GOVERNANCE AND ACCOUNTABILITY – A SHIFT IN CONCEPTUALISATION.¹

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ABSTRACT

Accountability has become a topic of concern in governance literature. The question of holding politicians and administration accountable in new governance environment, where many traditional means for controlling government no longer fully apply, has gained wide recognition. As a consequence, new types of accountability have been sought and identified. The article discusses the shifting conceptualisation of accountability in light of governance literature. It argues that this shift can be related to the structural changes that have taken place in politics and public administrations from the late 1980’s to the present. Also, the argument is made that instead of trying to identify new mechanisms of accountability more attention should be paid to the transformations taking place among traditional mechanisms of accountability and their potential in the new institutional design.

¹ This paper was first presented at the Annual Conference of European Group of Public Administration, 1-4. September 2004 in Ljubljana, Slovenia. I wish to thank everyone present at EGPA Ethics and Integrity of Governance study group for their comments. I’m especially grateful for the help and comments of Nathalie Behnke, Patrick von Maravic and Torben Beck Jørgensen. I would also like to thank Turo Virtanen, Klaus Korhonen, Niilo Kauppi and my anonymous referee for their valuable comments. I would also wish to express my gratitude to the Finnish Cultural Foundation for funding my work.
INTRODUCTION

Accountability is increasingly becoming a topic of concern in governance literature. The growing interest in the issue of accountability is largely explained by the rise of new governance models which are seen to challenge the traditional mechanisms of accountability. The problem of holding politicians and administration accountable for their actions in the new governance environment has been widely acknowledged. As the interest in ‘accountability’ has increased, the definition of the term itself seems to have become more ambiguous. Scholars have argued that the concept is all but well defined and that the definition of the term has moved and expanded (Mulgan 2000; Sinclair 1995: 221; Dubnick 2005: 2-3, 6). If this is so, how has the conceptualisation of the term changed and why?

In this article I will discuss the shifts in the conceptualisation of ‘accountability’ in light of governance literature. The term ‘governance’ has been criticised for its inconsistent use and catch-all nature (Stoker 1998: 17-18; Pierre 2000: 3; Smouts 1998: 81; Jessop 1998: 29). It has had a dual use as a phenomenon and as an analytical framework (Pierre & Peters 2000: 24). Governance literature describes the changes in politics and administration that have been taking place throughout the Western world from the late 1980’s to the present: changes in conditions, patterns and structures of governing, along with changes in nature, number and relations of actors involved (Pierre & Peters 2000: 14-23). In this respect ‘governance’ has been used as a referent for emerging structures and dynamics in governing that go beyond the scope of traditional ‘government’.

‘Governance’ is also a topic for a framework which organises different research approaches in trying to analyse these changes (Pierre & Peters 2000: 14, 24-25; Stoker 1998: 18). In this sense governance has been used in
reference to research as diverse as studies on New Public Management (Lane 2000; Pollit & Bouckaert 2004), policy networks (Kickert et al 1997; Rhodes 1996), new mechanisms of steering and coordination (Kooiman 1993; Mayntz 1993), internationalisation of government and public policies (Reinicke 1998; Hooge & Marks 2001; Rosenau 2000) and the changing role of the public sector and state (Pierre & Peters 2000; Weiss 1998). Governance research is also spread over several levels of analysis, which adds up to its heterogenic nature (Pierre 2000).

What can a framework and a body of literature this broad provide us with in order to make sense of the conceptualisation of ‘accountability’? The Governance framework might not provide one with many definitive answers, but it contributes to the discussion by pointing out relevant trends, issues and topics of concern regarding the current developments in politics and administration (Stoker 1998: 18). It also provides us with new ways of thinking and conceptualising these processes of change. Accountability has definitely become a topic of concern throughout governance literature. And respectively, the question of accountability can be seen as one of the reasons that governance has become so debated in recent years (Pierre & Peters 2000: 67). Furthermore, there are indications that the on-going structural changes, and the attempts to conceptualise them, are driving a shift in the conceptualisation of accountability (Mulgan 2000; Van Kersbergen & Van Waarden 2004; Dubnick 2005). This leads us to ask how our understanding of accountability has shifted and why.

I will begin by analysing different definitions of accountability and different types of accountability frequently referred to in governance literature. I will outline traditional types of accountability and analyse how the processes of change have influenced them. I will argue that there is no static way of organising accountability and that
accountability systems are dependent on the institutional design of their administrative context. Therefore, structural changes are likely to influence the organisation of accountability and also the conceptualisation of the term. As examples of this, two new alternative types of accountability, often cited in governance literature, will be discussed – namely ‘performance’ and ‘deliberation’. Both these can be linked to new governance structures. I will also discuss the critique that has been presented against these two as types of accountability.

As a conclusion I will argue that instead of just trying to identify new types of accountability one should rather pay more attention to the transformations of the traditional mechanisms of accountability and the role that performance and deliberation play in this process. Furthermore, I will argue that we should try to think of how the traditional mechanisms of accountability could be reinforced within their traditional context of a nation state, and also be implemented in emerging governance structures. This, in my view, highlights public debate, deliberation and public scrutiny through transparency, which is likely to influence the future conceptualisation of ‘accountability’.

**DEFINING ACCOUNTABILITY**

The concept of accountability has been applied in many different ways. The usage of the term is argued to have both expanded and gained distance from its original meaning. In the following I will look into different definitions of accountability. I will then categorise different types of accountability often cited in governance literature in terms of their features, mechanisms of accountability and administrative context.
Accountability – Attempts at a Definition

Melvin Dubnick traces the origins of the concept ‘accountability’ to the emergence of royal legal traditions in England, well before the rise of the modern bureaucratic state (Dubnick 2005: 10). Richard Mulgan also acknowledges the history of the term, but argues that for a long time it was little used outside the sphere of financial accounting and that it first spread to a wider use with the New Public Management (NPM) reforms started in the 1980’s (Mulgan 2003: 9; see also Bovens 2005). According to Mulgan, the concept of accountability has gained ground on the term responsibility (Mulgan 2000: 557-558; see also Dwivedi & Jabbra 1988: 3-5). In Mulgan’s view, accountability was first conceptually included in the idea of responsibility, but later gained ground as an individual concept, even to the extent of overweighting responsibility in both importance and scope (Mulgan 2000: 558; Sinclair 1995: 221). Also, Dubnick tends to see responsibility as an integral part of accountability rather than vice-versa (Dubnick 2005: 6).

Mulgan draws attention to what he calls the “core sense” accountability, derived from previous research on the topic. In this sense accountability is defined as a ‘process of being called to account to some authority for one’s actions’, or a process of ‘giving an account’ (Mulgan 2000: 555; see also Dubnick 2005: 6). According to Mulgan this core definition of accountability is characterised by ‘externality, social interaction and exchange and rights of authority’ (Mulgan 2000: 555). Externality refers to an external ‘account-holder’ to whom an account is given by an ‘accountor’ (Mulgan 2000: 555; Mulgan 2003: 10). In this sense accountability also involves social interaction and exchange in terms of rectification and sanctions (Mulgan 2000: 555). The account-holder also has rights of authority over the accountor implying rights to demand answers and impose
sanctions (Mulgan 2000: 555). In this sense accountability can also be seen as answerability (Dubnick 2005: 410-411; Bovens 2005).

Dubnick agrees with Mulgan’s definition of core accountability but finds it somewhat limited, since it stresses the external authority, disregarding personal ethics as a mechanism of accountability (Dubnick 2005: 6; Dubnick 2003). Mark Bovens also notes that the account-holder or the ‘accountee’ can be a person or an agency, but it can also be seen as an ‘accountability forum’ such as the general public. According to Bovens the accountability forum can also be of a more ‘virtual’ nature like personal conscience or faith (Bovens 2005). Similar to Mulgan, Bovens defines the social process of ‘account giving’ in terms of three elements: the accountor’s obligation to give account to the accountability forum, the forum’s ability to interrogate the accountor, and the forum’s ability to pass a judgement and impose sanctions (Bovens 2005).

The different definitions of accountability all entail an element of control, which in fact was the term commonly used in the literature before the term accountability took over (Beck Jørgensen & Larsen 1987; Hood & Schuppert 1989). Some scholars have also used a similar term ‘comptrol’ especially when referring to hierarchical means of control (Hood 1986; Beck Jørgensen 1993). Carol Harlow has argued that the notion of control differs slightly from accountability since the process of calling someone to account is retrospective by nature whereas control can be proactive (Harlow 2002; 10). Yet both of these terms refer to the same phenomena: authority over those who govern.

However, the blunt definitions of accountability do not take a stand on the mechanisms of calling someone to account. In fact, the range of options in the mechanisms of holding the politicians and administration accountable seem to cause problems in conceptualising the term consistently.
This has left room for various definitions and even misuses of the term (Mulgan 2000; Sinclair 1995; Dubnick 2005: 6). In my view the different definitions, or types, of accountability are highly dependent on the structure or administrative context in which they appear. Scholars have argued that different types of accountability apply in different administrative contexts and that there are no universal solutions for organising accountability systems (Peters 1989: 252-253; Dubnick 2005: 37; Sinclair 1995; Romzek 2000: 34-35). In the following I will try to summarise the definitions, or rather, the types of accountability often cited in governance literature by their features, mechanisms of accountability and typical context. I will make a link between the “new” definitions of accountability and the changes in the conditions of ‘account giving’, which will be further elaborated. In my classification (Figure 1), I have used previous classifications of accountability as a starting point, especially a classification by Richard Mulgan and a typology by Barbara Romzek and Melvin Dubnick (Mulgan 2000; Romzek & Dubnick 1987).

In addition, I wish to emphasise the importance of administrative context and structure to the applicability of different systems of accountability, which several scholars have also stressed (Van Kersbergen & Van Waarden 2004: 155-160; Mulgan 2003; Romzek and Dubnick 1987: 230; Goodin 2003: 381; Beck Jørgensen 1993). Therefore the classification adopted in this paper is not only based on the differences in mechanisms of accountability but also on the administrative contexts where these apply (see also Beck Jørgensen 1993; Beck Jørgensen & Larsen 1987). However, the different types tend to overlap and are not always clear-cut. In my analysis I will concentrate on the following types of accountability: Political accountability, Bureaucratic accountability, Personal accountability,
Professional accountability, Performance and Deliberation. These are presented in Figure 1.

Figure 1

*Different Types of Accountability* (elaborated upon Mulgan 2000; Romzek & Dubnick 1987)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of accountability</th>
<th>Features</th>
<th>Mechanisms of Accountability</th>
<th>Context (Structure)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Political accountability</td>
<td>Democratic, external</td>
<td>Democratic elections, chain of accountability</td>
<td>Democratic state</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bureaucratic accountability</td>
<td>Hierarchic, legal</td>
<td>Rules, regulations, supervision</td>
<td>Bureaucracy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal accountability</td>
<td>Internal, normative, moral</td>
<td>Culture, values, ethics</td>
<td>Collective</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional accountability</td>
<td>Complex, ‘deferent to expertise’, peer-oriented</td>
<td>Expert scrutiny, peer review, professional role</td>
<td>Expert organisation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Performance</td>
<td>Output or client-oriented</td>
<td>Competition, self-regulation</td>
<td>Market</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deliberation</td>
<td>Interactive, deliberative, open, public</td>
<td>Public debate, deliberation, transparency, access to information</td>
<td>Public sphere</td>
</tr>
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I have regarded political accountability, bureaucratic accountability, personal accountability and professional accountability as “traditional” types of accountability since they have a long history within the context of the democratic state and public administration. They are described briefly in the following along with some assessments of their recent developments. Governance literature often sees performance and
deliberation as “new” or “alternative” types of accountability. These two are discussed separately.

**Traditional Types of Accountability**

The traditional idea of democratic accountability is based on the institutional environment of a nation state (Reinicke 1998: 87). However, public administrations throughout Europe have been subjects of a structural change from the late 1980’s to the present day. This development has been characterised by redefining the role and scope of public sector and state (Pierre 2000; Pierre & Peters 2000). From the point of view of the state, this can be seen to consist of three kinds of outbound shifts in power: an upward shift emphasising the role of international organisations, a downward shift of decentralisation granting local government more autonomy and a shift towards private and non-governmental organisations in terms of externalisation of government activities (Pierre & Peters 2000: 77-91).

These shifts have significantly changed the role of state, as it no longer can be seen as single locus of power. Instead, a network of other actors has surfaced alongside the traditional state apparatus (Rhodes 1996, Kickert & al. 1997; Kooiman 1993). Also, the nature of public administration as an actor has changed. The insertion of market type mechanisms into the public sector has blurred the traditional border between the public and private sector (Lane 1997: 1-10; Lane 2000; Pollitt & Bouckaert 2004). The internationalisation of public administration and public policy agendas has also come to challenge the state as a single source of authority and new forms of global and multi-level governance are said to have emerged (Reinicke 1998; Rosenau 2000; Goetz & Hix 2001; Hooge & Marks 2001).

The governance literature emphasises that this shift in locus of power has made the traditional means of
accountability ineffective (Pierre & Peters 2000: 67; Jessop 2000; Hirst 2000; Rosenau 2000: 193-195; Reinicke 1998: 69, 220-221). How is this then apparent among the traditional types of accountability? I will next briefly present the traditional types of accountability and point out some changes in institutional design that can be seen to have eroded them. My argument is that traditional state-centric types, or mechanisms, of accountability such as political, bureaucratic and personal accountability have lost some of their capacity to control the administration, whereas the mechanisms of professional accountability have become more central due to the increasing complexity of government tasks. This development has in my view diminished the openness of decision-making, both in bureaucratic and political spheres and increased expert authority.

*Political accountability.*

The concept of accountability is closely tied to concepts of democracy and legitimacy (Mulgan 2003: 6-7; Skogstad 2003: 956-957). Those who govern have to answer for their actions to a wider public either directly, when politically elected or appointed, or indirectly as subordinates of politically elected bodies. If they fail to do so they can be substituted in democratic elections. This constant threat forces the ruling government to respond to the demands of a constituency, who can thus hold their government to account (Dwivedi & Jabbra 1988: 3, 6; Romzek & Dubnick 1987: 229; Moncrieffe 1998: 388). Many scholars have referred to this kind accountability as ‘political accountability’ (Sinclair 1995: 225; Romzek & Dubnick 1987: 229; Behn 2001: 41) or ‘political responsibility’ (Dwivedi & Jabbra 1988: 3; Peters 1989: 261-274; Harlow 2002: 8; see also Skogstad 2003: 957). The political accountability is external in nature, since the body in control, a constituency, resides outside the body
Political accountability reaches even non-elected bodies of government through a ‘chain of accountability’ that makes them accountable as subordinates of democratically elected representatives (Sinclair 1995: 225). This kind of accountability system is typical in the context of a democratic state (Beck Jørgensen & Larsen 1987). However, the decision-making in the open parliamentary process has declined due to the internationalisation of policy-making, and decisions previously made on a national level are now increasingly being made in various international organisations (Hirst 2000).

In the European Union a significant amount of decision-making previously conducted in an open parliamentary process is now being processed within EU institutions and national central administration (Raunio & Hix 2001: 163-164). As the national public spheres and political agendas remain dominant in the view of the citizens, the EU level decision-making is often poorly communicated to the national publics, let alone publicly debated (Eder 2003; Scharpf 1999). Accountability and especially the openness of decision-making on the EU-level have become key issues in the European Governance (Harlow 2002; European Commission 2001). Also the decision-making in the economic multilaterals, such as WTO, has been criticised for its lack of accountability and transparency (Stiglitz 2003; Kahler 2003).

According to Moncrieffe, the conditions for political accountability are constrained by prevailing power relations, institutional design and political culture (Moncrieffe 1998: 399-400). In this sense the conditions for political accountability on a national level have to also be analysed against the constraints set by international politics and economics. Political accountability can also be seen highly dependent on the publicity of decision-making.
(Bovens 2005; Sinclair 1995). Therefore, when assessing the developments in political accountability, one should look into the conditions for ‘account giving’ and especially the possible decline of openness in the policy processes. If the internationalisation of governance has indeed diminished the public nature of various policy processes then one should ask how this has influenced the political accountability. This also stresses the importance of bureaucratic accountability. If the decision-making in open parliamentary process has declined there will ultimately be more pressure on the mechanisms of bureaucratic accountability and especially the openness of administration.²

**Bureaucratic accountability.**

Separating administration from politics weakens the link of accountability between elected and non-elected bodies, which inevitably creates pressures for inventing other mechanisms of administrative accountability (Peters 1989: 253-254). Perhaps the strongest degree of control can be achieved through hierarchy based ‘bureaucratic accountability’ (Romzek & Dubnick 1987: 228). There seems to be a wide consensus that bureaucratic accountability is based on a hierarchic relationship between superiors and subordinates, rules and regulations and supervision (Mulgan 2000; Peters 1989: 273-274; Goodin 2003: 368-369; Harlow 2002: 10). These kind of hierarchic relationships and traditional mechanisms of accountability tend to be characteristic for a state bureaucracy (Goodin 2003; Mulgan 2003; Beck Jørgensen & Larsen 1987; Beck Jørgensen 1993: 221).

However, whether the source of control is internal or external to the administrative body that is being held to account seems to divide authors. Romzek and Dubnick

² I would wish to thank Guy B. Peters for bringing this to my attention.
have stressed the internal nature of bureaucratic accountability, dividing it from legal accountability, which in their view is clearly external and thus divides the “lawmaker” from the “executor” (public administration) (Romzek & Dubnick 1987: 228-229; see also Harlow 2002: 16). Robert Goodin and Torben Beck Jørgensen see the hierarchy based accountability of the state sector stemming from both legal control (external) and hierarchic relations of superiors and subordinates (internal) (Goodin 2003: 368; Beck Jørgensen 1993: 220-221; see also Beck Jørgensen & Larsen 1987: 288-299). Richard Mulgan also notes that from the point of view of the bureaucracy the internal control of superiors and the external control of other institutions tend to appear as a single mechanism of control (Mulgan 2000: 564). Accordingly, I have treated these internal and external means of control as a single type of bureaucratic accountability (see Figure 1).

As stated, the traditional bureaucratic accountability with checks and balances based on hierarchic relationships and rules and regulations tends to be characteristic for a state bureaucracy. However, the new governance structures are seen to possess a more complex nature, often referred to with a metaphor of network (Scharpf 1999: 19; Kickert & al. 1997; Pierre & Peters 2000: 15-16). This complexity is seen to have eroded the traditional mechanisms of bureaucratic accountability (Van Kersbergen & Van Waarden 2004: 155; Behn 2001: 58-59). Network-based governance might also be problematic in terms of accountability if networks fail to represent a wider constituency (Pollitt 2003: 65-66). According to Stoker all networks are, to a certain extent, exclusive and tend to promote the interests of those involved (Stoker 1998: 23-24).

It might not be right to assume that networks as such would be automatically less democratic than traditional state administration, as a study on Swiss drug
policy points out (Wälti, Kübler & Papadopoulos 2004). In some cases networks can even be more transparent than traditional hierarchic public institutions (Mulgan 2003). However, in terms of rectification the hierarchies are likely to provide better means of accountability: a network does not necessarily have a single body or institution that could be called to account if mistakes are made, whereas a hierarchy is more likely to provide one (Mulgan 2003: 14-15; Rhodes 1996). If accountability is seen as an ‘ability’ to call someone to account a hierarchy is more likely to provide more efficient mechanisms of accountability than a network (Mulgan 2000: 560).

The means of controlling civil servants have also changed due to the New Public Management reforms (Lane 2000; Pollit & Bouckaert 2004). Instead of rules and regulations civil servants are increasingly being controlled through performance contracts and results (Behn 2001: 123-125). Another important development in public administration is the agencification of public bureaus. This has meant that several organisations which were previously under democratic control are no longer accountable for their actions in terms of bureaucratic accountability (Thomas 1998). As a consequence of introducing market type mechanisms to the public sector, the ‘public authority’ has become increasingly difficult to define, which also makes it difficult to assess what mechanisms of accountability should be applied (Romzek 2000).

The mechanisms and institutions of bureaucratic accountability have evolved over a long period of time alongside the development of the modern state (Goodin 2003: 389). As the traditional model of government is replaced with new governance models there is a risk of compromising these traditional mechanisms of accountability. Along with institutional design, administrative culture has also been said to have changed. The possible changes in the key values of public
administration are also likely to affect the values and ethics of civil servants.

**Personal accountability.**

The idea of internal control as means of accountability is perhaps best captured in so-called ‘personal accountability’ (Sinclair 1995: 230), which refers to personal values and ethics as guidelines for acting in the public interest (see also Peters 1989: 274; Mulgan 2000: 562). The personal integrity of an individual is largely shaped by shared values, ethics and beliefs communicated within the organisation or within a certain collective (Sinclair 1995: 230; Grosenick 1994: 183; Beck Jørgensen & Larsen 1987: 289). In public administration the mechanisms of personal accountability are closely tied to the prevailing administrative culture and its values and ethics (Sinclair 1995: 230).

These normative constraints can, to a certain extent, be seen as complementary to the institutional arrangements enhancing administrative control (Peters 1989: 276; Beck Jørgensen & Larsen 1987: 289-290; Denhart 1994). Administrative culture may provide moral guidelines for acting, sense of involvement, commitment and boundaries for identification, and it can foster self-regulation by deeming certain behaviour undesirable (Grosenick 1994: 184-188; Sinclair 1995: 230; Goodin 2003; Denhart 1994). One may therefore conclude, besides the legal and bureaucratic framework defining duties and responsibilities of public service, that the continuity of public administration is largely based on administrative culture. Thus, shared norms, values and ethics effectively act as a mechanism of accountability.

There are also claims that administrative culture has been affected by the public sector reforms, which could have implications for accountability. The New Public Management doctrine has challenged traditional public
administration models, imposing new result oriented imperatives on the public institutions (Lane 1997: 1-10; Lane 2000). It is likely that this has also changed administrative culture and the values that are embedded in it as new managerialistic values have spread to public administration. Kernaghan has identified this as a shift from bureaucratic to post-bureaucratic organisation, where both old and new values prevail (Kernaghan 2000). Virtanen has argued that if traditional values and ethics of administrative culture are challenged, mutual understanding of "common cause", commitment to it and trust in others doing the same might become compromised (Virtanen 2000). As traditional and newer values can be potentially contradictory, there are concerns about awareness of obligation and the moral character of civil servants (Jos & Tompkins 2004).

According to Amanda Sinclair the shared values and beliefs communicated in an organisation reinforce ‘personal accountability’ (Sinclair 1995: 230). However, the contradicting “old” and “new” values in an organisation are likely to diminish the effect (see also Pugh 1991: 26). If civil servants no longer know according to which values they should behave then personal values and ethics cease to serve as guidelines for acting (Klingner et al 2002). It would also be worth considering how this shift in public sector ethics has influenced the openness of public administration.

**Professional accountability.**

Due to the increasing complexity of the tasks of public administration, public bureaus are more and more becoming expert organisations specialised in executing certain specific tasks (Romzek & Dubnick 1987: 229; Skogstad 2003: 959; Mulgan 2000: 558; Sinclair 1995: 229). Controlling and supervising this kind of expert activity requires ‘professional accountability’, which
according to Romzek and Dubnick is largely based on ‘deference to expertise within the organisation’ (Romzek & Dubnick 1987: 229). This definition stresses expert scrutiny since the technical knowledge inherent in the routines of an expert organisation makes other forms of external control difficult and ineffective (Mulgan 2000: 559). Therefore, the key mechanisms of a professional accountability system are peer-review and expert scrutiny.

The method of peer-review might also involve a wider academic community or experts outside the organisation in question, adding an element of external control to professional accountability (Van Kersbergen & Van Waarden 2004: 164). Professional accountability also has a personal aspect to it, since it builds on the professional role of experts and their desire to keep up their professional credibility (Sinclair 1995: 229-230). Expert organisations can also be seen as accountable to the public through their ability to meet their objectives (Romzek & Dubnick 1987: 229; Mulgan 2000: 559; Bovens 2005).

Professional accountability can be seen to have become a more common mechanism of accountability in policy fields involving complex tasks such as financial management, biotechnology, food safety, and energy and transport policy. Apart from increasing complexity it can also be linked with result-oriented public management agendas, globalisation and the increasing importance of international organisations responsible for negotiating international standards and agreements (Skogstad 2003: 960; Romzek 2000: 31).

However, there are concerns among scholars regarding the possible anti-democratic nature of expert authority (Skogstad 2003: 960; see also Sinclair 1995: 229-230). The key mechanisms of a professional accountability system are peer-review and expert scrutiny, which tends to create situations where the experts are accountable to their peers rather than to the public (Mulgan 2003: 14; Pierre &
Peters 2000: 153). This may potentially diminish the perceived need for public debate on various decisions that require expertise, leading to the exclusion of the wider public from the decision-making process.

**Shifting conceptualisation of accountability.**

So far I have outlined the traditional types of accountability and some key transformations I see taking place within them. If the traditional means of accountability cease to apply in the new administrative context, then what are the perceived solutions for calling administration to account? And how do these new alternatives reflect the changes in the institutional design?

**Search for New Alternatives**

Changes in government due to the fragmentation of power and the decline in role and scope of a state have been seen to create situations where the traditional means of accountability no longer fully apply. As a consequence new means of accountability are sought and identified (Van Kersbergen & Van Waarden 2004; Mulgan 2003; Behn 2001). I will next concentrate on two “new” alternative types of accountability often cited in governance literature, namely ‘performance’ and ‘deliberation’. I will also try to analyse why they have emerged.

‘Performance’ regards policy outcome and results as a means of holding administration accountable whereas ‘deliberation’ emphasises the importance of public debate, openness and transparency. The debate around both of these new alternatives can be linked to the changing conditions for holding politicians and administration accountable. The debate around ‘performance’ as a type of control can be traced to the late 1980’s when the NPM reforms where first introduced to the public sector. The idea of ‘deliberation’ as means of accountability is more recent and can, to a certain extent, be seen as a critique of
performance discourse, since they are usually seen as counterparts or alternatives to each other. Even though both undoubtedly reflect the changes in the conceptualisation of accountability, I wish to argue that instead of simply analysing these two as individual types of accountability one should perhaps see what role they play in the transformation of accountability systems and traditional types of accountability.

**Performance.**

Since the late 1980’s there have been references to output-oriented ‘responsiveness’ or ‘performance’ as a new means of accountability (Hood & Schuppert 1988; Beck Jørgensen & Larsen 1987; Beck Jørgensen 1993; Mulgan 2000: 568-569; Van Kersbergen & Van Waarden 2004; Skogstad 2003: 961; Papadopoulos 2003: 482-486; Behn 2001; Romzek 2000). Even though traditional political accountability bears some similar features, this new type of accountability is distinctively different from the traditional types due to its market and client-oriented nature and market type mechanisms (Mulgan 2000: 568-569; Beck Jørgensen 1993). According to Robert Goodin, market environment emphasises results as subject of accountability and competition as a mechanism of accountability (Goodin 2003: 366-367, 370). This result-orientation is also evident in the public sector, where the NPM reforms have blurred the traditional border between the public and private sectors (Lane 1997: 1-10; Lane 2000). Many traditional public sector tasks are now being executed according to market-based principles shifting the subject of accountability from policy process to policy outcomes (Skogstad 2003: 961-962; Goodin 2003: 367).

Public bureaus are increasingly being controlled by results instead of rules and regulations. This kind of ‘market-based authority’ has also introduced the mechanisms of self-regulation to the sphere of public
policy (Skogstad 2003: 962; Beck Jørgensen 1993). There has also been a shift in the citizens’ role, as they are now increasingly seen as clients or customers instead of active participants in a policy process (Papadopoulos 2003: 483; Mulgan 2000: 568; Beck Jørgensen 1993). A clear link can be seen between the New Public Management doctrine and the rise of performance as a perceived type of accountability. Introducing market type mechanisms to the public sector has lead to the new result and client-oriented thinking apparent in the discourse of ‘performance’ (Mulgan 2000: 568; Dubnick 2005: 2-3; Beck Jørgensen 1993).

Grace Skogstad has pointed out that this kind of market-based authority has gained more legitimacy in Canada over the last 15 years, despite its limitations in terms of democracy (Skogstad 2003: 962). In the context of European Union Fritz Scharpf has defined a dichotomy of ‘input and output legitimacy’ which tries to capture this phenomenon (Scharpf 1999: 6). Scharpf’s input legitimacy refers to the traditional idea of ‘government by the people’ emphasising accountability in the process of decision-making, whereas the output legitimacy, ‘government for the people’, emphasises the positive and efficient policy outcomes as a legitimating element (Scharpf 1999: 6; Papadopoulos 2003: 482-483).

Scharpf has identified an trend of policy choices being increasingly made by non-accountable bodies especially in Western Europe, although concerns about democracy deficit do not seem to pose an unbearable challenge to EU decision-making (Scharpf 1999: 26-27). The reason for this, according to Scharpf, is the compensating effect of ‘output legitimacy’ gained through satisfactory policy outcomes (Scharpf 1999: 12). Like several others, Scharpf has argued that in the long run results do not compensate for the lack of process accountability (Scharpf 1999: 26-27; Skogstad 2003: 962;
There are also arguments that improved performance should not imply less accountable government (Behn 2001; Romzek 2000; Aucoin & Heintzman 2000). Rather, it would mean different types of accountability (Behn 2001; Romzek 2000). The question is whether the performance itself can be seen as a mechanism of accountability in a strict sense. Richard Mulgan points out in his ‘core sense’ that accountability implies ‘rights of authority’, i.e. rights to demand answers and impose sanctions, but that the new result-oriented governance doesn’t necessarily offer any means for that (Mulgan 2000: 568). Also, Melvin Dubnick has taken a critical stance on the idea of performance as an element of accountability. Dubnick argues that the attempts to link performance with accountability might be unfounded, as this approach doesn’t offer mechanisms for “giving an account” (Dubnick 2005). Interestingly, these same questions were already asked in the late 1980’s when performance was first discussed as a means of control (Hood & Schuppert 1988).

One factor behind the “performance as accountability” discourse could be the loose conceptualisation of ‘accountability’. As the concept bears positive connotations and is often seen to crop “all things desirable”, there is the temptation of politically motivated (mis-)use of the term (Bovens 2005). In this sense the concept of accountability runs a risk of becoming a catchword that can be redefined and used for legitimating various political agendas or decisions already taken (Dubnick 2005).

There is a clear link between the changes brought on by the NPM doctrine and the emergence of the idea of accountability through performance. Even if one would not regard performance as a type of accountability as such this
kind of result-oriented thinking has undoubtedly influenced our ideas of controlling those who govern. Even the shift in the terminology from ‘control’ to ‘accountability’, stemming from the sphere of accounting, can be traced to the rise of the New Public Management doctrines. It is evident that ‘accountability’ as a term has nowadays outgrown its original context of bookkeeping (Bovens 2005). Then again, one can argue that the calculative techniques of accounting have also penetrated our thinking of government (Rose 1999: 151-153).

The changes have not only substituted the old mechanisms for controlling the government but have also penetrated their ethical foundations, norms and practices. This has influenced our ideas of citizenship, the role and duties of civil servants and the ways the policy-making is conducted. Therefore, instead of just trying to identify ‘performance’ as a type of accountability it might be worth asking how the NPM doctrine and new forms of expert authority have affected our understanding of political, bureaucratic, professional and even personal accountability.

**Deliberation.**

There has been a more recent surge of scholars stressing the importance of deliberation as a mechanism of accountability (Mulgan 2003: 10-11; Van Kersbergen & Van Waarden 2004: 161; Hirst 2000; Skogstad 2003: 969; Roberts 2002; Hunold 2001). This line of thinking owes a debt to the idea of deliberative democracy (Habermas 1996), which Paul Hirst has defined as two-way communication between the governors and governed based on an exchange of information and consent (Hirst 2000: 27). According to Hirst, this dialogue conducted in the public sphere enables the citizens to hold the administration accountable for its actions and keeps up the legitimacy of government (Hirst 2000: 27). The relationship between the administration and the civil society is thus largely built on
an openness of decision-making, transparency of administration and public access to information.

When discussing the dislocation of traditional mechanisms of accountability or democratisation of emerging processes of governing, the idea of holding policy-networks accountable through public scrutiny, dialogue and public debate is increasingly seen to have potential to enhance accountability (Héritier 2003; Scharpf 1999: 20; Papadopoulos 2003: 482, 484; Bovens 2005; Habermas 1996). The ideas of public debate, transparency and access to public information as mechanisms of accountability are by no means new and they have been an integral part of both traditional bureaucratic and political accountability (Peters 1989: 225; Sinclair 1995: 225-226; Romzek & Dubnick 1987: 229-230; West 2004; Bennett 1997). In this sense deliberation is rooted in the traditions of controlling government.

Some scholars, due to the institutional changes it might come to require, find the idea of deliberative democracy somewhat ambitious or problematic when related to the efficiency of decision-making (Mulgan 2003: 570; Skogstad 2003: 969; Van Kersbergen & Van Waarden 2004: 161). Richard Mulgan notes that public scrutiny is an integral part of accountability systems but, in his ‘core sense’ of accountability, the public should have ‘rights of authority’ over public officials, whereas the process of debate in deliberative democracy treats these different parties as equals (Mulgan 2000: 570). If deliberation is understood as general democratic dialogue among equal citizens, it does not fit Mulgans core definition of accountability since it does not implicate the ‘rights of authority’ – the right to demand answers and impose sanctions (Mulgan 2003: 569). If one analyses ‘deliberation’ in Mark Bovens’ terms, deliberation might provide one with an ‘accountability forum’ but an
obligation for account giving might still be missing (Bovens 2005).

Even if deliberation would not qualify as a new type of accountability, the on-going debate on the topic has shaped the conceptualisation of accountability. Transparency, public scrutiny, dialogue and public debate conducted in the public sphere are increasingly seen to have the potential to enhance accountability (Héritier 2003; Scharpf 1999: 20; Papadopoulos 2003: 484; Habermas 1996; Skogstad 2003: 969; Stiglitz 2003). These demands for publicity can in my view be linked to the structural changes that have diminished the publicity of various policy processes and administrative practices. If debate around ‘performance’ can be seen as an outcome of the NPM reforms, then why has deliberation become a topic of concern? To a degree one could perhaps see the demands for deliberation as a counter-action to the emphasis previously given to performance, and the transformations that have taken place in the traditional means of accountability. I will try to elaborate on this in the following.

Bringing Back the Public

Mark Bovens has identified two conditions for ‘public accountability’: the account giving is done within the context of public administration and in the public sphere (Bovens 2005). The reasons for the debate on deliberation to arise can in my view be traced to the structural changes that have influenced these conditions. The NPM reforms have imposed result-oriented imperatives on public organisations, increased expert authority and blurred the lines between public and private organisations, all of which has diminished the open and deliberative aspects of policy-making. Also, the internationalisation of governance is seen to have excluded the wider public from the decision-making. This has lead to
general demands for publicity through deliberation, public debate and transparency. I will present some examples of this.

First of all, the perceived structural complexity of decision-making can be seen to have highlighted the question of transparency. The new policy-networks and decision-making processes are often perceived to be complex and opaque which has raised demands for transparency that is seen to bring clarity to “the system” (Papadopoulos 2003: 482). In this sense transparency often gets expanded beyond its limits, which has made it to become something of a catchword for “generally desirable” development. Also, the decision-making by expert authority has lead to demands for organising counter-expertise within the civil society in order to bring the decisions back to public debate (Habermas 1996: 372-373).

A decline of parliamentary politics can also be seen as a factor for deliberation and transparency to become issues of concern. Significant amounts of decision-making previously conducted in an open parliamentary process have been shifted to international actors, such as EU and WTO (Van Kersbergen & Van Waarden 2004: 157). As this internationalisation of politics and administration has increased the importance of various international organisations we find an increasing interest in their democratisation, where deliberation and transparency are seen as remedies (Stiglitz 2003; Héririer 2003; Nanz & Steffek 2004; Kahler 2004; Eder 2003; King 2003). The internationalisation of public policies has also shifted the decision-making to the executives on a national level, since policy planning and implementation is increasingly done in national central administrations (Raunio & Hix 2001: 163-164). This can be seen to highlight the importance of transparency in bureaucratic processes on a national level.

In relation to the democratisation of European Union Adrienne Héririer has made an interesting remark
regarding the programme to increase transparency in the EU. According to her, the programme was a compromise after a failure to agree upon more radical reforms. In this sense transparency and some forms of deliberative policy making can be seen as feasible mechanisms of accountability in international public organisations before more fundamental institutional reforms are set to place (Héritier 2003: 822; Eriksen & Fossum 2000). One could also see this as a process of policy transfer, in which practices and innovations in bureaucratic accountability are adopted in a new context (Bennett 1997).

This takes us back to the argument presented earlier, that the accountability systems are always dependent on the prevailing institutional design. Public scrutiny and public debate are key elements in political and bureaucratic accountability, which are now slowly being implemented in international organisations and expert organisations alike. This can be seen as an attempt to create conditions for increasing the accountability of these organisations, for which certain practices of openness and access to information are elementary. In fact, one may ask if there can even be accountability in a meaningful sense without at least limited publicity.

Even if the deliberation, in broad sense, might not qualify as a mechanism of accountability, several elements that are emphasised by this line of thought are widely acknowledged to have significant potential for enhancing accountability in various administrative contexts. The question remains to what extent these ideas are in fact “new”. Public debate, public scrutiny, transparency and access to information can be seen as key elements in the traditional mechanism of accountability (Habermas 1989; Sinclair 1995: 225-226; Peters 1989: 255-257; Bennett 1997). Perhaps the demands for publicity and deliberation could be seen as longing for traditional mechanisms of accountability that have developed over time and proved
their functionality, but which now have been undermined by a process of change (see also Goodin 2003: 389; Harlow 2002: 191-192).

How should one analyse these changes? Jessop has criticised governance framework for being dismissive of classic dichotomies on which social sciences have traditionally relied. In this sense ‘governance’ becomes the ‘missing third term’, allowing us to re-evaluate and by-pass these dichotomies (Jessop 1998: 31). I wish to argue that dichotomies such as public-private and democracy-efficiency do still matter in the organisation of accountability. When looking at performance and deliberation one should perhaps not regard them as mechanisms of accountability as such but rather as two elements of democratic rule which should be balanced within each administrative context. Performance and deliberation do have a role in the organisation of accountability, but primarily as ideological elements of governing that influence the composition of accountability systems. In this sense performance and deliberation can be seen as reflections of a more historic debate on the trade-off between efficiency and democracy. When assessing the transformations in accountability systems this is certainly an important dichotomy.

CONCLUSIONS

One may conclude that there are indications that the shift from government to governance has challenged the traditional accountability systems. As the traditional means of accountability are being challenged in the new administrative context, there have been attempts to find new means of accountability. This has been said to have altered the conceptualisation of the term. How has the conceptualisation of ‘accountability’ changed? And especially why has this happened? In this paper I have
outlined traditional types of accountability and some transformations that I see are taking place among them. I have also discussed ‘performance’ and ‘deliberation’ as new types of accountability, both of which are often cited in governance literature.

The debates around performance and deliberation have undoubtedly altered the conceptualisation of accountability. As there is no uniform way of organising accountability, the changes in administrative context also affect the composition of the accountability system and ultimately the way in which the term is conceived. This is evident when looking at the changes that the new governance agendas have brought to public administration. In a sense, the academic debate around performance and deliberation reflects the changes in structures and conditions of governing. The performance discourse can be coupled with the rapid changes in public administrations at the turn of the 1990’s. As the traditional borders between public and private organisations became blurred the means of controlling government were also rethought. Even to the extent that the terminology shifted from ‘control’ to ‘accountability’.

In a similar manner the debate on deliberation can be seen as a result of this structural change that has led to new demands for bringing the ‘public’ back in. The adoption of NPM doctrine and the internationalisation of governance have both come to question the ‘public’ nature of public administration. As public organisations are increasingly being run according to result-oriented imperatives and expert authority, the deliberative elements in their decision-making processes are bound to diminish. Transparency is also sought in an effort to bring clarity to new policy-networks that are often seen as complex and opaque. Also, the shifting of important policy decisions from their national contexts to an intergovernmental level will most likely exclude the wider public from the decision-
making. In accordance with this, decision-making in an open parliamentary process is seen to be on the decline. This has shifted decision-making to the executives, highlighting the need for transparency for the organisations involved and raising calls for new deliberative forums.

However, several mechanisms often linked with ‘deliberation’ aren’t perhaps all that “new”, since the dialogue between publics and public officials, public scrutiny, transparency and access to information can be seen as traditional mechanisms of accountability (Habermas 1989; Mulgan 2003; Sinclair 1995: 225-226; Peters 1989: 255-257). This longing for traditional means of accountability in a context where they have not previously existed can also be seen as a reflection of change. As the traditional mechanisms and institutions of accountability are being dissolved and new ones are hard to accomplish, increasing transparency could perhaps be seen as a feasible alternative to, or a step towards, more ambitious institutional reforms, as the example of EU transparency programme suggests (Héritier 2003: 822). One may conclude that even if there is a perceivable decline in the role and scope of state, there might, somewhat surprisingly, be a perceivable increase in the importance of its bureaucratic processes. As traditional mechanisms of political accountability are losing ground (due to a decline in parliamentary decision-making), the organisation of bureaucratic and expert accountability of state and various organisations is becoming increasingly important.

There are credible arguments being made that neither ‘performance’ nor ‘deliberation’ should be regarded as types of accountability in a strict sense (Mulgan 2003; Dubnick 2005). However these two have undeniably influenced our understanding of the available means for controlling government. One should perhaps perceive them as two governance ideologies that can influence the
organisation and functionality of our accountability systems. Still our concern should be not only the current state of traditional mechanisms of accountability in their traditional contexts but also how the traditional mechanisms for controlling executives could be implemented to emerging governance structures. As mentioned earlier, the ‘shift into governance’ can be seen to have increased executive powers and expert authority. The remedy for this has traditionally been public debate and public scrutiny through transparency. Therefore, I hold it most likely that the issues of public debate, deliberation and transparency will remain central in future debates on accountability. This is also likely to shape our understanding of ‘accountability’.

REFERENCES


