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1. Introduction

The aim of this paper is to analyse and discuss the gender balance in Danish local action groups (LAGs) against the background of a reform in the LAG set up aimed to secure input legitimacy. LAGs have become well known in the domain of local rural development ever since the start of the Community Initiative LEADER in 1991. Since the 1990s, the emergence of a broad notion of integrated and sustainable rural development led to “values about the active participation of stakeholders” coming to play a more distinguished role (Greer 2005, 120). “All of these approaches circumvented the top-down governmental approach associated with the traditional agricultural policy community” (Murdoch 2006, 174). Traditionally, the agricultural policy community has been male dominated. More local and informal decision making has been thought to stimulate the entrance of previously excluded groups such as women. This paper focuses on the gender distribution in LAGs because LAGs have become firmly established decision-making bodies for local rural development.

The LAGs can be seen as local expressions of a shift from government to governance that has taken place in European rural development policy as well as in many other policy areas with the objective of enhancing efficient and inclusive policy delivery at a local level. Despite the existence of affirmative gender policies accompanying the establishment of LAGs or other rural partnerships, there still exist concern around the level of inclusion of previously disadvantaged groups in politics and decision making, such as women. One of the factors which has been identified hampering the inclusion of more women has been the structural and cultural conditions of these new forms of governance; which are as Pini argues “more of the same” (Pini 2004, 1) in terms of gender inequality. In Denmark, concerns around accountability and representation have guided the Danish Ministry of Food, Agriculture and Fisheries to change the entry and selection methods for the LAG establishment from an appointment structure into elections in order to improve input legitimacy. Input legitimacy refers to the democratic

legitimacy of the starting conditions of the decision-making entity; who decides on who can be a member and how are members accountable to the public so the public can control those that govern. These changes were not aimed at improving the gender balance per se, but were aimed at creating better access to the LAGs in general. Nevertheless, they have been the kind of structural changes that different authors have been calling for (Pini 2004; Bock 2004; Derkzen and Bock 2007). Hence, in the light of the reform of the access procedures, our aim here is to critically examine the LAG composition. Unlike previous mostly qualitative case studies, this paper is based on quantitative data representative for all Danish LAGs. This data goes beyond general figures on numerical counts and reveal background and positions of LAG members. We ask the following question:

Did the reform of the LAG organisation (the change from an appointment structure to an electoral structure) have any effect on the gender balance and what might be the future impact of this reform?

Governance and democratic legitimacy

The new rural governance practice parallels an increasing body of literature addressing these changes theoretically. Governance theorists have described a shift from government to governance in which, on a more decentralised local level, decision making increasingly takes place through multi-stakeholder platforms. In contrast to ‘government’, ‘governance’ therefore indicates a *pluricentric* rather than a unicentric approach to governing which moves the analysis away from a state-centric approach (Rhodes 1996; Heffen et al. 2000). It is argued that governance implies an increased importance of *networks* as the principle means for social coordination (Sorensen and Torfing 2003), in which “hierarchy or monocratic leadership is less important” (Van Kersbergen and Van Waarden 2004, 152). Moreover, the governance literature has put emphasis on *processes* that highlight the negotiation, accommodation, cooperation and formation of alliances that occur. All in all, many have evaluated the perceived shift towards decentralisation and broader participation positively. Governance networks, or in European rural development jargon, ‘partnerships’ are seen as being capable of helping governments to deal more effectively with increased complexity and interdependency (Klijn et al. 1995; Rhodes 1996; Goodwin 1998; Bang 2003; Murdoch 2006). The new structures are said to improve the inclusiveness of decision making towards previously excluded groups:

“Area based programmes are frequently presented as a means of addressing civic exclusion, both through the inclusive nature of the partnership structure, and through the local nature of the partnership, which is perceived to allow greater access to excluded groups than centralised policy” (Shortall 2004, 113).

However, studies which have focussed on the inclusion of women show that women hardly profit from the implementation of new rural governance modes (Bock 2002; Derkzen and Bock 2007; Little 2002; Pini 2004, Pini 2006; Shortall 2002). This is the case, even despite the existence of affirmative gender policies which often accompany the set up of these governance networks in national as well as EU frameworks (CEC 2005; MFAF 2009). Thus, questions about legitimacy appear.

First of all following gender studies, the representativeness of these partnerships is often seen as problematic. Representatives are often invited by a higher level of administration that turns to well known established interest organisations and elites and often favours retired middle class white men (Bock and Derkzen 2003; Pini 2006; Shucksmith 2000; Thuesen 2010; Woods and Goodwin 2003; Young 2000). Secondly, the multi-stakeholder nature of the partnerships, in which also the private sector and civil society organisations are present next to the public sector, holds the danger that the boundaries between these sectors become blurred (Stoker 1998). Thirdly, such partnerships can create problems of accountability. They are basically an arena of decision making outside the elected institutions of representative democracy which renders these governance networks only moderately accountable as a whole (Derkzen et al 2008). It therefore induces the questions: who can participate and who are represented? Is it only benefiting the usual suspects; the local elite who "can increase their power while at the same time denying it to already marginalised and excluded groups in the community" (Lawrence 2004, 10)? Based on a case study in rural Australia, Pini (2006, 404) concludes that the promise of power redistribution induced by language of ‘partnership’, ‘networks’ and ‘participation’ is a fallacy. Not only are women still hardly present. When moving beyond ‘body counting’ she shows the gendered binaries of masculinity and femininity inscribed in the governance process. Gender in rural governance, therefore, needs our attention. The more because in rural

development it seems that partnerships/networks are becoming an established method of decision making; here to stay.

Outline of the paper

Section 2 explains the methods used. Section 3 introduces LEADER policy, its principles and changes in European rural development and fisheries policy as well as it explains in depth the institutional changes in the LAG set up in Denmark. In section 4, we then move to the empirical material and show data on gender distribution among LAGs in Denmark. We show quantitative material from a questionnaire to all board members and discuss the gender balance and the background of the board members. Subsequently, in section 5, we discuss input legitimacy and the potential future impact of the reform of access procedures from a theoretical point of view (Mansbridge 2003; Saward 2006) and relate this to the findings. Section 6 concludes.

2. Methods

Data collection was undertaken by means of an electronic questionnaire sent to all 704 LAG board members in Denmark following a full census approach. This happened during the period from June 13 to August 1, 2008. 454 board members responded, constituting a fairly good response rate of 65%. The full census approach leaves us in a situation resembling selection by self-selection instead of random selection. Selection by self-selection implies that the respondents in the sample are different from the rest of the population in one way, namely that they found reason to participate in the survey. Since we cannot say to what degree our sample resembles the population – that is whether it is biased or representative – we tried to evaluate this by making a comparison between sample and population. Nothing indicates that the data was biased regarding variables such as gender, role on the board, LAG type, municipality type and region. Even so, it is not possible to ignore the fact that for example non-respondents might have had a less positive view on the role of the LAGs.

The questionnaire sought data on the board members' experience with LEADER from previous programming periods, socio-economic characteristics of board members and accountability circumstances in the form of who the board members represented on the board. It also included questions concerning board members' motivations for joining

the board and the amount and type of work they had put into the board, their view on the main strategies to follow as well as on the processes and results so far. In addition, questions about cooperation with the municipality, the region and the managing authority in the Danish Food Industry Agency and the Network Unit were included in the questionnaire. The data in this paper stems from those parts of the questionnaire where a gender division is relevant.

3. Background: LEADER policy – its principles and changes

What is LEADER?

LEADER is an acronym for the French: ‘Liaisons Entre Action de Developpement de l’Economie Rurale’ (links between actions for the development of the rural economy) (CEC 2006b). The most important players in the LEADER programmes through the years have been the LAG board members. Thus, the core of the LEADER method is the establishment of a LAG partnership consisting of representatives from the public, private and voluntary sector. The LAG partnership holds decision-making power, makes a development plan and provides project grants to project holders and can also initiate their own projects. Beside the partnership concept, the LEADER method consists of six other key concepts: bottom-up, area-based strategies, cross-sector/integrated approach, innovation, cooperation, and networking.

The structure of LEADER in EU has changed from LEADER being a community initiative during LEADER I (1991-1993), LEADER II (1994-1999) and LEADER+ (2000-2006) to its being mainstreamed into the rural development programme (RDP) and fisheries programme (FP) 2007-2013 (CEC 2006a). As a community initiative, LEADER functioned as a laboratory for experimenting with new solutions for rural development. As part of the RDP and FP in Denmark today, LEADER makes up a methodological approach to rural and coastal development in parts of the RDP and FP where also more sector specific aims related to agriculture, forestry and environmental conservation are pursued (CEC 2005; CEC 2006a).

Institutional changes in the organising of Danish LAGs

In contrast to the 12 LAGs in the period from 2000 to 2006, 57 LAGs have been established as part of the RDP and FP 2007-2013 in Denmark. This means that more

than 700 persons are active on the LAG boards (Thuesen 2010; Thuesen and Sørensen 2009). 39 LAGs work strictly within the RDP, 12 LAGs work both within the RDP and FP and six LAGs work strictly within the FP. A change in the organisational set up took place in 2007. During the LEADER+ period 2000-2006, LAG board members were appointed not elected, and there were no clear entry standards that applied to Danish LAGs. This meant that for an outsider it could be difficult to gain entrance to and influence the LAG partnerships. In most places there were no additional members of the LAG beside the board itself. During the programming period 2007-2013, it is obligatory for Danish LAGs to be organized as associations with open and free membership. People who live within the boundaries of the LAG area over 15 years old can become members of the LAG association and participate at the annual election for the LAG board. The board members must be at least 18 years old, and are elected for two years at annual general assembly meetings. They must represent four groups: 1) local citizens, 2) local enterprises and trade organizations, 3) local nature, environment, culture, citizen, and leisure associations, and 4) public authorities (DFIA 2007a; DFIA 2007b).

The change from an appointment structure to an associational structure aimed to secure better input legitimacy for LAG decision making in improving access and influence procedures by first, using the principle of election instead of appointment and second, by broadening the passive participation of inhabitants through associational membership. In the following section we will show our survey data concerning the composition of the LAGs.

4. Empirical material: Gender distribution on Danish LAG boards

Distribution of gender

A small proportion of women. Danish LAG boards have between seven and 21 board members and the average number of board members is 12. One of the guidelines from the ministry for the composition of the LAG boards in Denmark has been to aim at an equal gender distribution on the LAG boards. In spite of the formal guidelines, Danish LAG boards only consist of 29% women. In actual numbers, according to the population/email list, the lowest number of women on the LAG boards in June 2008 was zero and the highest number was eight.

Table 1: Gender distribution of all LAG board Members (N=454) and gender distribution of LAG board members calculated by LAG type (N=454)

	All LAG board members	LAGs of fisheries	LAGs of rural areas	LAGs of fisheries and rural areas
	%	%	%	%
Men	71	87	69	70
Women	29	13	31	30
Total	100	100	100	100

The share of women shows a downward tendency, the more the LAGs have to do with the FP. Thus, LAGs acting strictly within the RDP have 31% women on the board, LAGs acting in both the RDP and FP have 30% women on the board and LAGs acting strictly within the FP have 13% women on the boards. The FP has only included LAGs since the current programming period, and therefore, in some areas, it is the first time they have a LAG.

The share of women shows an upward tendency, the more the municipality is urbanized/centrally placed in Denmark. This corresponds well with the fact that women make up a higher share of the population in these municipalities than in the outskirt municipalities of Denmark, but it could also indicate a more ‘modern’ lifestyle in the centrally placed municipalities, with women having a higher propensity to be involved. The differences are, however, not that large.

Table 2: Gender distribution of LAG board members, calculated by municipality type (N=454)

	Men	Women	Total
	%	%	%
Outskirt municipalities	72	28	100
Rural municipalities	70	30	100
Intermediate municipalities	66	34	100
LAGs crossing municipality types	79	21	100

We can compare the current gender distribution with the pre-reform distribution in Denmark (see for studies with similar percentages (Bock and Derkzen 2003; Pini 2006, 407). We know from former research on the gender distribution of Danish LAGs in the start-up period of LEADER+ that female membership was low in this period too (Thuesen 2003). The average share of women was 26%. Eight out of the 12 LEADER+ LAGs had a share of women on the board below 25%. Even though the current gender distribution is a bit less skewed, the 2007 reform did not at first sight have any

significant effect on the gender distribution. The result is, however, bigger if we leave out the fisheries LAGs, which have the lowest share of women on the boards.

Other relevant political bodies can put the LAG board gender distribution in perspective. The Danish monitoring committees for the RDP and the FP have electronic member lists available on the web. These lists show that 52% of the members of the monitoring committee for the RDP 2007-2013 in Denmark are women (DFIA 2009a). For the monitoring committee covering the FP 2007-2013 the share of women is only 14% (DFIA 2009b). We can also compare the gender distribution of the LAG boards with other relevant elected bodies. We know that the share of female politicians on the municipal boards in Denmark is 27% (Kvinfol 2009) and the share of female politicians in the European parliament is 35% (Fifty-Fifty 2009). The LEADER+ Observatory Contact Point has collected data (monitoring indicators) from the former LEADER+ period via the national/regional managing authorities (LEADER+ http://ec.europa.eu/agriculture/rur/leaderplus/midb_en.htm).ⁱ Here, the indicator of 'less than 50% women' on the boards were much higher than the indicator of 'more than 50% women' on the boards. Thus, the gender distribution of Danish LAGs does not seem to be different from the other European LAGs from the LEADER+ period. Danish LAG boards thus seem to be very much on the average level concerning gender distribution. Still again, differences between gender distribution on rural and fisheries related boards are worth emphasising.

We now move on to look at the background of the LAG board members to go beyond mere body counting and the limited focus of numerical representation (Derkzen and Bock 2007; Pini 2006, 406; Shortall 2002, 168). Bocks (2004) research has shown that women's presence is "not necessarily indicative of access to power, as those women who are members lack the access to knowledge, political experience, networks and institutional support that are available to male members" (Pini 2006, 397) However, it is not within the scope of this paper, to address the gendered subjectivities and meaning embedded in the LAG governance. Although, our ability to go beyond body counting is limited - given the quantitative nature of the data - the background data of the LAG board members shows interesting gender patterns which will be discussed in relation to the change in the access procedures from an appointment structure to elections in the discussion section.

General background characteristics

Age distribution. Women have distributions above average in the age groups less than 50 years and men have distributions above average in the age groups over 50 years. This indicates that the disproportionate representation may slowly change over time.

Table 3: Age distribution, calculated by gender (N=452)ⁱⁱ

	18-29	30-39	40-49	50-59	60-69	≥70	Total
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Men	2	8	18	40	30	3	100
Women	3	13	25	33	25	2	100
Total	2	10	20	38	28	3	100

Educational background. A higher proportion of female board members have a long cycle higher education compared to men. This applies to 33% of the female board members and 25% of the male board members. However, both male and female LAG board members in Denmark are very well educated since only about 6% of the Danish population of roughly the same age group hold a long-cycle higher education.

Table 4: Educational background of LAG board members calculated by gender (N=454)

	Primary and lower secondary school	Upper secondary school	Vocational training	Short-cycle higher education	Medium-cycle higher education	Long-cycle higher education	Total
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Men	8	3	20	11	34	25	100
Women	5	5	9	15	32	33	100
Total	7	4	17	12	33	27	100

Main occupation. There is a slightly higher proportion of female wage earners (both public sector and private sector) and a slightly lower proportion of self-employed women compared to the data for men. This can be explained partly by a relatively high representation of the agricultural and fisheries sectors as main actors in rural development and development of coastal areas. Accordingly, for example, a high number of farmers (mostly men) are registered under the category self-employed.

Table 5: Main occupation of LAG board members calculated by gender (N=454)

	Wage earner (public sector)	Wage earner (private sector)	Self-employed	Senior citizen	Working at home	Under education	Other	Total
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Men	25	21	36	13	0	0	4	100
Women	29	25	27	11	1	2	5	100
Total	26	22	34	13	0	1	4	100

Even though the differences between women and men are moderate as to general background details such as age, educational level and occupation the data presented does to some degree contrast the argument by Bock about women's lack of knowledge etc. We now move on to look at the internal positions on the boards.

Positions on the boards

Nominated positions. Women can be found in the highest proportion in the group 'local citizens' followed by 'local associations' and 'enterprises and trade organizations'. Men, in contrast, can be found in the highest proportion in the group 'local associations' followed by 'enterprises and trade organizations' and 'local citizens'. Thus, all in all, fewer women are elected on nominated positions.

Table 6: Group for which one has been elected to the board, calculated by gender (N=454)

	Public authorities	Enterprises and trade organisations	Local associations	Local citizens	Total
	%	%	%	%	%
Men	15	26	38	22	100
Women	11	20	29	40	100
Total	14	24	35	27	100

All LAG types seem to have one group that is clearly more weakly represented than the other three groups. For LAGs of fisheries it is 'local citizens', while for the LAGs of rural areas and the integrated LAGs it is the group 'public authorities' that is most weakly represented. Since women are often elected for the group 'local citizens' this corresponds well with the already mentioned low share of women on fisheries LAG boards (13%) and the low share of board members elected for 'local citizens' in fisheries LAGs.

Table 7: Group for which one has been elected to the board, calculated by LAG type (N=454)

	Public authorities	Enterprises and trade organisations	Local associations	Local citizens	Total
	%	%	%	%	%
LAGs of fisheries	26	32	35	6	100
LAGs of rural areas	14	22	36	29	100
Integrated LAGs	10	30	32	29	100

Positions held. The chairman of a LAG board in Denmark is elected at the general meeting, with the board subsequently deciding on a vice-chairman, treasurer and secretary. Taken the smaller amount of women, they are on average slightly better positioned on the LAG boards than their numbers prescribe. In all they hold 31% of the

primary positions. Women do however only hold the post as chairmen in about 26% of the cases, whereas they hold the role as vice-chairman in about 33% of the cases, the role as treasurer in about 31% of the cases and the role as secretary in about 35% of the cases. The figures indicate that even though women are to some degree externally excluded since the boards only consist of one third women representatives, female LAG board members in Denmark do not seem to be further internally excluded when entering the LAG boards (Young 2000) since they too obtain important positions. Even though they have a higher propensity to become vice-chairman, treasurer and secretary than to become chairman, they do obtain a share of the posts as chairman that almost equals their share of the total number of board members.

Table 8: Positions held on the board calculated by gender (N=454)

	Chairman	Vice-chairman	Treasurer	Secretary	Ordinary member of the board
	%	%	%	%	%
Men	74	67	69	65	71
Women	26	33	31	35	29
Total	100	100	100	100	100

Knowledge of other board members when entering. Women knew fewer board members before entering the board than men did. This corresponds well with the fact that female representatives often represent the group ‘local citizens’ and thus are more loosely coupled to existing networks than the male representatives. Hence, the category of ‘local citizen’ seems to give women an entry point.

Table 9: Knowledge of board members when joining as board members

	No one	1-2 persons	3-5 persons	6-10 persons	More than 10 persons	Total
	%	%	%	%	%	%
Men	11	29	37	18	5	100
Women	15	38	30	16	2	100
Total	12	32	35	18	4	100

To end the characterization of male and female LAG board members we will emphasize that concerning women and men’s 1) level of commitment, 2) their assessment of the LAG goals and the results created during the first year, we cannot trace any clear differences. This is of course despite the fact that women only make up one third of the boards. Except from the differences already described about main occupation, group for which one has been elected, knowledge of other board members and the lower share of chairmen, we have only small indications and thus no striking data showing that women are structurally weaker positioned than men on the LAG boards. This contrasts

previous research (Derkzen and Bock 2007; Pini 2006; Bock 2004 and Shortall 2002). Given the positions women take on the LAG boards, there is no evidence of women serving as the ‘female other’ within a strong gendered binary of masculinity and femininity (see for an example of the ‘female other’ Bock and Derkzen 2008, 276-277). However, we are well aware that the many ways in which exclusion can take place through gendered meanings and subjectivities are not visible from the quantitative data.

Table 10: Women’s relative position to men

Women relatively good positioned	Women not relatively good positioned
Slightly better educated	Represent ‘local citizens’
Slightly younger	Knew fewer board members when entering
Hold positions on the boards that are a little higher than their share of board members	Lower share of female chairmen
	More seldom self-employed

Conclusion on this section

As a first conclusion, when ‘body counting’, the data of this survey shows a continued gender imbalance in Danish LAGs. The average percentage of women (29%) does not differ much from the average in the previous LEADER+ period. However, there is an interesting difference in the gender balance between the areas which implement the RDP and areas which implement the FP. The gender distribution becomes more skewed the more the LAG has to do with fisheries and especially the strictly fisheries LAGs show a lower proportion of women on their board. This corresponds well with the fact that the fisheries LAGs have the lowest share of the group ‘local citizens’ on the boards, since only 6% belong to this group. As shown above, the largest part of the female LAG board members belonged to the group ‘local citizens’. A second conclusion therefore indicates probably a small ‘emancipatory effect’ of the LEADER way of working of bottom up decision making in relation to the rural development programme where the former LEADER+ period might have left its marks, something which is not the case in relation to the newly installed FP. The current system of associational membership and elections might well stimulate this further. We will elaborate on this in section 5.

Thirdly, when moving beyond body counting, we can see that behind the gender imbalance there is little differences as to the general characteristics (age, education, and occupation) of the board members be they men or women even though women are

slightly younger, have a higher educational level and are more rarely self-employed. Tables 6, 7 and 8 show small but interesting differences pointing again to the ‘door opening effect’ the LAG might have in letting new groups enter the decision-making body. As mentioned, women are slightly more represented in the category ‘local citizen’ (Table 6). This category contains non-organized, independent citizens instead of nominated positions via organizational representation in other categories. Traditionally, organisations such as farmers unions, chambers of commerce and from these data maybe also fisheries organizations are often more male dominated. In the same vein, Table 9 seems to indicate again the independency of women’s entrance from existing networks, persons or organizations in their report of low numbers of already known persons in LAGs and thus maybe the emancipator effect of the program although qualitative research following the decision making process and *culture* over time is needed to elaborate on this tentative conclusion. We reflect more on these findings and the relation to input legitimacy in the next section

5. Discussion of the gender distribution in relation to input legitimacy

In counteracting gender imbalance in decision making networks such as LEADER LAGs there are two different policies working. First, there is the general gender policy trying to induce gender balance by affirmative action and rhetoric. Second, in this case, there is policy to improve input legitimacy which could also have an effect on the gender balance. Fair and equal access procedures (how to become a member of the LAG board) and influence procedures (how to influence decisions taken by the LAG boards) are important for input legitimacy. Although we have concluded that there still is an imbalance in the overall gender distribution, we will argue here, that the reform for the Danish LAGs to secure better input legitimacy might be more effective in counteracting gender imbalance than affirmative gender policies.

The general gender policy – affirmative action and rhetoric

There are several possible reasons why fewer women than men end up on the LAG boards. Bock and Derkzen (2008) have outlined four different barriers to women’s participation in rural policy making:

1. Women’s position in rural society and their weak socio-economic and political integration.

2. A traditional gender ideology that underlines women's domestic responsibilities and civil and a-political involvement in the community.
3. The dominance of agriculture and economy in the rural development discourse.
4. The lack of fundamental structural and cultural changes in new governance arrangements.

All these possible reasons point to the disadvantaged position of women in the public sphere. Mansbridge (2003, 99) states that disadvantaged groups might “want to be represented by individuals who ‘mirror’ the typical experiences and outward manifestations of belonging to the disadvantaged group” (see Derkzen and Bock 2007, 200, for an example). In descriptive representation, the aim is more women in decision making since women can represent best the interests of women, referring to both the visible characteristics of the group as to the shared experiences. Affirmative policies such as gender guidelines have implicitly some kind of assumption of descriptive representation underlying. For example the Council regulation states:

“Member States and the Commission shall promote equality between men and women and shall ensure that any discrimination based on sex (...) is prevented during the various stages of programme implementation. This includes the stages of design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation” (CEC 2005, 10).

Also in Denmark, in both the departmental order and the standard rules concerning the foundation and running of LAGs, the gender distribution is addressed.

While our data confirms the skewed gender distribution for which these affirmative policies are made, our data also seems to break with the image of women as a disadvantaged group. Read off from the general characteristics of the women *on* the LAG boards, we cannot conclude that they are distinctly disadvantaged in terms of resources and positions held.

Affirmative gender policies therefore, might not enhance the possibilities of women on LAG boards. Because groups who appear to be good candidates for affirmative policy to increase their representation, are those whose political participation was historically forbidden or hampered; which still works through today, only now in “informal social

political and economic structures rather than through law” (Mansbridge 2003, 110). Therefore the existence of affirmative gender policies can express a lack of real interest to change the deeply inscribed structural and cultural ideas and practices which uphold that which the policy tries to counteract. Indeed it has been argued (Derkzen and Bock 2007) that rural women, representing their interests from a ‘women’s point of view’ were seen as ‘the other’, the non-professionals in new rural governance networks. By thus emphasising the features by which inequality works, the possibilities for change become ‘locked in’ into dominance – resistance frameworks.

The policy to improve input legitimacy

The policy to improve input legitimacy on the other hand, has, we believe, more potential impact. This policy, which introduces new institutional rules and norms such as election instead of appointment, works directly into changing governance practices. It addresses, therefore, more directly the structural and cultural barriers which could possibly hamper the involvement of previously excluded groups like women (Bock and Derkzen 2008).

First, both the set up of the association underlying the LAG board as well as the introduction of elections open up existing networks of cross-reference. The system of appointment usually works through already existing networks of active people, formal or informal community leaders, governors or relevant organisations. Thus selecting board members by appointment naturally limits the potential ‘pool’ from which to choose. In contrast, selection through election and association has more possibility to recruit outside the known networks, which may benefit previously excluded groups such as women, and categories which do not rely on nominal positions such as ‘local citizens’.

Secondly, membership of the association potentially increases the (passive) participation and knowledge of the work the LAG does to a wider group of inhabitants (the LAG associations had up to 300 members at the time of the investigation). It gives the possibility to become acquainted with this type of rural development without being either a board member or a project initiator. It thus introduces a new type of involvement which might lead to other types of involvement in the future.

Thirdly, the new arrangements have more space for the *creative process* of representation (Saward 2006). This can be explained through Saward's concept of 'the representative claim'. In most theories of representation focus is on the representative and how he/she acts in the interests of the represented. The constituency is left somehow out of the picture as unproblematic assuming that it is more or less transparent what the interests are. Saward argues that there is a dialectic relationship between the representative as 'claim maker' and the constituency as active in acknowledging, accepting or rejecting the claim. This view puts emphasis on the performative process of (being allowed) to represent. "[W]ould-be political representatives, in this process of portrayal or representation of constituencies, *make claims* about themselves and their constituents and the links between the two; they argue or imply that they are the best representatives of the constituency *so understood*" (Saward 2006, 302, emphasis in original).

Saward's argument about the creative process of representation shows that for descriptive representation to work, the constituency – the women in the area – also have to identify with what the representative brings forward. Claim making from a women's point of view needs to meet with recognition and acknowledgement that this is a separate and a valid claim. In other words, it needs the women in the area to identify themselves as a separate and coherent constituency just because they are women. For representation in LAGs on the basis of gender only, the claim maker needs recognition from other women that they need political representation because they view themselves as being disadvantaged or being different.

Mansbridge argues that the benefits of enhanced deliberation of descriptive representation are highest in contexts of communicative distrust or un-crystallized interests. Since our data reveals that women are quite well positioned on the boards, there does not at first glance seem to be two opposing groups that cannot communicate. Neither do un-crystallized issues exist around the gender issue. In relation to the low share of women on municipal councils in Denmark Kjær emphasises that "there is no one in Denmark who is seriously discontented with the situation. Except from a few dedicated souls, no one is so indignantly dissatisfied that they raise the question. You don't here critical voices from the parties demanding a higher share of women – neither from the women in the party" (Kjær in Moustgaard 2009, 10, own translation). So

conditions for the stimulation of gender-based representation do not exist, neither seems there to be conditions for successful claim making based on gender alone.

Rather, the theory of Saward points to the potential impact for improving the gender balance through the Danish reform to introduce elections and associational membership. Elections and the process of becoming elected involve a far more creative process than does the appointment system. Claim making is likely to be more explicit and articulated and to involve more people. Elections return periodically giving this process of claim making a chance to be refreshed and rehearsed. In contrast to the value laden aspects of the affirmative policies, the Danish LAG reform opens the governance structure in a more gender neutral way. Through elections, new people can enter the rural development 'arena', not dependent on the appointment system, neither on nominal positions. The category of 'local citizens' therefore is a crucial category. Questions remain whether or not representatives in this category can influence decision making in the same way as other representatives.

6. Conclusion

This paper has uncovered the gender distribution of Danish LAG board members and contrasted the characteristics of female and male board members. It has also discussed whether the reform of the LAG set-up has had an effect on the gender distribution and assessed the future impact of the reform.

Securing the input legitimacy in Danish LAG's through the introduction of LAG associations, general assemblies and membership did not have a major effect yet on the gender balance in the Danish LAG's. The questionnaire results show a gender distribution, which does not deviate much from past patterns. The literature has stated that the new rural governance structures are just more of the same. This holds true as to the female representation on the board which makes up 29%.

However, if we look behind the general 'body count', the situation seems to change. We have uncovered that Danish female LAG board members are slightly better educated, slightly younger and hold positions on the board that are a little higher than their share of board members except the slightly lower proportion of chairmen. At the other hand, women represent the group 'local citizens', know fewer board members

when entering and are more seldom self-employed. The study does however show no striking data that women are structurally weaker positioned than men on the LAG boards and this contrasts previous research (Bock and Derkzen 2008; Pini 2006; Bock 2004 and Shortall 2002). Given the positions women take on the LAG boards, there is no evidence of women serving as the 'female other' within a strong gendered binary of masculinity and femininity. However, we are aware that ways in which exclusion *can* take place through gendered meanings and subjectivities are not visible from the quantitative data.

The Danish reform to secure input legitimacy for LAG decision making is the kind of reform which various authors have called for (Derkzen and Bock 2007; Pini 2006; Shortall 2002). Moving from an appointment system to an election system opens the governance structure and – maybe over time – the culture of decision making. The re-organisation in associations can open space for other constituencies to appear, and other representative claims to occur over time. Despite very moderate reflection of the impact of this reform in our data, the reform seems to be a good first step towards formalizing equal and open access opportunities for all at the place of former access procedures through more closed networks.

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ⁱ There are differences in the reliability of the data between the countries, but the database seems to be the closest we get to a comparative summary of the gender distribution of European LAGs. Data is represented for the year 2004 in the table below. In seven countries, the largest shares of the LAGs had less than 25% women on the board. In two countries, the largest shares of the LAGs had more than 50% women on the board. Taken together, Finland, France, Luxembourg, Portugal, the Netherlands, Great Britain, Italy and Spain had LAGs with more than 50% women on the boards. Greece was the country

with the smallest share of women on the boards, since all 40 Greek LEADER+ LAGs had less than 25% women on the boards (http://ec.europa.eu/agriculture/rur/leaderplus/midb_en.htm)

Table 11: Gender distribution on LAG boards in Europe, 2004

	Number of LEADER+ LAGs	Participation of women on the LAG boards		
		<25 %	25-50 %	>50 %
		%	%	%
Denmark	N=12	58	33	8
Austria	N=56	18	82	0
Belgium	N=20	55	45	0
Finland	N=25	4	84	12
France	N=140	54	16	30
Germany	N=148	47	49	5
Greece	N=40	100	0	0
Ireland	N=22	32	68	0
Luxembourg	N=4	0	0	100
Portugal	N=52	2	4	94
Sweden	N=12	0	100	0
The Netherlands	N=28	54	25	21
Great Britain	N=57	9	63	28
Italy	N=130	73	10	17
Spain	N=146	68	18	14

ⁱⁱ The shares do not actually sum up all the way to 100 due to rounding errors. This applies to Table 3, 4, 5, 6, 7 and 9.