

THE INFLUENCE OF DISSENSUS ON GOVERNMENTALITY DURING COMPETITIVE TENDERING: A LONGITUDINAL FIELD STUDY

Jean Claude Mutiganda *

* School of Business and Economics, Åbo Akademi University, Turku, Finland; University of Gävle, Gävle, Sweden
Contact details: School of Business and Economics, Åbo Akademi University, Fänriksgatan 3B, 20500 Turku, Finland



Abstract

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This paper investigates the ways in which dissensus has influenced governmentality during a longitudinal process of competitive tendering of public services. Data are from a field study conducted in the field of public care for the elderly from 2007 to 2015 in Finland. Public elderly care in Finland is under the responsibility of each municipality. Municipalities have local autonomy; including municipal taxation right. In addition to municipal tax revenues, the central government finances each municipality on a per capita basis annually. Every municipality is run by democratically elected local politicians. The elected politicians have the power to appoint leading public managers in charge of each public service sector. Findings showed that political dissensus arose from a lack of appropriate policies of governing for performance during a new and international competitive tendering process. Managerial dissensus arose from a low-level professional experience and a lack of appropriate technologies to deal with highly advanced profit-making companies competing for entry and expansion into a prestigious public elderly care market. In consequence, costs of outsourced services continued to increase. As time passed, however, political and managerial dissensus improved the process of governing for performance; key decision-makers took reactive measures to limit procurement risks in future competitive tendering processes. The potential contribution is to show the relevance of dissensus when it motivates public managers and political decision-makers to improve specific programs, techniques, and strategies used to manage public services.

Keywords: Competitive Tendering, Costs, Dissensus, Elderly Care, Outsourcing, Public Sector

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1. INTRODUCTION

The question of ethics quality, dissensus, and governmentality when public funds are used to outsource public services, has attracted the attention of many practitioners, politicians, and

interdisciplinary scholars (Garegnani, Merlotti, & Russo, 2015; Hodgson, 2012; Labelle, Gargouri, & Francoeur, 2010; Milne, Roy, & Angeles, 2012; Passetti, Bianchi, Battaglia, & Frey, 2017; Whelan, 2013). Ethics quality refers to the quality with which codes of ethics are designed, implemented,

communicated, and understood by organisational members (Garegnani et al., 2015). Dissensus appears when there is a lack of consensus, or agreement, between two or more persons or organisations (Whelan, 2013). Dissensus helps minority voices to appear (Du Preez & Becker, 2016; Rancière, 2010). Democratic decisions to outsource public services provide opportunities to local and multinational organisations to compete for the delivery of public services at a profit or not (Hawkins, Gravier, & Powley, 2011; Mutiganda & Järvinen, 2021; Neu, Everett, & Rahaman, 2015). Governmentality refers to the process of governing with a specific end, which involves designing governance policies and using appropriate technologies to implement them (Foucault, 1991; Hayes, Introna, & Kelly, 2017; Rose, 1991; Rose & Miller, 1992). Research shows that using competitive tendering to outsource public services, has given rise to political and managerial tensions, dissensus, and ethical concerns in many democracies around the world (Benjamin, Nisim, & Segev, 2015; Lansing & Burkard, 1991; Ntayi, Ngoboka, & Kakooza, 2013). The gap in the literature begs for investigating how dissensus can lead to cost savings in outsourcing public services (Isaksson, Blomqvist, & Winblad, 2017; Neu et al., 2015).

The aim of this study is to fill this gap by asking how dissensus influences governmentality. The expected contribution is to show the relevance of dissensus as motivation for public managers and political decision-makers to improve competitive procurement of public services in the long run.

The theoretical part uses the concept of governmentality (Foucault, 1991), and conceptualises dissensus as an event that takes place during the process of designing and implementing a specific program of governing with a specific end (Brown & Tregidga, 2017). Dissensus does not manifest openly unless technologies of government that have been used to design the new governance program have failed to limit the risks inherent to the new program (Rancière, 2010).

The empirical part is based on a field study conducted in municipal social services tasked with taking care of the elderly in Finland. As background, each municipality and city in Finland have local autonomy. It is run by local politicians that are democratically elected for a four-year term in municipal elections. Politicians that receive the highest votes become members of the municipal council. The council is the most powerful political organ. It oversees the public administration of the municipality and can decide on municipal taxation rates. The council is assisted by the executive committee and the audit committee, both run by elected politicians. Daily managerial tasks are done by public managers. In addition to municipal tax revenues, each municipality/city receives subsidies allocated by the central government on a per capita basis annually (Vinnari & Näsi, 2008). Data are from document analysis, interviews, meetings observation, and continuous contacts with key field actors from 2007 to 2015. Findings confirm the key theoretical assumptions used in this study.

The paper contributes to recent accounting studies that have used governmentality to analyse organisational change policies such as austerity (Ahrens, Ferry, & Khalifa, 2020), the role of civil

society in democratic change (Apostol, 2015) by adding a dissensus approach to governmentality (Brown & Tregidga, 2017; Rancière, 2010). The findings contribute to policy makers and practitioners by showing how political decision-makers and public managers dissented among themselves and used this as a motivating pressure to do better in future procurement processes.

The remainder of the paper is structured as follows. Section 2 explains the theoretical framework used in this study. It is followed by Section 3 describing the research methods and context data. Section 4 presents the results and Section 5 discusses the findings of the research. Finally, Section 6 concludes.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This section provides a short review of competitive tendering literature in public sector organisations, before explaining the notion of governmentality, the concept of dissensus, and their operationalisation in investigating democratic decisions to outsource public services through competitive tendering.

2.1. Competitive tendering

Competitive tendering is the outsourcing of goods and services by using public tender (Kastanioti, Kontodimopoulos, Stasinopoulos, Kapetaneas, & Polyzos, 2013). The tendering process can be open, that is, available to all persons and organisations interested, or closed, that is, selective (Arlbjørn & Freytag, 2012). Open competitive tendering is a principle that applies in many democracies around the world (Kavanagh, 2016). Selective competitive tendering applies by default or exception (Wegelin, 2018). One of the aims of competitive tendering is to improve value for money in public services. Consequently, public managers and political decision-makers have to design a tendering process that will help them choose bids that are likely to perform as expected (Wegelin, 2018). Research has shown; however, that many competitive tendering processes fail (Arlbjørn & Freytag, 2012; Kastanioti et al., 2013; Milne et al., 2012).

Reasons for the failure of competitive tendering processes may be technical; such as shortcomings in the design and implementation of the competitive tendering process (Adedokun, Ibrinke, & Babatunde, 2013; Nash & Wolański, 2010; Van de Velde, Veeneman, & Lutje Schipholt, 2008) and performance control framework (Bergman & Lundberg, 2013; Isaksson et al., 2017; Van de Velde et al., 2008). Failure may be due to ethical issues such as corruption (Neu et al., 2015; Ntayi et al., 2013). Failure may also be political, for example, how political decision-makers and public managers negotiate contractual relations with private sector operators (Diggs & Roman, 2012; Lenferink, Tillema, & Arts, 2013; Mutiganda & Järvinen, 2021). Well-designed and implemented competitive tendering processes can reduce the costs of public services (Arshoff, Henshall, Juzwishin, & Racette, 2012; Wegelin, 2018). However, in some technical settings and contexts such as public transport, public sector organisations might do better by concluding

contracts with private operators without using open competitive tendering (Kavanagh, 2016).

It is important to investigate how politicians and public managers learn to limit procurement risks and improve the likelihood of achieving value-for-money in designing and implementing competitive tendering to outsource “soft” services such as social health care because of the need to put more focus on ethical health issue rather than financial costs, especially in welfare countries like Finland (Tynkkynen, Chydenius, Saloranta, & Keskimäki, 2016).

2.2. Governmentality

Foucault (1991) suggested using the concept of governmentality when analysing the process of government that takes place in an organisation or among organisations. Governance is the work of government, that is, the process of using power to lead people and organisations towards a specific goal (Vangen, Hayes, & Cornforth, 2015). Power is the capacity to use resources in order to make people and organisations think and act in ways that they would not have done otherwise (Clegg, 1989). Foucault defines governmentality as a process of governing for specific ends (Foucault, 1991). In this way, governmentality reflects on and critically investigates the problematics of government. Problematics of government deal with ways of thinking and doing that organisations, groups, and individuals use when trying to know and govern the needs of a specific population, often for the sake of (and best interest of) those wanting to govern that population (Foucault, 1991). Rose and Miller (1992) argue that there are two different ways of investigating the problematics of government: political rationalities can be investigated, and/or the technologies of government can be investigated.

Political rationalities deal with the process of formation, discussion, justification, and change of ideal schemata that represents a specific focus point, such as using competitive tendering to outsource public services for the elderly (Rose & Miller, 1992). Characteristics of political rationalities include morality (such as a social welfare principle to take care of the elderly), epistemology (such as the right and the knowledge of the elderly to receive social care services financed by public funds), and idiom (that is, the language and vocabulary) used to operationalise the process of solving a specific social, health, economic, or educational issue (Rose & Miller, 1992). The moral approach is based on ethical assumptions (Neu et al., 2015). The moral, epistemological, and idiom go through a process of translation when applied to solve a problem of government (Rose & Miller, 1992). The purpose of any translation process is to use programs (also called calculated activities) to establish equilibrium (or mutuality) between what is ideal (or desirable) and what is possible in a specific setting and context (Hutchinson & O’Malley, 2019; Rose & Miller, 1992).

Technologies of government refer to strategies, techniques, and procedures that political actors use to operationalise specific political rationality. Technologies of government include complex assemblage forces (human and non-human, technical, technological, legal, financial, social, medical, and calculative) that pass through a process

of inscription (also called enrolment) in order to form a system whose mechanisms are strong enough to solve a specific issue in ways that become well established and taken-for-granted at individual, group, organisational and societal levels (Rose, 1991; Rose & Miller, 1992). In this setting, power becomes a pivotal tool in the hands of actors that are capable of using their established systems or networks of systems to solve a specific political rationality issue as they expected (Clegg, 1989; Foucault, 1991; Hutchinson & O’Malley, 2019; Rose & Miller, 1992).

Many interdisciplinary scholars have used the concept of governmentality to analyse relationships between programs and technologies of government in public and private sector organisations (Ahrens et al., 2020; Apostol, 2015; Basu, 2016; Brorström, Argento, Grossi, Thomasson, & Almqvist, 2018; Brun-Martos & Lapsley, 2017; Kurunmäki & Miller, 2010; Manochin, Brignall, Lowe, & Howell, 2011). For instance, Ahrens et al. (2020) affirmed earlier studies of governmentality that highlighted the relevance of resistance and suggested alternative forms of governing through which new spaces of choices evolve (see also Apostol, 2015; Bigoni and Funnell, 2015). However, further attention is needed in investigating dissensus as a form of resistance against the status quo that takes place during the process of translating political rationalities and technologies of government in solving societal issues involving actors with different motives (Brown & Tregidga, 2017; Neu et al., 2015). It is important to fill the gap in this study because the process of competitive tendering of public services establishes a network of political, public, and private sector actors and their organisations whose needs to provide public services are motivated by different goals, such as winning future democratic elections (for politicians), receiving professional esteem and promotion (for public managers), and obtaining better profitability and returns on invested capital (for profit-making organisations involved), and are implemented through different technologies of government.

2.3. Dissensus in decision-making and change

What is dissensus or consensus is conceptual. Consensus refers to agreement whereas dissensus refers to disagreement (Habermas, 1995; Rancière, 2010; Suchman, 1995). Reasons that lead to dissensus or consensus can be based on self-interest, that is, pragmatic, ceremonial or instrumental; moral, that is, normative approval or disapproval; or cognitive, that is, level of comprehensiveness and taken-for-grantedness (Suchman, 1995). The level of dissensus and consensus can be strong when based on value, or light when based on a pragmatic approach (Whelan, 2013). Because consensus and dissensus are not self-exclusive, people and organisations keep moving positions from time to time depending on the rationale that underlies their ways of thinking and doing in a specific setting (Whelan, 2013). Research has shown that dissensus can lead to positive revolutionary outcomes when they reveal limitations of taken-for-granted frameworks and how to improve them (Alexandersson & Kalonaityte, 2018; Brown & Tregidga, 2017; Foucault, 1984; Ziarek, 2002). For example, budget volatility

increases more when there is consensus among budgetary actors at the organisational level during budgetary negotiations than when there is dissensus among them (Jones, True, & Baumgartner, 1997). Likewise, organisational change actors can use appropriate management accounting information as an instrumental tool of dissensus to enrol their opponents into a successful organisation change process (Hiebl, 2018). The study by Brown and Tregidga (2017) has illustrated the potentials of dissensus in opening up new societal weaknesses and realities.

The ways through which dissensus can lead to successful organisational change or not depend on holders of key technologies of government and their power to use them in specific settings (Whelan, 2013). For example, public media has the potential to use dissensus systematically to influence public opinions and practices (Ciszek, 2016). When trying to make a complex decision, thoughtful use of dissensus can improve the reliability of the decision (Haigh & Ell, 2014). Public engagement has the potential to improve decisions made by public managers and politicians when that engagement becomes a factor that is taken into consideration in current and future decisions (Delina, 2018).

2.4. Operationalisation of the theoretical framework

Operationalisation of the theoretical framework used in this study starts by analysing organisational contexts and settings that lead to democratic decisions to use competitive tendering in outsourcing elderly care services in the municipality analysed. A thorough investigation of how the case organisation set up a program to invite public bids and evaluate them reflects on how the problematics of government takes place in real life. Further examination of what went wrong in the first competitive tendering process, how citizens and political opponents reacted in dissensus, and how politicians and public managers improved a competitive tendering process that took place years later, shows the relationship between political decisions, dissensus, problematics of government and impacts on further managerial and political decisions.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1. Methodological approach and research site

Intensive field research methodology improves the value of archival data based on document analysis, by adding lively field information from interviews, participation in meetings, and meeting observations (Yin, 2013). This study used a combination of different field-study research methods as appropriate tools to investigate the process of competitive tendering and the role of dissensus in highlighting areas that political decision-makers and public managers needed to improve in future procurement processes. The first data collection method was document analysis. The analysis was done chronologically and thematically (Gioia, Corley, & Hamilton, 2013). The second method was conducting interviews with key informants. The third method was to participate in managerial meetings. The fourth method was

to observe political and managerial meetings (Yin, 2013).

It was important to use a longitudinal approach in order to examine whether the influence of dissensus had motivated enough public managers and political decision-makers to improve future processes. Continuous contacts with interviewees and their organisations helped to clarify ambiguities and contradictions arising from documents analysis, interviews, and meeting observations, which enhanced the validity and reliability of research data and findings (Gioia et al., 2013). The choice of Finland was relevant because Finland is known as having one of the most democratic and ethical-political systems in the world (Rainio-Niemi, 2019; Salminen, 2013). Quality standards of the Finnish welfare system rank highly on a global level (Joensuu & Niiranen, 2018).

As background, local municipalities in Finland have governance autonomy. Political parties are represented at different hierarchical levels such as the municipal council, the audit committee, and the executive committee. Decision-makers are elected for a four-year term and politicians that win the highest votes in municipal elections become members of the municipal council. The municipal council is the highest governing body and has the authority to approve policies, strategies, budgets, annual financial reports and to appoint the municipal mayor. The audit committee is the second governing body and has the authority to monitor the implementation of municipal policies, budgets, and financial reports as approved by the council. The audit committee reports annually to the municipal council prior to the council approving official municipal annual financial reports. The executive committee is the third governing body and has the authority to monitor the municipality's daily management. It also has the authority to approve all managerial decisions suggested by key public officials and to appoint key public officials upon suggestions from the mayor (Vinnari & Näsi, 2013). Political accountability functions on a bottom-up basis as political committees govern every sector of municipal services, including maintenance of public infrastructures, education up to secondary school level, health care, and social services (Kurunmäki, 1999).

Elderly care is financed by municipal funds and falls under the auspices of the social and health care committee, which is directly politically accountable to the municipal executive committee and audit committee, and indirectly accountable to the municipal council. Elderly persons are responsible for financing part of the costs of their care, including meals, medicine, and rent. However, depending on the elderly person's financial situation, the public national insurance system may provide additional subsidies where the need arises. A large part of the cost of elderly care is provided by the municipality (Tynkkynen, Lehto, & Miettinen, 2012). Municipal finances are largely dependent on municipal tax revenues and subsidies allocated on an annual per capita basis by the central Government (Hyvönen & Järvinen, 2006; Kurunmäki, 1999). Some municipalities are becoming successful entrepreneurs in areas such as water, electricity, and regional deep-sea harbour services (Vinnari & Näsi, 2013).

The municipality reported in this research has considerable influence at the regional level in

Finland. The municipality provided direct access to archival data and opened its doors for interviews and meetings observations. At the same time, the author maintained privileged contacts with local operators in the municipal health care sector. They showed interest to participate in the empirical part of this research project and gave access to all relevant data.

3.2. Context data

The research started in 2007 and ended in 2015. During 2007, research focused on analysing archival documents related to the democratic political process to outsource social care services by direct negotiation with local private operators. These documents were kept under business secrecy by the organisation analysed. The role of financial information and quality standards of outsourced services dominated the political field with lively debates. During the same year, a new law on competitive tendering of public services came into effect in Finland. The law was welcomed by politicians and public managers as it allowed them to invite local and international health care operators to compete with local operators. As in many other countries, politicians, and public

managers in the municipality hoped that using competitive tendering to outsource health care would reduce costs.

The first competitive tendering process took place in late 2007. The investigation of this competitive process and its outcome took place from 2007–2012 by interviewing political decision-makers, public managers, and local operators. A deeper investigation took place in observing the meetings of the social and health care and the audit committees of the municipality from 2008 to 2012. The meetings dealt with procurement of public services and how public managers used budgets allocated to them to outsource public services. The second competitive tendering process took place in 2013. The investigation of how this competitive tendering process took place and its outcome lasted from 2013 to 2015 through the use of document analysis, interviews, and continuous contacts with key decisions makers in the municipality. Table 1 shows interview statistics. The total duration of interviews was 27,25 hours. Time spent in meeting observations was about 60 hours. The data gathered through different methods affirmed each other to be trustworthy (Yin, 2013).

Table 1. Interview statistics

<i>Interviewees (positions)</i>	<i>Time period</i>	<i>Duration (hours)</i>
Head of social and health care committee (A)	2007–2012	2
Head of audit committee	2008–2012	1,5
Members of audit committee	2008–2012	2
Member of the social and health care committee (A)	2008–2012	1,5
Internal auditor	2009–2013	3
External auditor	2009–2013	2
Member of national parliament	2012	0,5
Chief finance officer	2009–2012	1
Finance manager of social services	2009–2013	2
City lawyer	2009–2013	1
Social service director	2009–2013	2
Manager of elderly care (A)	2007–2013	2
Head of social and health care committee (B)	2012–2015	2
Members of the social and health care committee (B)	2015	1,5
Manager of elderly care (B)	2015	1,5
Procurement manager	2015	1
Internal controller	2015	0,75
	Total hours	27,25

Data analysis used a realist approach of finding out the “what”, that is, the event(s); the “why”, that is, political rationalities and managerial motivations; the “how”, that is, the technologies of government and operationalisation mechanisms; and the “so what”, that is, the outcome and reactions of organisational members concerned (Sayer, 1992). This realist investigation process provided relevant information to understand how consensus and dissensus might go hand-in-hand in political decision-making processes that involve concluding the business contract(s) with private sector operators. Combining the “why” and the “so what” approaches helped to investigate how public managers and elected politicians react to public criticisms and whether they respond to them ethically, pragmatically, normatively, or both. The “how” approach helped to analyse relationships between political and managerial decisions to outsource elderly care competitively and their use of calculative programs and technologies to limit procurement risks in the short and long run.

4. RESULTS

This section starts with explaining the context and settings of research findings, before explaining the problematics of government in competitive tendering processes, democratic decision-making, dissensus, and their operational outcomes.

4.1. Context and settings of research findings

In 2007, the municipality faced two different challenges. First, the need to reduce increasing costs of public social services, including elderly care; and second, the legal imperative to operate competitively in outsourcing any public goods and services whose total value was beyond 15,000 euro. Political rationality underlying political pressure to reduce costs of social services at the municipal level was in line with central government pressure to reduce subsidies allocated to municipalities, and democratic debates on how to avoid increasing public borrowing and taxes.

As background, in accordance with the Municipality Act of 1995 municipalities are required to have balanced budgets and to avoid accumulative budgetary deficits during the four-year term corresponding to the calendar of municipal elections. In the interests of political accountability, political governing bodies strive to stay within the term mentioned (Mutiganda, 2013; Vinnari & Näsi, 2008). The budget allocated to the social and health care committee for the municipality reported in this study varies between 40% and 50% of the total annual budget of the city. Before 2007, part of elderly care services was outsourced from local entrepreneurs by the municipality, who negotiated directly with them on an annual basis. In order to guarantee health care quality, local entrepreneurs wanted to act as price setters. The financial manager of social and health care services commented in one meeting in the mid 2007s:

"I have compiled statistics of how social and health care costs have evolved in every municipality in Finland We are among municipalities that have the highest cost lines The municipality has not enough funds to continue increasing budgets of social care services ..."

The director of the social and health services approved. One of the leading local operators commented:

"... Yes, I understand this. That is why you should purchase services that you can afford rather than trying to reduce the prices of our services arbitrarily because we also have expenses that we have to finance ..."

Various discussions with many local operators in 2007 revealed that they faced pressure from municipal decision-makers to reduce the prices of their elderly care services without offering any alternatives or services that the municipality was willing to provide itself so that local operators could save costs and reduce prices of the remaining services. Document analysis shows that up to 2007 the social and health care committee had not managed to curb over-expenditure on its budget. As the municipality's tax revenues decreased, so the pressure to reduce elderly care costs increased in conjunction with an increase in social and health care costs and unemployment rates. The director of social and health care services explained in one meeting:

"... the municipality needs to set up a system that we will give us mechanisms to set 'a market price' on our elderly care services Competitive tendering is probably one alternative ..."

A local provider of elderly care services commented in a local media afterwards:

"... how ethical is it to sell and buy services to the elderly? It is not the prices or our services one wants to compete for ... it is the elderly themselves Why?"

Increasing pressure to cut social service costs, not to increase local taxes, and a failure to negotiate low prices with local entrepreneurs motivated the director of social and health care services to suggest to the social and health care committee to approve launching open competitive tendering of all elderly care services that thus far had been provided by local entrepreneurs. However, his/her comments sounded a bit different:

"... According to the new public procurement law, it is compulsory for us to organise competitive

tendering of elderly care services Direct negotiation with key service providers has become illegal ..."

Using legal normative rationality to start a competitive tendering process did not convince all political decision-makers, however, that it was right ethically to use competitive tendering when outsourcing services for the elderly who had already left their homes permanently and lived in social elderly care homes. A leading local politician explained:

"... Public managers convinced our board that competitive tendering was mandatory I opposed it myself ... but was in the minority I still believe that that decision was not ethical But I was in the minority ..."

The manager of elderly care services confirmed that the social and health care committee failed to reach a consensus when deciding to start an open competitive tendering process for elderly care services:

"... There was a lively debate in the board meeting including voting However, our proposal to start the process of competitive tendering prevailed ..."

This study argues, that the dissensus on using competitive tendering as a procurement method in the municipality was conceptual (Habermas, 1995; Suchman, 1995). Political rationality to dissensus was based on a moral approach (Whelan, 2013). Public managers used the entry into force of the Public Procurement Act of 2007, as a problematic of government (Rose & Miller, 1992) with the aim of trying to reduce costs of elderly care services financed by municipal funds (mostly tax revenues). The need to reduce costs of public elderly care services by using competition was pragmatic and self-interested (Brown & Tregidga, 2017; Jones & Mellett, 2007) because politicians and public managers had no guarantee whatsoever that competitive tendering was going to succeed in reducing the costs of outsourced elderly care services.

4.2. Dissensus in problematics of government

When the social and health care committee approved the launch of a competitive tendering process in the municipality, new problematics of government (Rose & Miller, 1992) appeared, that is, it was the duty of public managers to implement what they had asked for themselves. The speaker of the social and health care committee explained:

"... Our board made the decision to organise competitive tendering. After this, the public managers in charge ... had the duty to organise the implementation of this decision We expected them to do this correctly ..."

In conformity with Foucault (1984, 1991), Rose and Miller (1992), and Hutchinson and O'Malley (2019), dealing with the problematics of government beg for focusing on two inter-related issues: programs and technologies of government. In the municipality, however, public managers had no knowledge about what program was appropriate to use in designing a new competitive tendering process for the first time and which technologies of government they needed to use in order to avoid procurement risks. The manager of elderly care explained:

“... When the ... board made a decision to start ... competitive tendering ... technical aspects were not an issue However, I had no toolbox ready for use ... I had no previous background ... in this specific matter We were simply not ready ...”.

The internal controller of the municipality confirmed this. The director of social and health care confirmed the concerns of his/her colleagues when the first competitive tendering process was over:

“... My colleagues and I have substantive expertise in social and health care management ... but not in organising competitive tendering in this field ...”.

A deeper investigation found a disconnect between a governance program to implement open competitive tendering and the technologies used to do so. The director of social and health care services used a pragmatic approach to explain this:

“... There are ... so many laws and recommendations ... about the quality of health care services We have to consider all of them But what is quality? ... and how do we measure it? ...”.

Using “what” to respond to the question of how the public manager designed and implemented the invitation to submit public tenders shows an emergent cognitive and technological weakness of the municipality’s public procurement. A further investigation into the municipality’s archival documents and continuous interaction with leading public managers showed that there was dissensus among public managers themselves at different hierarchical levels. The manager of elderly care explained:

“... My colleagues and I used a model developed on an Excel worksheet to evaluate bids We assigned a grade to each evaluation criterion ... such as aged care price levels, service quality standards, daily costs for feeding an elderly person, and monthly rent for an apartment in which an elderly person will stay ...”.

The internal controller explained some critical aspects of the procurement evaluation model:

“... It is hard to measure what you do not really know The municipality has always been looking for cheaper ways of providing elderly care services Other variables than the price are less likely to be relevant in bid evaluation ...”.

Although the technical framework of evaluating bids included many calculative variables that seemed to match with managerial textbooks and calculative technologies of governance (Miller, 2001; Rose, 1991), a closer look into the relevance of each metric in evaluating bids showed that only the price level offered by competitors weighted heavier than other metrics. The manager of elderly care confirmed:

“... A company that offered the lowest cost for aged care services could obtain maximum points on this criterion ... that is 60% of all other criteria ... quality standards accounted for 20% ... rent and feeding costs accounted for 20% ...”.

This study argues, in consequence, that allocating 60% of grades to a financial metric (that is the price of service) confirmed the real rationality that motivated public managers and political decision-makers to initiate an open competitive tendering process in the municipality, which was to save costs. The study uses this finding to question the ethics of public managers when discussing sensitive issues with political decision-makers in

the municipality (Ziarek, 2002). None of them made an official statement or public announcement that the municipality was going to use competitive tendering for public elderly care services in order to save costs of elderly care. They simply maintained the official legal rationality that competitive tendering was compulsory as a matter of law. Not surprisingly, two companies, one local and one international that was not yet established in the municipality won the competitive tendering process since they offered the lowest price levels. When the official decision to approve the bids of those companies became public, dissenting voices started to surface from both fearless public managers and political opponents. An audit board member made a thoughtful comment:

“... The question is about how a company ... that had no personnel, workshop, or building in the city could obtain maximum grades on quality standards Local companies with established workshops and good quality services did not ...”.

It is not usual, that a democratically elected municipal politician in Finland makes such a comment when discussing a politically sensitive issue that his/her political colleagues have approved. The manager of elderly care responded vehemently:

“... That company has workshops somewhere else in Finland ... and abroad ... and quality certificates There was no reason we should give it lower grades on quality”.

The director of social and elderly care services provided further clarification about which rationality prevailed when suggesting approving the bid of a new company whose standards of performance in the local market were not yet known:

“... A multinational company can afford hiring the best experts to write a bid that outperforms the bids of local companies We have to consider what is written in bids during bid evaluations ...”.

This study argues because public managers and political decision-makers had no political incentives to litigate with a new powerful actor in the local market; that is, the multinational company, they decided to find a political consensus among themselves (Habermas, 1995) rather than dissent against each other (Brown & Tregidga, 2017; Foucault, 1991). The manager of elderly care approved:

“We selected two bids as winners ... and made a proposal to our board to approve them There was a lively debate on the board ... but they approved our selection ...”.

The finding contributes to earlier studies of competitive tendering (Rolfstam, 2012; Rönnbäck, 2012; Wegelin, 2018), by showing the power of price information as a calculative technology of governance that a company can use to enter a judicious public-sector market and drive away local competitors without needing to demonstrate that what is being proposed to offer will be delivered as expected.

4.3. Translating political decisions and dissensus into managerial actions and change

After approving competitive bids that won the competition, public managers had an obligation to sign new procurement contracts with weaning companies and ask for their implementation.

Problems arose, however, because the multinational company delayed the implementation process because it had first to find or build a new elderly care facility, which was not included in the bid. Building activities lasted for two years. When the building was almost completed, the municipality became obliged to finance the rental and maintenance costs of the facility that each elderly, allocated there, had to pay. These costs were too high for an elderly person to afford by him/herself. The internal controller explained critically:

"... The risk was that our public managers and political decision-makers were not aware of what they were doing ... and what they needed They have no skills to deal with competitive tendering contract issues ... that involve multinational business organisations ..."

The audit board member provided further clarification:

"... All local companies that submitted bids included building maintenance costs and costs of heating and cleaning common places in the building in monthly rents charged to the elderly The multinational company did not do this because the invitation to submit bids did not specify this detail ..."

Through this well-thought-out technical manoeuvring, the multinational company succeeded to offer the lowest price for elderly care to the municipality during competitive tendering and started to receive pay-offs afterwards by using a member of its international network to build the new elderly care centre. This technical and strategic approach opened a new door to another company connected to the multinational company to enter into the social health care market of the municipality without passing through competitive tendering. A member of the social and health care committee approved:

"... Our board had no other choice but to conclude additional contracts to rent and maintain that building so that the elderly could live there ... at affordable costs for them The city pays additional charges ... to the owner of that building ..."

The board member provided further explanation:

"Politicians ... and public managers ... do not like to be told that they have acted wrongfully ..."

A member of the audit committee explained why the audit committee chose to approve the additional contract and costs anyway:

"... The city's lawyer is not an expert in competition law ... and in business litigation That is why our annual audit report recommended that the city opens a new position for a procurement manager with legal training in competitive tendering ..."

This study argues, in consequence, that translating a program of governance into operational techniques and technologies often fails in the public sector (Rose, 1991; Wegelin, 2018) because elected politicians and public managers at different levels choose to use consensus to cover the mistakes of each other (Brown & Tregidga, 2017).

In contrast to expectations by public managers and political decision-makers, the costs of elderly care services in the municipality did not decrease in the late 2010s and the early 2011s. Sharp critics arose publically in the face of looming municipal

elections. Consequently, in 2011, the head of the social and health care committee made a public announcement that the municipality would not use international competitive tendering to outsource elderly services in the future. Instead, an expert in public procurement methods and strategies was recruited. The director of social and health care services approved:

"... In a way, I have now realised that competitive tendering of elderly care services is not the most appropriate strategy It can even lead to a monopoly in the long run ..."

Two years later the municipality again attempted to organise local competitive tendering for elderly care services. However, the total financial resources to be allocated to tendered contracts exceeded the threshold fixed by the 2007 Act. As a result, the municipality again amended its local tender invitation to become an international tender invitation. This time the competitive tendering process went more smoothly than the previous one. The tender was awarded to one local and two international companies because they had offered the lowest prices. The international company that had won the previous competition won the second one as well. The new competitive tendering contracts are being implemented smoothly.

In 2015, the study investigated factors that have led to this successful outcome. The chief procurement officer explained:

"... the work of designing the invitation to submit bids was intensive I participated as an expert in legal issues related to public procurement I have done this many times in fields other than health care ... the manager of elderly care did substantive market research to find out which model is the most suitable ..."

The intensive work, the use of experts, and doing substantive market research are words that many public managers and political decision-makers confirmed as factors that they used to limit procurement risks in the 2013 competitive tendering process. The manager of elderly care services commented:

"... I reviewed public procurement models applied in other fields and designed a specific model for us in elderly care ..."

Document analysis and the financial manager confirmed. The elderly care manager explained further:

"... We included two hundred criteria on the quality of services and elderly care service packages that each company had to comply with before its bid could be considered During bid evaluation, we focused on price levels that competing companies offered ..."

A deeper investigation by using archival analysis confirmed this and showed a high level of professional standards that public managers used in designing and approving competitive bids. There is a clear difference between the simple excel worksheet used in 2007 and the advanced computerised system used in 2013. There was also a high level of political pressure to design and implement a successful competitive tendering process and avoid the criticisms of their political opponents. A member of the social and health care committee explained:

“... As you may know, ... I used to be quite critical However, I have learnt to trust our public officials in health care For example, the manager of elderly care services is doing a good job now ... and the financial manager regularly informs us how well or not our budget is doing I feel confident that my political responsibility is not in danger anymore ...”.

The public media is very positive about the successful achievements of the 2013 competitive tendering process. In fact, the manager of public elderly care services received a national recognition award a few years ago.

5. DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

This section discusses key issues related to political dissensus, managerial dissensus, and the process of governing with specific ends.

5.1. Political dissensus

Since the beginning of the competitive tendering process, elected politicians had a different conceptual understanding of the rationale underlying any competitive tendering process. This misunderstanding led to conceptually motivated dissensus (Suchman, 1995) that manifested during the process of voting to approve or reject competitive tendering as a procurement model in public elderly care. At the same time, however, all politicians understood that there was an increasing need to limit the rapidly growing costs of public elderly care. This study argues, in consequence, that costs of elderly care became a context in which dissensus about competitive tendering as a program of government (Foucault, 1997) took place. This political dissensus evolved to become public dissensus following approval of the social and health care committee to conclude a long-term contract with a new international company that was not presented in the local market before the competitive tendering process. As Rancière (2010) argues, such dissensus gives an opportunity for minority voices to emerge on the surface and start influencing the general public (Brown & Tregidga, 2017). The public dissensus, at this time, was about how and why local providers with high-quality services had become excluded, and why the elderly who lived in facilities run by local providers of elderly care would have to forcibly move to another “unknown” facility to save costs to the municipality. The health care cost argument became a topical issue in the local newspapers questioning moral and ethical standards (Garegnani et al., 2015) underlying municipal policies to outsource elderly care services from the “cheapest” providers with no guarantee of quality standards (Mutiganda & Järvinen, 2021). This finding confirms studies focusing on dissensus (Alexandersson & Kalonaityte, 2018; Ciszek, 2016; Delina, 2018; Du Preez & Becker, 2016; Jones et al., 1997; Ziarek, 2002) and add a political approach at the local level in the setting of designing how to implement a new policy at less costs for tax payers.

5.2. Managerial dissensus

In contrast to political dissensus, the findings of this study suggest that managerial dissensus was cognitive (Suchman, 1995), that is, the level of taken-for-grantedness that technologies of government including calculating technologies (Ahrens et al., 2020; Rose, 1991) which they used to apply before implementing competitive tendering were going to function well in the new era. Hence, cognitive dissensus can take place within a group of people (such as public managers in this case) without directly appearing to the knowledge of the general public. However, because public managers in Finland have a duty of informing political decision-makers about the internal weakness of the system through which they operate, the social and health care director and elderly care managers did not hide to the public that there was a need for hiring a new expert in competitive tendering and for trying to use other outsourcing methods other than international competitive tendering as long as possible. This study argues, in consequence, cognitive dissensus among policy makers and decision-makers has the potential to shape new policies and to look for better ways of managing public services as a way of improving self-confidence among decision-makers (Rancière, 2010). As time passed managerial and political dissensus shaped the understanding of what competitive tendering really is, how to avoid procurement risks and why the need to use better technologies of government (Rose, 1991) was imperative if the municipality was going to be able to outsource elderly care services at lower costs to the elderly and tax-payers who finance this.

5.3. The process of governing with specific ends

The findings of this study suggest that there were two aspects of governmentality that political and managerial dissensus influenced during the process of designing and implement competitive tendering policies in the municipality analysed. The first aspect is that of political rationality; the second is that of technologies of government (Miller & Rose, 1990). It is obvious that political rationality in focus aims to save costs of outsourced elderly care services. However, understanding how that has to be done becomes a problematic and lengthy process during which the role of expertise (or expert knowledge) becomes more and more powerful. During the first competitive tendering process, the expertise of public managers was almost taken for granted. Following the failure to save costs during this process, political decision-makers approved to hire a new expert and to outsource research-based procurement models that would help public managers design a competitive tendering model that is less likely to become catastrophic afterwards. Political and managerial dissensus in this process helped to highlight weak areas that needed more attention (Apostol, 2015). All these efforts could not have lead to expected outcomes, however, if public managers had not looked for, learnt, and implemented new calculative technologies (Ahrens et al., 2020). For the instance, the model of evaluating receivability of bids during the second competitive tendering process included over 200 performance indicators that each bidder had to comply with before the bid could be received for further analysis.

The new calculative technologies (Miller, 2001) could not have been quickly looked for and implemented at any cost without pressure coming from political, public, and managerial dissensus taken together. This study argues, in consequence, that dissensus played a crucial role in showing up the weaknesses of politicians and public managers following the failure of the 2007 delivery as expected. Because dissensus took place in a well-organised democratic setting, however; none of the public managers and politicians lost his/her professional or political role in the municipality. Rather, the municipality provided them with all necessities, including hiring a well-established public procurement expert on a permanent basis and providing research funds to improve the competitive tendering process in the best possible way (Brown & Tregidga, 2017; Ciszek, 2016; Haigh & Ell, 2014). Thus, dissensus does not improve anything by itself; it simply shows weaknesses in problematics of management that can be improved or not, depending on the organisational settings in which it takes place

6. CONCLUSION

This study has investigated how dissensus influences governmentality. The theoretical part has used the concepts of governmentality and dissensus in conceptualising relationships between the problematics of government, governing with specific end, dissensus, and change in the context of using competitive tendering to outsource public elderly care services. Data came from a field study conducted in municipal social services tasked with taking care of the elderly in Finland from 2007 to 2015. The democratic governance structure of the organisations analysed has helped to investigate relationships between political decision-makers, public managers, and the general public in setting up, implementing, and continuously improving the process of public procurement of elderly care services.

Research findings are as follows. First, financial, political, legal, and tax policies put pressure on municipal politicians and public managers to cut the costs of municipal elderly care by organising an international open competitive tendering almost overnight in 2007. Second, the findings show two types of dissensus: political and managerial. Political dissensus arose from using weak policies of governance to launch, approve and monitor a new and open competitive tendering process. The majority of politicians took competitive tendering for granted and approved it with full expectations. However, minority politicians dissented. Managerial dissensus arose from a realisation that public managers in charge lacked

the professional experience to use appropriate technologies of government to limit procurement risks when dealing with international profit-making corporations. In consequence, costs of outsourced services continued to escalate. Third, political and managerial dissensus put pressure on both political decision-makers and public managers to take serious measures allowing them to avoid mistakes in future procurement processes successfully.

This study argues, in consequence, that it is not heedful of public managers and politicians to believe that because they have the power to make a democratic decision to introduce change in the municipality, that it can be taken for granted that change will proceed smoothly when the new problematics of government that come with the change are not taken into consideration thoroughly. The findings confirm earlier governmentality studies (Brun-Martos & Lapsley, 2017; Foucault, 1991; Rose, 1991; Rose & Miller, 1992), and add a competitive tendering setting that opened the doors to international competition in a social welfare market tasked with taking care of the elderly in Finland.

This study argues that dissensus which took place in the organisation analysed was cognitive, ethical, and conceptual. Health care ethics quality, which is a value issue (Garegnani et al., 2015), was not questioned. The question was on how to ensure high-quality elderly care services purchased through an international and open competitive tendering process at low costs to the community. The third finding, which is the strongest contribution of this study, shows the relevance of dissensus when it motivates and obliges public managers and political decision-makers to improve specific programs, techniques, and strategies used to manage public services (Brown & Tregidga, 2017; Ciszek, 2016; Haigh & Ell, 2014).

As in any other field research, the findings of this study cannot be generalised to other organisations than the organisation analysed. The main limitations are conceptual and methodological. The conceptual limitation is based on a narrow approach that is applied in conceptualising dissensus (Alexandersson & Kalonaityte, 2018; Brown & Tregidga, 2017; Ranci re, 2010). The conceptualisation of governmentality has remained relatively broad (Mihret & Grant, 2017). The methodological limitation is that the research findings are by large based on data from interviews. This has been necessary in order to keep the paper below 10000 words. Further research is needed to investigate the ways through which dissensus can be used to improve managerial transparency in outsourcing highly sophisticated health care products, such as pharmaceutical items, elsewhere.

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