have apparently become very extensive.

One consequence is that large organizations gain privileges at the expense of small organizations, i.e., organizational participation has become more unequal. Corporatism always favored large and strong organizations, but the weakening of corporatism seems to have magnified this tendency.[28]

Civil servants and politicians have probably gained more degrees of freedom in connection with the inclusion of organizations in legislative preparation. However, in many instances, the organizations have ample opportunity to mobilize greater resistance to proposals that are in conflict with the interests of their members, and in some cases they have actually succeeded. Almost all policy areas create dependencies between the authorities and affected interest groups. This may make it difficult for decision-makers to implement changes that are detrimental for an actor,[29] which may partially explain why decision-makers occasionally opt to pass reforms in large complexes to avoid including the public (see below).

It is more challenging to conclude whether the influence of private business has changed. There are many indications that its strength has increased. Globalization makes it easier for large corporations to pick a location, which presumably makes them stronger in relation to political authorities. The many mergers we have witnessed in recent years, e.g., in the food industry and retail sector, have the same effect. In comparisons with other countries, Denmark was previously characterized by the absence of large corporations. This picture has changed, however, and in some areas a few corporations have gained a monopoly-like position.[30] Finally, recent outsourcing and privatization of large state enterprises such as the Copenhagen Airports, Scandlines AG and Tele Danmark/TDC have also contributed to a stronger private business sector at the expense of the state.

Has private business been able to increase its influence on political decisions? In some regards, this is beyond doubt. Some of the largest corporations now enjoy relations to public authorities that are comparable to the organizations. In addition, the corporations with frequent contact to the authorities are the same corporations that are active in the media, coordinating their strategies with other players and employing actual lobbyists. In trades with one dominant corporation, it can be difficult to distinguish between the corporation and the relevant organization. The organization's policy thus comes to represent a single corporation.[31] If there are signs of growing political influence in some trades, the relations across elite groups seem to have faded since the mid-1930s and further since the 1960s. There is little overlap in memberships between business, on one side, and the political and administrative elite on the other. Furthermore, the fact that the Compe-

tition Act was revised more than once during the 1990s proves that there are limits to the political influence of large corporations. Despite considerable resistance from big business, competition legislation has been tightened.[32]

The increased political significance of the mass media, however, is beyond all doubt. The political parties no longer fulfill the role as the primary link between people and politicians. The media affect the agenda and attitudes of the people, as well as political communication and political decisions. The decisive aspect is less the deliberate attempts of journalists to introduce single issues or sensationalist journalism, than it is the influence of the media on the structure and form of political communication. The media provide the arena that frames the political competition. The decisive factor seems to be the news criteria of the mass media and the fast pace that may give a distorted picture of the political reality. A good news story relates something unusual; it involves a conflict, preferably between named, famous individuals. The media are less proficient at dealing with complicated social issues, which receive less mention. Since it is important to appear in the media, politicians are pushed to act primarily on the terms of the electronic media. The media have thus increased their influence in recent years, but they have not taken over power. Nor can the politicians be seen as the defenseless victims of the media's coup d'état; quite to the contrary, they are usually willing players on the stage provided by the media.[33]

We have recently witnessed change in the strength of actors in the state's surroundings, most prominently in terms of a relative weakening of the organizations and a relative strengthening of the mass media. This corresponds to the popular perception. In addition, globalization seems to have strengthened the market at the expense of the state, but it is more doubtful whether private business has increased its political influence. It is hardly fair to characterize this development as a general weakening of the political authorities, but the terms for their activities have changed.

Sovereignty and independence

Globalization has also altered the conditions for politics in Denmark. Distinction can be drawn between three forms of globalization: economic, political and cultural. While economic and cultural globalization affect the framework of politics, political globalization – including Europeanization – affects political decision-making processes directly.

Nobody would dispute that economic globalization increased in the second half of the 20th century, but assessments as to the scope and novelty

of the phenomenon differ. Specifically, a small country such as Denmark has always had an open economy and been dependent on international trade and competition. The most radical change is the dramatic growth in international capital transactions on the financial markets. Equally conspicuous are the transnational direct investments and acquisitions into gigantic multinationals. All things being equal, this weakens the governing potential of nation states, including the ability to enforce regulation and effectively tax large corporations.[34]

Political globalization comprises Denmark's participation in international cooperation within the EU, UN, NATO etc. Of these, EU membership has the greatest impact on political decision-making processes, because Denmark has formally ceded sovereignty to the EU on several occasions, after which decision in narrowly defined areas are made by the EU's competent bodies as opposed to the Danish Folketing. There are two types of limitations to the scope and depth of EU cooperation: One is the legality principle, limiting EU cooperation to those areas that are stated in the Treaty. The other limitation is the subsidiarity principle, i.e., decisions are to be made as closely to the affected citizens as possible. The EU should not interfere in matters that can just as well be handled at the national level. The actual strength of these limitations is debatable, however. The legality principle is itself limited by the fact that the Council of Ministers can make decisions that affect the current treaty foundation "when required."[35] This makes the legality somewhat flexible, which goes for the subsidiarity principle as well, which is difficult to apply stringently.[36]

As a member of the EU, Denmark is furthermore subject to decisions by the European Court of Justice. To the extent that nation states have ceded sovereignty to the EU, they also have to accept the decisions of the Courts. Likewise, the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR), founded on the basis of the European Convention on Human Rights, can make decisions which Denmark are bound by treaty to follow. In terms of national law, there is nothing stopping legislation that is in conflict with the Human Rights Convention, but in reality compliance with the Convention has always been the goal. In 1992, The European Convention on Human Rights was actually incorporated into Danish legislation. In specific decisions, the Danish courts characteristically take into account that the legislature does not want the state of the law to conflict with ECHR precedents. One consequence of the judiciary's ongoing lawmaking practice is that judges in international courts may make political decisions of major significance for Danish society;[37] and this is probably merely the beginning.

We can get an impression of EU influence on Folketing legislation by examining how often law texts refer directly to compliance with EU regulation. The number of such references has grown significantly over the past 20 years: In 1981/82, only three percent of Danish laws referred to direct compliance with EU directives, compared to 12 percent in 2000/01. In 1981/82, 14 percent of the laws contained some form of adaptation to EU regulation compared to 37 percent in 2000/01. Although many of these laws have limited scope, the autonomy of the Folketing has nevertheless been significantly reduced.[38]

These conditions have given rise to a common perception that globalization – and EU cooperation in particular – will gradually erase national institutional characteristics, and a convergence of the European countries will take place. There are several indications that this is not the case, however. Political institutions survive. One conclusion is that globalization has not and will not anytime soon affect Danish welfare policy in any significant way.[39] Another conclusion is that the political integration of immigrants in Europe depends completely on the citizenship regime that has traditionally been established in the different countries.[40] The third conclusion is that adaptation to the EU system that member countries have been compelled to make vary from country to country. We cannot talk about institutional convergence, but rather adaptation within a framework that is defined by the administrative architecture of the individual country.[41] However, we should not overlook the pragmatic, internationally oriented development in the public sector, which quietly follows in the wake of the large and more visible political decisions. Various branches, especially in the central administration, are joining direct cooperation with bodies of administration in other countries or with a supranational body such as the EU. These environments feed a dynamic that may transform the national administration as we have seen with regulation of the infrastructure (telecommunications, railroads, power supply etc.).[42]

Considering the significance of EU regulation, it is important to examine the nature of influence the Danish Folketing has on decisions made in the EU. Already when Denmark joined the EU, the solution was to establish a special committee – today the European Affairs Committee – with which the government would confer on market policy issues. In contrast to the other parliamentary committees, the European Affairs Committee actually has authority to reject the government's proposals. Danish European policy is thus defined with a direct democratic mandate and with an opportunity to impose political accountability on the minister if he or she steps

outside the mandate from the European Affairs Committee. This mandating process is not without problems, though. The case load is enormous, the deadlines often so tight that we have to wonder whether the European Affairs Committee in some cases is more than a rubber stamp for EU policy in the government.[43] With or without the European Affairs Committee, ceding sovereignty to the EU has weakened the Folketing.

There is no doubt that competences have gradually been transferred from national to international authorities over the past 30 years. Nor is there any doubt that the people's democratic influence through the EU system is more indirect and limited than its influence through the Folketing. But let us not forget that the cessation of sovereignty is a result of the people's own choices, and there is no guarantee that the same competences could have maintained their full value outside the EU. Nonetheless, the fact that power has shifted from national to international authorities is beyond question.

Changed decision-making processes

In 1901, the Rigsdag passed 55 acts, and the central administration issued 130 statutory orders. In 2002, the Folketing passed 257 acts, and 728 statutory orders were issued. In 1901, there were two interpellation debates as opposed to 70 in 2001. The decision to implement a local government reform in the late 1950s required 12 years of preparation. In 2002-03, political patience for work of a similarly thorough nature no longer exists. The nature of political decision-making processes has changed.

The first precondition is that the political sphere has expanded. Many more issues are subjected to political regulation than previously, and the regulation has moved closer to the individual citizen than before. Politicians and authorities increasingly attempt to form the citizens' behavior and attitudes.[44] The governing ambitions have grown, as has the number of questions to be decided. Apparently there are no limits to what can be included in politics today. The erosion of the traditional boundary between domestic and foreign policy, where the latter was the sole responsibility of the Cabinet, contributes to the expansion of the field of responsibilities of the Folketing. It has become difficult to define an area that, on the grounds that it concerns foreign policy, is not within the competence of the Folketing.

The nature of political actors has also changed: there are more of them, and they are less predictable. The elected politicians face competition from many corners. Single-issue organizations have replaced broad social movements; the mass media have replaced political parties as the most important link between citizens and politicians, *and* the media have simulta-

neously distanced themselves from the political parties. The effect of the media on politics also means that political communication is increasingly controlled by the media's own news criteria and cycles. Ordinary citizens have also gained greater influence on political decisions in different ways,.

Denmark has never had strong traditions for basing political decisions on accessible knowledge – as opposed to Sweden, for instance. The scientific/analytical level in Danish white papers has generally been low. White papers have often seemed negotiated rather than analytical presentations of political issues. Trends in recent years point towards a further weakening of the knowledge base of decision-making. Fewer and fewer bills are prepared in commissions, and when the commissions are formed, their time frame is often narrower than previously. It almost seems as though there is a guiding principle a la "We'll figure it out as we go – we can always fix things if the there are unforeseen and unfortunate consequences."

Combined, these new conditions for political decisions mean that the character of the decision-making process has changed. The number of cases requiring attention from ministers and MPs has grown. Although the politicians may have great capacity, there are limits, and the number of possible topics has grown significantly faster than the capacity of decision-makers to handle them. More single issues pop up out of the blue and occupy the agenda, and the politicians must provide prompt results. Here, the media effect plays a significant role, because it puts pressure on politicians who feel that they must demonstrate action to the voters, who no longer automatically vote for the same party election after election.

In other cases, media attention is deliberately avoided when making decisions, which is reflected in the manner in which the decisions are made. It is now common practice to pass amendments to legislation – sometimes even actual reforms – as part of large compromises, including budget compromises. The logic is to avoid mobilization of the media and the public against unpopular decisions.[45]

This all means that the political pulse is beating much faster than before, and there is less time to prepare large reforms. The legislative pace has increased, as has the pace of reform throughout the public sector. "Development" and "innovation" are among the most frequently mentioned values in public institutions.[46] Decision-making processes have become more chaotic and murky. The reduced transparency makes it difficult for citizens to affect political decisions and control those in power.

Changes in the forms of power

The power concept is widely discussed in literature on the issue.[47] An important point is that in addition to observable power, where one political actor actively and openly influences another political actor, power is also found in more covert forms. An example is attempts at influencing the political agenda or the perceptions or consciousness of others, thereby influencing their decisions and actions. The claim is that if we only focus on direct, observable power, a major part of the actual exercise of power will go unnoticed. Many analyses in the Democracy and Power Study do discuss these alternative forms of power. Some areas have no doubt experienced increased use of more indirect forms of power. Of course, we have also become more aware of and better at describing indirect forms of power.

For example, Nils Mortensen and Jens Peter Frølund Thomsen[48] describe the exercise of power over social clients today as an iron fist in a velvet glove. Soft power has replaced punishment and sanctions. The central objective is to affect the clients' behavior, attitudes and self-image towards mastering and claiming responsibility for their own lives, thereby contributing to improving their quality of life and to progress. Power is exercised through apparently "soft" social techniques, such as supportive client dialogues, offers of pedagogical assistance and invitations to confide personal problems. A key trait in such intervention is that it strives to avoid direct discipline and control. The objective is, in Foucault's words,[49] to control individuals by allowing them to control themselves. The reference to an iron fist in a velvet glove is owing to the latent threats of force, e.g., withholding benefits or forcibly removing children, which usually serve as back-up for these soft techniques. Soft forms of power often involve manipulation, as clients are not fully informed as to the evaluation of their situation or the precise intentions of the effort.

The weakest social clients are not the only victims of this form of power. Social and health policy currently emphasizes respect for the self-determination and integrity of the individual citizen, as well as their right to make their own choices. However, for citizens to be able to live up to expectations concerning self-determination, their basis for making the right choices must be improved. There is talk of empowering citizens by supporting their choices and creating supportive environments. While underscoring the citizens' self-determination and right to make their own choices, there is a massive effort to shape citizens and affect their behavior, attitudes and skills to help them plan their lives in a way deemed desirable. This trend was resisted in Denmark for a long time, as it was perceived as repre-

senting transgression of personal boundaries. However, it is becoming increasingly legitimate for the state to interfere when citizens behave "undesirably" – e.g., when they smoke or drink too much, when they eat too much fat etc.[50] This trend raises questions as to how far the state ought to go in pursuing what is best for people or to make them do what is best for them.

Defining political problems is the point of contention in many contemporary power struggles. It is not so much about deciding what people should think, but rather, about shaping the conceptual framework of their thinking, i.e., defining the concepts and perspectives through which reality is to be perceived. The method is to talk about *problems*, about what is *desirable* or *necessary*, which may gloss over the fact that there is somebody whose *interests* are at stake. The "power to define" is so important, because the subsequent policy formation depends on how the problems are defined from the outset.

The history of the Poor Relief Act serves as an example – legislation that was primarily intended to solve a specific societal problem. In 1933 it became a social law, in 1973 a social assistance law, and in 1998 it became the *Social Service Act*. The latter name signals that the authorities exist to provide services to citizens as if they were customers in a store. Another example is labor market policy, which was almost redefined overnight as a policy for structural problems in the labor market. Focus in the 1970s was on stimulating employment. In the 1980s, focus was on improved competitiveness and increased exports. In 1988-89 focus shifted to emphasize greater flexibility in the labor market, including stronger incentives. A third example is debate in 2001 regarding longer parental leave, specifically the issue of the men's share. There were those who defined paternity leave in terms of gender equality, while others characterized it in terms of an expression of force, paternalism and restriction of individual free choice. The latter interpretation of paternity leave won the problem definition struggle, subsequently making its mark on the final legislation.[51]

Such attempts at acting politically by influencing the language are sometimes made to cloak the real issue of a debate. This was the case when, in the spring of 2003, the government justified an organizational change in the news section of the national Danish Broadcasting Corporation with a wish to "ensure diversity" in the news coverage; however, the real reason was objection towards the work of certain journalists. The same occurs when demands for efficiency in the public sector are rejected by

employees with reference to clients and the quality of service, when the arguments are actually designed to protect employee privileges.

The power of definition determines which types of arguments are deemed legitimate in the political debate. Some arguments are more privileged than others. The aforementioned example of paternity leave illustrates how the freedom of choice argument carries more weight in the Danish debate than does the gender equality argument. It does not have to be that way, however. Comparison with Sweden reveals that gender equality is much less prominent in the political debate in Denmark. Equality is often not mentioned in Denmark, not even in connection with reform proposals that would affect the two genders differently.[52] Another example is that, in contrast to earlier, political arguments in the present-day health care debate rarely refer to the community or society, referring instead to benefits for the individual citizen.[53] Finally, arguments are occasionally raised in Danish politics in support of an aspect of policy that it is somehow "Danish", regardless of its other qualities. The converse can also be observed, i.e., arguments are leveled against a specific measure on the grounds that it is regarded as "non-Danish". In contrast, describing something as specifically "Swedish" is not an element in the political debate in Sweden.[54] In this way, some interests become far more difficult to accommodate than others. As a consequence, the political sphere drains its pool of arguments.

This struggle over concepts and problem definitions occasionally manifests itself in a direct and open manner as an element in the political struggle. This is the case when, for instance, experts are described as opinion makers, and opponents of the bourgeois government's refugee and immigrant policy are described as "the do-good industry," or when former Prime Minister Poul Nyrup Rasmussen labeled the Danish People's Party "not salonfähig."

At other times it is more indirect and with expert assistance: unemployment was once defined as a result of low demand for manpower (e.g., due to low consumption or low exports), but has since been redefined as a result of an inflexible labor market or a lack of educational qualifications. In another example, for quite some time the dominant idea among teachers was that traditional knowledge and skills lose their significance in the "knowledge society."[55] These types of theoretical models can sometimes achieve an almost hegemonic status and make it very difficult for alternative ideas to gain a foothold in the debate.

Regardless which direction the process evolves in, the fact that some problem definitions win the battle and become dominant restricts the politi-

cal debate, and choices become limited. Marianne Jelved, parliamentary leader of the Social Liberal Party, describes this state of affairs quite succinctly: "They say I belong to the 'do-good industry', and therefore they don't have to talk with me. That's how to put a lid on the debate, and this is very unpleasant for democracy."[56]

How has democracy fared?

We began by defining four criteria for a democratic society: 1) Equal political rights, based on universal suffrage, majority decisions and protection of minorities. 2) Free opinion formation, based on an open and relatively diverse communications system. 3) Broad and equal participation, which again depends on relatively large equality in resources. 4) Effective governance, meaning that the public sector is capable of solving collective problems in an acceptable and effective manner in accordance with the politically formulated guidelines. In the following, we inquire as to whether developments in Denmark have strengthened or weakened democracy in terms of these four criteria. The related question about citizens' attitudes, values and identities will be discussed in the next section.

Equal political rights

By equal political rights we mean that all citizens in the country have equal opportunities to effectively influence political decisions and effective protection of minority rights in relation to the majority. In practice, the influence of the people is indirect, as the citizens elect representatives to the Folketing or to the local councils, who then have the decision-making authority. In Denmark, representative democracy is supplemented by other elements of direct democracy, such as referenda.[57] The fundamental rules for the political rights of the citizenry are stated in the Constitution, which was last revised in 1953. However, various changes were made in this area in the second half of the 20th century.

According to the Constitution, all Danish citizens who have reached the electoral age determined by referendum and who are residing in Denmark can vote in parliamentary elections. The electoral age was set in 1953 at 23. After subsequent referenda, the electoral age was lowered in 1978 to the current 18 years. Suffrage in local elections is determined by the election act and was originally reserved for Danish citizens. Suffrage in local elections has, however, been expanded several times; first in 1977 to Nordic citizens after three years' residence in Denmark, then in 1981 to all foreign citizens with three years' uninterrupted residence in Denmark, and finally in

1995 to all EU citizens and the Nordic citizens with permanent residence in Denmark. These expansions should be seen in the context of a growing number of foreign citizens during that same period, which means a growing number of citizens who cannot vote in parliamentary elections.[58]

The provisions of the election act concerning nomination and distribution of seats have only been revised on minor points since the constitutional amendment of 1953. The most important revision is that it has become more difficult for new political parties to become registered in elections. For the Folketing, seats are distributed proportionally within multi-member constituencies, and a low threshold and a large number of compensatory seats ensure a high level of correspondence between the voice of the electorate and the distribution of seats in the Folketing. However, there have been changes in intra-party rules regarding nomination and distribution. Previously, most parties put up their multi-member constituency candidates with one candidate in each nomination district, some of the parties combining this with the use of a closed list. Since the 1970s, the parties increasingly have put up the candidates in parallel in all nomination districts, i.e., using a kind of open list system. This extends greater influence to the personal votes on which candidates are elected for the individual party, and the influence of the voters grows at the expense of the parties.[59]

Denmark's EU membership and the gradual transfer of competences to the EU complicate the question of equal suffrage. Equal suffrage for all Danish citizens residing in Denmark who have reached 18 years of age also applies to the European Parliament, just as other EU citizens can vote, but it may be a problem that the Council of Ministers, the EU assembly that plays the main decisive role in the legislative process, is not subject to free, direct elections. The Council consists of ministers from the member countries and lends its democratic legitimacy from the national governments, which again lend their legitimacy from the parliaments. Thus, many extra links have been added between the voters and the assembly with the greatest decision-making authority.[60]

The important items of minority protection are stated in the list of civic rights in the Constitution: freedom of speech, freedom of assembly and freedom of religion. Minority protection was expanded when Denmark joined the UN's Declaration of Human Rights and the European Convention on Human Rights. The latter was incorporated into Danish law in 1992. Denmark also joined UN's Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, which was implemented in Denmark in 1971 through schedule to the criminal code and through *Law on prohibition*

against differential treatment on the labor market and finally in the spring of 2003 the *Law on ethnic equal treatment*. In sum, minority protection has expanded considerably in recent years.

Section 3 of the Constitution stipulates the separation of powers, and Section 15 the parliamentary principle. The former emphasizes a separation of the legislative, the executive and the judiciary, while the latter prioritizes the Folketing and thereby the sovereignty of the people. Thus far, the constitutionality reviews of the Supreme Court have been very cautious. In recent years, however, the courts have gained a more prominent role that challenges the primacy of the Folketing. Decisions from The European Court of Justice and the European Court on Human Rights, which Denmark is bound to follow, have had the same effect.[61] Increased court control with legislation may reinforce the rule of law, but it also weakens the political democracy.

Developments in this area have been contradictory. In many ways, the democratic rights of the people have been strengthened: suffrage has been expanded, the voters have more influence on the election of MPs, and human rights are better protected; however, there are also contradictory trends. First and foremost, Denmark's EU membership has meant that many important decisions are made in a decision-making system in which the citizens only have indirect influence. We also must note that although the suffrage has been expanded, a growing share of the adult population in Denmark cannot vote in national elections. Add to this the increased strength of the judiciary at the expense of the legislature, which may reinforce the rule of law, but weakens the sovereignty of the people.

Free opinion formation

The demand for free opinion formation implies that formal decisions are preceded by public debate, and opportunity for qualified opinion formation has been provided. It is therefore important that all political questions are publicly debated, and all views have an opportunity to be heard in the debate.

The June Constitution of 1849 introduced transparency in the Rigsdag as well as in the courts. Nevertheless, committee negotiations are closed, as in the European Affairs Committee. Normally, work in the committees would subsequently be confirmed in the Folketing. However, as the European Affairs Committee has the competence to instruct the government regarding negotiations in the EU, the Committee's strong position in the Folketing has limited the transparency principle. This is, of course, intended

to protect the Danish Government's position in EU negotiations, but it does not alter the fact that the insight of the people into the decision-making process has been restricted. Generally, the highly complex EU decision-making process has made it more difficult for the people to keep informed about political issues.[62] The transparency principle is also weakened by the increasing number of large reform packages, e.g., in connection with budget compromises where all negotiations have been kept even more hidden from the public than usual.[63]

A qualified public debate about future legislation requires more than transparency in the legislative process: it requires sufficiently thorough analyses of possible consequences of proposed measures before reading in the Folketing; it also requires that this information is made public.

Transparency in the courts and in meetings in the Folketing does not extend to the administration, which, to the contrary, has a long-standing principle of absence of transparency. The Act on Public Access to Documents in Administrative Files of 1970 introduced open administration in the form of access to documents. The right to gain access to documents does not comprise internal work documents, legislative preparation material before introduction of bills to the Folketing, information about individuals' private relations, or documents that may harm the safety of the realm or the solution of crimes. Moreover, a person requesting access to documents must identify the relevant case. The purpose of access to documents was to safeguard the individual citizen's civic rights, not public opinion formation or the democratic process. As Tim Knudsen points out,[64] Denmark remains reluctant to expand the access of the public to the administration. In comparison, Sweden's transparency principle is stated in the Constitution, and it is significantly broader than the Danish principle. The Danish Constitution does not stipulate freedom of information; it only prohibits pre-censorship. Considering the development in transparency principles that has taken place in many western countries in recent years, it is becoming increasingly difficult to maintain the image of Denmark as a model country in terms of open administration.[65]

Free opinion formation not only requires broad publicity in common matters, but also a pluralistic mass media institution so that different political actors and ordinary citizens have channels through which to communicate their views. The dominant trends in the media pull in opposite directions. On the one hand, the number of newspapers – and thus diversity – declined steadily throughout the 20th century. On the other hand, the Danish Broadcast Corporation's monopoly on electronic news coverage was

abolished, and the number of competing radio and TV channels has risen. All the same, the result is that the different news media have become more similar.[66]

This development does not imply that all political actors and all views have equal opportunity to speak out. The news criteria applied by both the written and the electronic media prioritize powerful political actors at the expense of the less powerful. They prioritize cases where sharp views clash; they focus on personal conflicts instead of the substance of a case, and they grant preference to cocksure, simple and plain standpoints over enquiring and compromising views. The greatest problem is probably all the cases and opinions that are filtered out because they do not make the cut in the routine news criteria. The danger is that the media construct an image of reality that fits poorly with the political reality. Media researchers find that these trends in news coverage have intensified in recent years.[67]

This is another area in which the development has been contradictory. The administration has opened up slightly, but at the same time the legislative process has become less transparent and murkier. The abolishment of the monopoly on radio and TV has paved the way for increased competition between channels and between the printed and electronic media, but paradoxically the competition seems to have made the media more similar.

Broad and equal participation

There are two points of interest when we examine the political participation of the people: first, the scope – how many participate, and has that changed? Second, the distribution of participation – do all groups participate fairly equally in society, and has that changed? Political participation comprises participation in the formal democracy, for instance voting and work in political parties, and informal activities like participating in demonstrations, signing petitions or political consumption. It also concerns the so-called "big democracy", i.e., common decisions made centrally or locally, and the so-called "small democracy," i.e., individual citizen influence at work or in public institutions.

Most countries have experienced a drop in voter turnout in recent years; however, not Denmark. After a temporary drop around 1990, voter turnout at the national election in 2001 was 87 percent, which is approximately the same level as many decades back. Voter turnout for national elections is also high in comparison with other countries. However, as is the experience in other countries, it is difficult to motivate the people to participate in elec-

tions for the European Parliament, where turnout has hovered around 50 percent.[68]

In contrast to voter turnout, activity in the political parties has dropped. Party membership culminated in the early 1950s, and since which time it has declined; rapidly in the beginning and since more moderately. Currently just fewer than five percent of the electorate are members of a political party; roughly half of the members participate actively.[69]

Informal activities, which have always existed in one form or another, flourished in the 1970s with the new social movements, and have since been referred to as grassroot activities. Despite the subsequent decline of the social movements, grassroot activities have continued to grow, but more recently in connection with single issues. The scope shrunk during the past decade, but in 2001 the level of activity was still higher than in 1979. Likewise, participation in the so-called "small democracy" has increased, i.e., activities related to one's place of employment and in relation to public institutions.[70]

With the exception of active party membership, political participation has not dropped – neither over the previous decade, nor if we go even further back. Moreover, compared to the glory days of the political parties, grassroot activities have increased. Hence, if we add all forms of activity, total activity is presumably as great as ever. This does not mean that everybody – or even most – is politically active. For many people, political activity is limited to voting in national elections.[71] However, activity has not dropped over the years. This is only true for participation in relation to local and national political institutions. In relation to the EU system, participation is veritably non-existent. The democratic institutions exist, but they are devoid of life.

The degree of equality varies in terms of form of participation. Voter turnout has never been characterized by great social differences, and that continues to be the case. The well-known age-related differences remain, and if any change has occurred, it is that young people vote relatively more often than they did 50 years ago. The lowest turnout today is found among ethnic minorities and among socially marginalized groups, whereas the gender differences of the past have completely disappeared.[72]

In connection with party membership, we earlier encountered a reverse social inequality, i.e., workers and people with the lowest educational levels were most active. This has changed along with the decline in membership. The educational differences have vanished, and the workers are now the

least active. At the same time, the gender gap has widened rather than become narrower.

When the grassroot activities flourished in the 1970s, it was primarily the young and the well-educated who participated. This is no longer the case. Activities are now much more equally distributed in terms of age, education, profession and political colors than was previously the case, although there are still differences. Formerly "unconventional" activities are now completely normal.[73]

Political participation in Denmark and the other Scandinavian countries is relatively high compared to other countries. This is a legacy from the great class-based social movements that laid the foundations for our present political system in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. We can also thank these movements for the relative equality in individual resources in contemporary society. Furthermore, equality in participation has grown rather than declined in recent years, except in terms of party activity. The fact that the sum of activities may tend towards greater inequality might be owing to grassroot activities with relatively large numbers of well-educated persons having replaced party activities, which were dominated by workers and peasants.

Effective and responsible governance

Widespread concern among politicians and researchers about lacking governance existed 25 years ago. The primary fear at the time was that increased political participation would lead to reduced governing capacity. In addition to the interest organizations, the many unconventional and chaotic grassroots activities made politicians nervous.[74] This concern probably grew when the comprehensive system of long-term plans, sector plans etc., which was launched in the early 1970s, crashed with the reality of unemployment, large economic structural problems and rapidly increasing public expenditures. The gap between ambitions and capacity had become daunting.

Today, nobody worries about these governance problems. Current concern in the Folketing is whether the extensive loss of competences to the EU, local governments and private corporations may jeopardize national governance. In addition, the other consequences of globalization augment to the list of concerns.

As mentioned, the Danish state has ceded sovereignty to the EU, and to the European Court of Human Rights in several areas. Cession of sovereignty inherently makes it more difficult for national Danish authorities to

control these areas – despite the fact that the Folketing and government have gained influence on EU decisions. The fact that the EU Commission holds the initiative to make EU legislation makes it difficult for the government and the Folketing to control the decision-making agenda. However, it may help solve other governance problems. Experience shows that it is extremely difficult to enter, for instance, binding environmental agreements within the framework of non-binding international cooperation. The Kyoto Protocol is one example. The EU offers an institutional framework, which can force obstinate member states to contribute to the solution of transnational problems. In some areas, EU cooperation implies a loss of governance, but improves it immensely in others.

As a small country with an open economy, Denmark has never been in a position to fully control its economic development. Increased economic globalization, including liberalization of the international capital markets, has reinforced this problem. For example: price fluctuations in Denmark's foreign investment portfolio have a greater impact on the reduction of foreign debt than does the balance of payments. Conversely, there are no signs that globalization has significantly restricted – or will restrict – freedom of action in the most obvious area, namely welfare policy.[75]

Since the local government reform that created larger municipalities, the central government has delegated a number of tasks, primarily concerning the provision of services to their citizens. The rationale was that services should meet local needs. As a consequence the central government has lost governance capacity. However, budgetary cooperation involving bargaining between the central government and the associations of local and regional governments has reduced these problems. More intense economic and legal regulation of local government activities points in the same direction. As a matter of fact, the use of framework control has been one of the most popular instruments in public sector governance, especially since the central government budgetary reform in 1984. It has secured a firmer grasp on public expenditures, and it is now implemented fairly consistently throughout the system, even in individual public organizations in the state, counties and municipalities. Other governing tools – incentives, agreements, performance contracts etc. – have slowly spread to the public service areas. While framework control has solved most problems related to controlling total public expenditure, it is doubtful how much it has improved the ability to effectively control efficiency, productivity and quality in public service production.[76]

Finally, the conversion of the old state enterprises to corporations and the subsequent sale of stock have reduced the direct ability of the authorities to govern such vital areas as the postal services, telecommunications, railways, ferries and airports. But perhaps the old governing tools were not that effective. The wave of privatization was succeeded by increased state regulation and close public supervision, just as competition is assumed to have a disciplining effect on corporations.

All in all, it is doubtful whether the governing capacity of the Folketing has been decisively weakened over the past decades. In contrast, there is no doubt that desire in the Folketing to govern has increased, and that this desire has created a growing disparity between the governing ambitions and the actual capacity to solve the tasks. Many problems do not offer clear solutions: pollution, dysfunctional children and integration of immigrants. Not all problems in life can be solved by political measures and especially not through detailed governance by local authorities. Growing aspirations to govern are accompanied by a sense of disempowerment.

It may still seem strange that this great concern about governance failure exists in Denmark at the dawn of the 21st century. In many respects, developments in Danish society in recent decades prove that political governance is indeed possible. When Knud Heinesen stepped down as Minister of Finance in 1979, he stated that Denmark was "heading for the abyss – on first class," because there was no will to implement the necessary economic measures. In 2003 Denmark belongs to the "Major League" of European economies. In the years immediately after the Local Government Reform, the Danish health care sector was plagued by skyrocketing expenses, but the growth was halted already around the mid-1970s, and have been kept on a relatively short leash ever since.[77] In spite of threats from both globalization and the information society against economic equality and against employment for low educated groups, Denmark has managed – due to the highly redistributive welfare state – to preserve a very high level of economic equality and relatively high employment levels, including among unskilled groups.[78]

In fact, developments in Danish politics over the past 25 years have provided ample illustration that governance – at least at the general level – is possible, and that political will makes a difference. There are no signs that this will change fundamentally in the near future.

Have we been able to keep up mentally?

Globalization, the transition from industrial to information society and the growth in public responsibilities have all affected the power relations in Danish society. Denmark is socially and politically a different country at the dawn of the 21st century than was the case at the end of WWII; and the progress has been relatively rapid. It is therefore fair to ask whether our minds have kept up. Have we adapted mentally to life in a globalized information society? In this connection, we can also inquire as to attitudes in the context of citizenship: has it been possible to maintain the relatively high level of trust in politicians and in fellow citizens that has traditionally characterized Denmark, and has it been possible, despite globalization and individualization, to maintain a high degree of solidarity with the disadvantaged?

It is not a question of whether people have positive or negative attitudes towards one phenomenon or the other, e.g., the EU, but whether they feel that they master living in a globalized information society, whether they feel at home in such a society, and whether they feel competent and capable, or whether they feel powerless. Another question is whether the development has moved in the direction of greater trust, competence and capability, or the opposite. The development in the consciousness or identity will be examined via the attitudes and behavior of the population in relation to five aspects of modern society: power, democracy, internationalization, the information society and the media.

Power

In the book *Billeder af magten* (*Images of power*), Niels Nørgaard Kristensen[79] distinguishes between three social periods with different views of power relations. First, the hey-day of the traditional industrial and class-based society when the employer-employee relation was decisive, and the power perception dichotomous: *us* against *them*. The second is the period of corporatism when the decisive relation was the politico-administrative systems versus the labor market parties. This period was dominated by a perception of organizational power. The third and final period – thus far – is the information society. The power perception may be rather "vague," but nevertheless dominated by an idea that "I'm in power."[80]

According to Kristensen's interviews, it is characteristic of modern citizens that they are not afraid of power and do not feel distanced from it. Feelings of powerlessness are rarely encountered. The power gap is narrow, and power is always accessible. They register complaint with the authori-

ties in the event they are dissatisfied, and they do not mind being labeled as complainers. They are critical of the administrators of power, but do not feel intimidated by them. We may not find this view of power in all members of society, but it is the predominant attitude – regardless of social background.[81]

Very much in the same vein, Palle Svensson[82] has, via comparisons of surveys, demonstrated a significant decline from 1979 to 2002 in terms of the share of people who feel that the key political decisions in Denmark are made by a small power elite or by big business. More people think that decisions are made in deals between several different interests, and that all citizens have significant influence via the ballot. In other words, more Danes feel that the actual exercise of power in Danish society complies with the democratic ideals today than was the case 25 years ago. Moreover, there is widespread agreement in the general population about how to perceive power relations. The view that power is disseminated is commonly accepted.

The conclusion is that the perceived power gap has narrowed. The individual citizen feels more capable and less powerless than has previously been the case. They are still critical of those in power, but they no longer have the same antagonistic relationship to them. Perhaps we can say that there is great faith in the pluralism of the overall power system, but coupled with a healthy skepticism directed at specific power holders.

Democracy

It is commonly known that Denmark is the EU country in which citizens express the highest level of satisfaction when asked to assess "the way national democracy works." However, difficulties are encountered when comparing responses to questions translated into many different languages. Therefore, it is perhaps even more remarkable that the Danish response to this question has gradually become more positive over the past 25 years[83] in contrast to the responses in many other countries. In the survey that was conducted in connection with the national election in 2001, no less than 93 percent responded that they were either very satisfied or fairly satisfied with the way democracy worked. Likewise, trust in Danish politicians has increased over the past 10 years and is now at its highest level since political trust was first measured in 1971.[84]

In that same period, the general conception of a democracy has shifted in the direction of greater emphasis on popular sovereignty and on equal rights for individual citizens. Compared with 1979, more people in 2002

appear to associate democracy with "the people has the power to decide," and "everybody has equal opportunity to make something of his life." Overall, the Danish people overwhelmingly support the notion that democracy implies equal and universal suffrage, majority rule, freedom of speech and equal opportunities. Slightly fewer support the notion that democracy implies minority protection, actual equality in participation or sanctity of ownership. Popular sovereignty is clearly the most important.[85]

We may thus be able to explain why the Danish population, despite its great satisfaction with the way democracy works in Denmark, is more ambivalent when it comes to representative rule. Over the past 25 years, almost half of the population has demanded more referenda. In this connection, it is worth noting that this demand for more referenda is not equally distributed in the Danish population; it is particularly common among citizens who feel marginalized in relation to the established political institutions. In a way, referenda become a defensive weapon, which the politically marginalized groups can turn against the political power holders. Incidentally, this support for referenda fluctuates according to the number of referenda that are actually held, i.e., the demand declines immediately after a referendum only to start climbing slowly again.[86]

On another negative note, almost half of the Danes think that we have "lost our self-determination" in the EU, and that "the most important decisions are now made in Brussels."[87] Satisfaction with Danish decision-making structures is, in other words, tempered by democratic concerns about ceding sovereignty to the EU.

Internationalization

For the EU to be more than just a decision-making machine – to be a dynamic political institution – requires a certain amount of political fellowship, solidarity and identity. Compared with populations in other countries, the Danes feel great affiliation with Europe. Only Luxembourg, Sweden and Spain express a stronger European identity. Equally important in this connection, however, is that identification with Europe increased during the 1990s. While national identity remains the strongest, a growing number of Danes – in 2003 even a majority among those expressing an attitude – feel like Europeans. Ten years ago, this figure was merely 15-20 percent. There is less focus on the economic advantages than is the case in most other EU countries, and the willingness to pay to support to East Europeans is greater. In contrast, the Danish population still feels considerable powerlessness in relation to the EU decision-making system. People feel it is far

more difficult to keep abreast of EU policy than is the case with national and local politics. This gap is greater in Denmark than in any other EU country. Finally, we should say that there has not been a positive trend in this area.[88]

It would appear as though a growing European identity has been able to go hand in hand with a strengthened national identity and increased national self-awareness. Danish identity thus plays a greater role now than earlier. An increasing share of the population states that they are very proud of being Danish, and an increasing share support Danish involvement in armed conflicts abroad.[89] Moreover, to characterize something as Danish is a legitimate argument in the political debate.[90] This heightened focus on what is "Danish" has two almost contradictory consequences: We focus inwards on ourselves in terms of self-sufficiency, while at the same time we want to assume a bigger role in the world.

In general, immigration in Denmark has – similar to accession to the EU – put pressure on our national self-image and created new conflicts in society. The trend has resulted in more people worrying that immigration threatens our national character, while at the same time more people also think that immigrants have enriched our culture with their habits and traditions. To the extent that we can detect a trend, tolerant attitudes have become slightly more prevalent over the past 20 years.[91]

Individualization

There are many signs indicating that the transition from industrial to information society has been accompanied by tendencies in the direction of increased individualization. The desire to join large, binding, collective organizations seems to be waning, replaced by an increasing interest in maintaining as many options as possible. Niels Nørgaard Kristensen[92] shows how many, regardless of social background, guard their autonomy. They want to decide for themselves and believe that they are capable of doing so. Therefore, they are not immediately attracted to joining a political party. Like the young women interviewed by Ann-Dorte Christensen, very few people want to commit to the package of opinions offered by a political party; instead, they want to make up their minds on individual issues. Similarly, many want to make their own assessments as to whether a law is fair, and if they find that it is unfair, they do not feel obliged to obey it. Authorities are no longer accepted merely on the strength of their position.[93]

As a consequence, membership in political parties has dropped dramatically, although it seems to have stabilized somewhat. Union membership is

under pressure, and there has been relative growth in individualized forms of political activity. People move in and out of political communities, and membership is no longer necessarily life-long.[94] In some areas, political decisions are now more often than not justified in the individual citizen's self-interest than in the common good or social considerations.[95]

This does not mean that citizens maneuver strictly according to selfish interests. It is a common pattern in Danish voter surveys that the Danes are generally "good citizens," who also consider the common good. They are willing to carry burdens when it is economically "necessary," on the condition that the burden is shouldered in solidarity.[96] Individualization and solidarity *can* co-exist.

Nor have we found signs that the high level of support for the welfare state has declined over the years. There is generally almost unconditional support behind expenses for the welfare state's universal benefits: health care, education, childcare, retirement pension and homecare. Moreover, willingness to cover the costs related to unemployment and cash benefits remains high.[97] All told, there are very few signs that increased prosperity and demands for greater autonomy have eroded solidarity with the disadvantaged. Of course, this does not eliminate the risk that they may be "forgotten" in the political process.

The media

As mentioned, the media have gained a strong foothold in the political sphere in recent years, meaning that political communication increasingly accommodates the terms dictated by the electronic media. We might fear that people would fall prey to media manipulation. However, Louise Phillips and Kim Schrøder[98] document that this is not the case. While the well-educated and the less educated segments of the population use the media differently, both groups are generally well informed about politics and cultural issues, and they manage to maintain a critical distance to the media-constructed reality. They possess broad knowledge, which can be draw upon when acquiring information in the media, and they have a well-developed sense of the aesthetic and the rhetorical effects employed by the media.

As TV news coverage has become more independent in relation to sources and owners – and eventually more interpretative and opinion forming – so also has the population's capacity to engage in critical dialogue with the media increased. People do not believe everything they are told, and they are fully aware that the media have their own angle on stories.

Do politicians underestimate the voters?

All in all, we can conclude that we have mentally kept pace with the relatively significant changes in Danish society over the past decades. Neither globalization nor the transition from industrial to information society has produced a disempowered population. The Danes have more resources, they are more capable, and they are more self-confident than previously was the case. They are interested in politics, they exhibit a relatively high level of political trust, but they do not have much respect for authorities, and they are critical of the actual authority holders. The power gap has shrunk.

It is important to keep in mind that this positive depiction is for the population in general. There are still citizens in Denmark who are politically marginalized, who lack political self-confidence, and who deeply distrust politicians and other authorities. There are also groups who do not possess the resources to take political action if their interests are threatened.

The greatest identity tensions or conflicts are related to developments in EU and immigration. The Danish population increasingly perceives itself as being a part of Europe, but feels powerless vis-à-vis EU institutions. People are more open to the idea of Denmark becoming involved in conflicts around the world, but they are also scared of being overrun by foreign cultures. The fear of globalization is probably the most disquieting element in this depiction. However, to a great extent this is a generational problem. Rejection and worry are more prevalent among older Danes than among the young.

The main impression then is of a population with great political competences and relatively little respect for authorities. It is a can-do people. The real problem may be that the politicians are actually lagging behind the voters. Anthropologists describe a common notion among MPs that most ordinary citizens are not interested in politics, "that they would go home if they had to wait more than 10 minutes to vote."[99] Many MPs think that the voters cannot fathom the general perspectives, that they do not trust politicians, that they primarily think about "taking care of number one," and that they do not want to accept cutbacks and change. It appears as though the Christiansborg[100] culture tends to underestimate the voters. As a result, the tone in election campaigns is often condescending; complex issues are reduced to slogans, and political disagreements diminished to personal questions.

The state of democracy

The conclusions drawn in this review of power relations and democracy in Denmark at the dawn of the 21st century and of the changes that occurred earlier are rather positive. Denmark has done surprisingly well. The Danes are still democratically active, and the political institutions are democratically robust. First and foremost, the Danish people appear resourceful and capable.

Along the way, we have exploded various myths of decline that prevail in the public debate. Political participation has not dropped, and participatory democracy has not been replaced by a passive spectator democracy. However, there has been a shift from collective towards more individualized forms of participation. The gap between people and elite does not seem larger than before, rather the contrary. The comparatively high degree of economic and social equality that has characterized Denmark for a long time has pretty much been preserved. The political parties are weakened and thus their ability to function as link between people and power holders, but they appear to have found a new stability with fewer members. The media have become a more powerful player in the political sphere, increasingly dictating the terms for political communication. Still, neither in relation to the people nor to the elected politicians have the media taken over completely. Compared to other national, political institutions, the Folketing has been strengthened more than it has been weakened. However, this is not true in relation to the EU, which is assuming an increasing share of Folketing legislation in the form of adaptation to EU directives.

Another myth is that economic globalization has increased economic inequality or removed the basis for the Danish version of the welfare state. It is true, however, that the rapidly increasing volume of transnational capital movements makes it difficult or impossible to control foreign debts, just as it may be difficult to control the large – including Danish – corporations, which increasingly operate across national borders.

Society has been through great changes, and many things are different – in some respects very different – than before. However, not all changes represent democratic setbacks, rather the contrary. From a historic and comparative angle, we must say that things have gone far better than we might have feared.

In the late 1970s, the common perception both domestically and abroad was that Denmark had huge, insurmountable political and economic problems: the classic party system was dissolving, party membership on the wane, flourishing grassroots activities brought anarchy and unpredictability

to the political sphere, the many new parties made work in the Folketing chaotic and unpredictable, and the organizations had reduced the Folketing to a rubber stamp for decisions made in the corporatist system. In addition to all this, the economy was out of control, foreign debts grew, and we consumed more than we produced. Public sector growth was rampant, resulting in an equally high tax burden. The politicians had almost lost control of developments. Today, we seem to have found a new equilibrium: the parties and the party system have stabilized, the economy is balanced, welfare state growth is under control, governance is restored, and we discovered that the political system could work together with an activist population. However, increasing economic globalization presents new challenges, which are too complex to solve on a national basis.

Moreover, the politicians' governing ambitions have grown over the years, creating an increasing gap between the politicians' governing ambitions and their governing possibilities. This feeds a sense of governance failure and of "a real loss of democratic influence."

The fact that it has gone well and in many cases better than expected is not a matter of course. It is a result of the political choices made over the past 20-25 years, and they can be changed again through new political choices. The high level of economic and social equality is a product of the highly redistributive Danish welfare state, which does not seem threatened economically, but which may be facing political pressure if, for instance, a strong coincidence between ethnic and social cleavages should arise – or because of more or less intended effects of political decisions. The significant equality in political participation is a product of the activities of the great class-based movements in the 20th century, and may be jeopardized as a result of the growing individualization and educational demands. Transfer of competence to the EU implies the threat of a democratic deficit if we do not succeed to increase attention, participation and a sense of influence among ordinary citizens.

The predominantly positive development does not mean that everything has gone well or well enough. If we compare the description of the actual state of affairs with democratic ideals, the conclusion is not as encouraging. Considerable social cleavages remain in Danish society, although they may be of a somewhat different nature. The most obvious cleavages are between the well-off and the socially marginalized and between the majority and ethnic minorities. Where growing freedom of choice and respect for individual autonomy are the dominant principles in the state's relations with the well-off and the majority population, there is far more force and discipline

in relations with the other groups. In a number of areas undeniable gender cleavages remain, and they are most pronounced the closer we get to the powerful positions in Danish society. Political participation is widespread in Denmark, but not in all areas, and there is some evidence that we will observe greater educational inequality in participation. The judicialization of the political sphere and the growing emphasis on individual rights strengthen the rule of law and may be useful tools in the struggle for equality by oppressed groups, but another effect is an alarming shift of power from politics to law.

Measured against an ideal of an informed public debate, there are serious deficiencies in the rules about transparency and openness in the legislative process as well as the administration, and the development does not seem to be headed in the right direction. The demands of the mass media in terms of access and content have come to control the political communication, a condition that threatens the quality of the political process. The decision-making processes have become more chaotic: many political decisions are marked by politicians acting like lemmings in relation to single issues, and occasionally it is the members of the media who act as lemmings. Other political decisions carry a stamp of the opaque influence of large and strong interest organizations – and sometimes corporations. The fact that people are more critical of the media does not hinder the image of political processes that is communicated to the people often becoming distorted and incomplete and therefore providing a poor basis for political opinions. Pluralism is not as widespread as we sometimes claim.

In the light of all this, it is important to remember that we are – to a large extent – in charge. The opportunities for political action are extensive. The qualities as well as deficiencies described above are first and foremost a result of political choices.

Notes

[1] Togeby et al., 2003: Chap. 3.
[2] Bille & Elklit, 2003.
[3] Goul Andersen, 2003a.
[4] Micheletti, 2003.
[5] Goul Andersen, 2003a.
[6] Goul Andersen, 2003a.
[7] Goul Andersen & Borre, 2003; Goul Andersen, 2003a.
[8] Christiansen, Møller & Togeby, 2001: Chap. 3.
[9] Goul Andersen, 1999; Holmberg, 2000.

[10] Fadel, 2002.
[11] Christiansen, Møller & Togeby, 2001: Chap. 3.
[12] Togeby et al., 2003: Chap. 8.
[13] Vallgårda, 2003b.
[14] Albæk, Christiansen & Togeby, 2002; Christiansen & Nørgaard, 2003a: 100.
[15] Hoff, 2003.
[16] *Nyt fra Danmarks Statistik*, 2003: 21, 168.
[17] Goul Andersen & Borre, 2003.
[18] Goul Andersen, 2003b.
[19] Goul Andersen, 2003b.
[20] Damgaard, 2003.
[21] Christiansen, Møller & Togeby, 2001: 73-83.
[22] *Betænkning 1354*, 1998.
[23] Cf. *Betænkning 1354*, 1998.
[24] J.P. Christensen, 2003.
[25] Damgaard, 2003.
[26] J.P. Christensen, 2003: 44.
[27] Blom-Hansen, 2002.
[28] Christiansen & Nørgaard, 2003a.
[29] Christiansen & Nørgaard, 2003a.
[30] Christiansen & Nørgaard, 2003b.
[31] Christiansen & Nørgaard, 2003b.
[32] Boje & Kallestrup, 2003.
[33] Hjarvard, 1999; Lund, 2002.
[34] Rasmussen & Andersen, 2002; Togeby et al., 2003: chap. 16.
[35] EEC Treaty, Article 308.
[36] Togeby et al., 2003: Chap. 17.
[37] Nielsen, 2001.
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