

Innovating local representative democracy: How citizens evaluate new roles of elected and non-elected representatives

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ABSTRACT

In many Western countries, citizens tend to support democratic ideals, while at the same time being increasingly critical of the functioning of key democratic institutions, including political representation. This paper explores how the innovation of representative democracy might help to resolve this Democratic Paradox as presented by Robert Dahl that is experienced by many citizens. Taking people's views as a starting point, our main question is: *How do citizens evaluate innovative roles of elected and non-elected representatives, and what are the implications of these evaluations in terms of strengthening local democracy?* Using unique survey-data from the 2018 Dutch Local Election Studies, we answer this question by building upon theories of political representation by both elected and non-elected representatives, which are actors such as social or medical professionals who are not authorized through political election, but nevertheless claim to represent citizens' interests. On this basis, we conclude that Dutch citizens are not particularly satisfied with the performance of their elected representatives. Furthermore, our analyses suggest two innovations that, in combination, can help address the challenges posed by the Democratic Paradox. First, in response to the rise of interactive and collaborative governance, elected representatives could consider adopting new roles as democratic facilitators and monitors. Second, as part of these new roles, elected representatives could consider innovating representative democracy by integrating non-elected representatives in the local representative system, as the involvement of these non-elected representatives might address the weaknesses of the current system.

Keywords: democratic innovation, representation, representative claims, non-electoral representation, local democracy.

Introduction

At present, many representative democracies in the Western world are facing what Robert Dahl has referred to as the *Democratic Paradox*:

In many of the oldest and most stable democratic countries, citizens possess little confidence in some key democratic institutions. Yet most citizens continue to believe in the desirability of democracy (2000: 246).

One of the institutions at the heart of this paradox is representative democracy. In many Western countries, representative democracy is undermined by the likes of declining voter turnout, increasing dissatisfaction with elected representatives and political parties, and difficulty recruiting candidates for elected offices (Forde, 2005; Mair, 2005; Michels and de Graaf, 2010; Saward, 2010; Ladner and Fiechter, 2012; Voerman and Boogers, 2014;

Grimberg and Vollaard, 2016; Denters and Rose, 2013). In response to such problems, democratic innovations are high on the agenda in many of these countries and local government often serves as the testing ground for these innovations.

In recent publications, the term *democratic innovations* has been used to mean many different things and has been used reference to a wide variety of democratic reforms (e.g. Cain et al, 2003; Warren, 2003; Smith, 2009; Michels, 2011; Newton and Geissel, 2012; Geissel and Joas, 2013). Much of the focus of the current literature, however, has been devoted to one particular type of democratic innovation: participatory reforms aimed at supplementing, or sometimes even bypassing, the main institutions of representative democracy by strengthening the role of citizens and citizen groups in public policy-making.¹

Thus far, much less attention has been paid to innovations aimed at “deepening representative democracy” – as Warren (2003) has dubbed this second type of innovation. To the extent that there is attention on such reforms (e.g. Cain et al, 2003), the focus here has been primarily on the electoral rules pertaining to the choice of democratic representatives. This focus is inherently limiting in two ways. First, attention is fixated on the processes of recruitment and (s)election of elected representatives at the expense of considering the role(s) that elected representatives (should) play after their election. Second, the current democratic innovation literature does not refer to the possible role of non-elected representatives in strengthening representative democracy, be it at local or other levels.

The aim of our research is to explore the potential of two innovations to strengthen local representative democracy, both individually and in combination. As such, we seek to address the challenges implied by Dahl’s Democratic Paradox. Our contribution is based on a relatively new, broad view of political representation. First, we focus on the role of elected councilors, extending beyond the traditional understanding of this role, where councilors act as democratic watchdogs, facilitating and monitoring democratic governance. In this way, local councilors are better able to deal with the practices of interactive and collaborative policy-networks that have emerged over the past few decades. Second, we consider the role of various *non-elected representatives* that may also play a role in innovating (local) representative democracy. Non-electoral representation refers to the notion that many actors – not necessarily only elected officials – make representative claims on behalf of certain groups of constituents. They are able to do so based on different grounds (Saward, 2010; Van de Bovenkamp and Vollaard, 2019). For example, general practitioners can claim to represent their patients based on their professional expertise and daily contact with their patients; churches can claim to represent followers on a religious basis; and local advisory councils can claim to represent service users based on their direct experience with using public services. Non-elected representatives may also be able to speak for citizens who would not otherwise make themselves heard and may be more accessible and oftentimes also better informed on specific issues than local councilors (Taylor, 2010; Montanaro, 2012; Saward, 2016; Van de Bovenkamp and Vollaard, 2019). In light of this, it has been proposed that combining representation by elected and non-elected representatives is a viable strategy for democratic innovation (Saward, 2009; van de Bovenkamp and Vollaard, 2019). In this paper, we will explore the potential of combining elected and non-elected representation in democratic local governance.

¹ This might be in the form of direct democracy, when citizens have the final say on a policy choice, or by advocacy democracy (as referred to by Dalton et al, 2003) allowing citizens / groups to influence policy-making.

We explore the potential of these innovative roles of elected and non-elected representatives in the spirit of Robert Dahl. At the end of his paper on the Democratic Paradox, he considered possible remedies for this paradox, asking:

Has not the time arrived, then, when political scientists, constitutional lawyers, and others who are concerned about the future of democracy should take up this challenge and look for feasible ways of remedying the defects that so many citizens see in the way their governments operate? (Dahl, 2000: 250).

As such, we take citizens' views on the strengths and weaknesses of the current representative practices of elected and non-elected representatives as a starting point for exploring possible options for strengthening representative democracy. There is preliminary evidence pointing to the potential of the two aforementioned innovations to local representative democracy (Denters, 2017; Van de Bovenkamp and Vollaard, 2019). When citizens recognize and appreciate their added value to existing forms of representation, these innovative roles are a way forward in terms of revitalizing democracy. Against this backdrop, we formulate our main research question: *How do citizens evaluate innovative roles of elected and non-elected representatives and what are the implications of these evaluations in terms of strengthening local democracy?*

To this end, we start by exploring how citizens evaluate existing and new roles of councilors as their elected representatives. Therefore, our first sub-question is: *how do citizens evaluate the innovative role of democratic watchdog in comparison to the traditional representative roles of municipal councilors?* We address this question by asking how citizens evaluate the performance of councilors in terms of traditional interpretations of the role of the council and its members in theories of political representation, as well in light of the innovative role of democratic watchdog. On the basis of this analysis, we conclude that citizens are not very satisfied with current representative practices in local democracy. However, the role of democratic watchdog appears to be a promising avenue for strengthening local representative democracy, as it has a strong influence on citizens' overall satisfaction with representation by local councilors and it fits better with current participatory and collaborative tendencies in local politics.

Next, we turn our attention to the possible contribution that non-elected representatives can make in innovating local representative democracy. Empirical research on non-elected representatives and how they relate to citizens is still in its infancy. As we have seen, advocates of non-electoral representation claim that these non-elected representatives may be better positioned to represent particular groups whose interests are normally not well represented. At present, however, empirical evidence on non-electoral representation is scant and it is not known (a) to what extent citizens are actually aware of activities of non-elected representatives who represent their views and act in their interest; and (b) how (dis)satisfied citizens are with the activities of these non-elected representatives. Hence, our second sub-question is: *To what extent are citizens aware of the activities of non-elected representatives who may claim to represent their views and act in their interest and how do citizens evaluate the representation by such non-elected representatives?*

We answer both these empirical questions on the basis of unique data from the Dutch Local Election Studies 2018. On the basis of our answers to these empirical research sub-questions, in the discussion, we will address the normative implications of these findings. This section includes conclusions we draw about the potential of combining elements of

elected and non-elected representation, and reflections upon the implications in terms of strengthening local representative democracy.

The paper proceeds as follows. First, in the theoretical section, we briefly introduce the basic theoretical notions required to answer our two empirical questions by considering both electoral and non-electoral representation. Second, we describe the methods used to answer our first and second research questions, which we subsequently answer. In the discussion, we pinpoint the implications of our empirical findings in light of our research aim: exploring the potential of innovating local democracy through representation. We end with a short conclusion in which, based on our findings, we highlight the value of future research focusing on innovating representative democracy.

Theoretical perspectives on elected and non-elected representatives

There is a vast body of literature on political representation. In the following two subsections, we provide a short discussion of the major theoretical considerations relevant to answering our two empirical research questions. We begin with a discussion of representation by elected representatives, followed by a discussion of the recent literature on non-elected representatives.

Representation by elected representatives

Most of this literature deals with representation by elected representatives (e.g. Pitkin, 1967; Thomassen, 1991; Birch, 1993: 69-79; Manin, 1997; Judge, 1999). This is not surprising, as representation by directly elected representatives is at the core of the democratic political regimes that were established during the second democratic transformation since the 19th century (Dahl 1989). On the basis of the literature on political representation, we distinguish between three traditional interpretations, or models, of political representation (see: Pitkin, 1967; Thomassen, 1991; Birch 1993: 69-79; Manin, 1997; Judge. 1999). The same interpretations have also been used in research on local politics (see: Denters, 2005; Karlsson, 2013; Denters, 2017).²

The first model, often referred to as descriptive representation (Pitkin, 1967: 60-91), refers to the representative assembly, *in casu* the municipal council, as a whole. According to this interpretation, the council's members should reflect the socio-demographic features of the electorate, like gender, age, level of education, occupation, income and ethnic/cultural background, as faithfully as possible. In this way, the council should be a "microcosm of the larger society" (Birch, 1993: 72). Descriptive representation is based on the presumption that

(I)f direct participation by *the people* is impractical, then as a second preference, representation should at least attempt as close a reflection of the constituent elements of *the people* as possible (Judge, 1999: 22-23).

Here, the (s)election of the members of the *microcosm* effectively guarantees representation of the needs and preferences of electors, as the representatives remain true to their former, pre-elected selves and simply act accordingly.

² A comprehensive review of the three traditional interpretations of political representation is beyond the scope of this article. As the three models are discussed in most textbooks on democratic theory, a short characterization of these models should suffice here.

The second model – derived from the work of Edmund Burke (1999 [1774]) – concerns the representative's role as a trustee. Here, the representative has to strike a balance between two, sometimes contradictory, aims: being responsive to the demands and preferences of his/her constituents and – to the best of his/her personal judgement – doing what is in the best interest of the jurisdiction as a whole (Judge, 1999: 47-69). This trustee model envisions representatives as being dependent upon their familiarity with the demands and preferences of the electorate, the quality of their judgement, and their orientation on the well-conceived, long-term common interest of the jurisdiction as a whole.

The third model, the party-delegate model, conceives of representatives primarily as agents of political parties. Different from the trustee model, the relationship between elector and representative is not personal, but based on a citizen's affinity with the *political color* (i.e. the ideology and platform) of the party of a representative (Manin, 1997: 206). The role of representatives in this model is essentially dual in nature. First – particularly during the pre-election period – representatives are responsible for communicating the political views of their party to the electorate so that the voters know what different parties stand for. Second – after the elections – they are expected to act together with other representatives of their party to loyally contribute to the implementation of the party's policies (Thomassen, 1991).

The three traditional models are based on the assumption that elected representatives play a key role in the democratic process; namely, speaking and acting on behalf of their constituents and in this capacity exercising control over public decision-making in government. However, this assumption has become increasingly problematic. Against the backdrop of the shift from government to governance at the local level (Denters and Rose, 2005, Denters, 2011) and the introduction of participatory innovations in local democracy – a response to participation demands made by emancipated, critical citizens who speak for themselves (Klingemann and Fuchs, 1995) – the role of political representatives has changed considerably. In various publications, it has been pointed out that these changes require a reconsideration of democratic procedures and the role of politicians therein (Denters and Rose, 2005; Denters, 2005; Sørensen, 2006; Sørensen and Torfing, 2016).

Rather than taking for granted their traditional role of acting as a mouthpiece for citizens in public-decision making, as in their three traditional roles, elected representatives might be better served by adopting a meta-governance role, one that allows them to regulate processes to secure the democratic legitimacy of networks and interactive governance (Sørensen, 2006). In a similar vein, Denters (2005) has argued that councilors should adopt a new role as facilitator and moderator of local democratic processes. In this fourth interpretation of the representative role – the *democratic watchdog* model – local councilors are able to secure citizen access to governance networks and also monitor the democratic quality of innovative forms of participatory governance, seeking to guarantee the openness, transparency and equality of these new channels (Denters, 2005; 2017).

In a way, this *watchdog role* can be seen a contemporary variant of the 18th-century, trustee model. This *trustee* model is based on a meritocratic interpretation of representation that includes a key role for a *democratic aristocracy* (Manin, 1997: 132-160). Here, representatives maintain a benign attitude towards constituents (responsiveness)³ and rely on their own superior judgement, in Burke's words "his unbiased opinion, his mature judgment and his enlightened conscience" (1999:156) to operate in the context of traditional

³ To this end they have to be well-contacted and well-informed.

government. The *watchdog model*, however, is based on a democratic interpretation of representation in which every modern-day citizen is considered to be sufficiently qualified to participate in collective decision-making (cf. the strong principle of political equality; Dahl, 1989: 97-105). Here the role of representatives is primarily to assure that the voice of citizens' either directly or indirectly guides decision-making in the various governance arenas.⁴ An important role of the watchdog is to make sure that the new interactive arenas offer a level playing field on which all citizens can make their voices heard. This role is especially important as modes of interactive and network governance might very well lead to the exacerbation of existing political inequalities that favor of politically privileged groups of citizens.⁵ But likewise, as we will argue in the final section of this paper, as part of this new role, representatives might also consider further innovation of representative democracy.

Representation by non-elected representatives

As Pitkin (1967) and Birch (1993) have argued, in Western societies, the word *representative* is used with regard to many actors and in reference to a wide variety of activities. The common denominator of the activities of these actors pertains to the representative's "acknowledged duty of defending or advancing the interests specified by his or her principal" (Birch, 1993: 71). Elected representatives are by no means the only actors who operate as representatives in this sense. Ambassadors, lawyers, medical or social professionals, and spokespersons for interest groups or resident groups are representative, in this sense, as well. But it was only recently that the possible democratic implications of the involvement of non-elected representatives, including self-appointed individuals, were more systematically considered in political theory and empirical political science (Street, 2004; Rehfeld, 2006; Urbinati, 2006; Lord and Pollak, 2010; Saward, 2010; Severs, 2010; Taylor, 2010; Disch, 2011; Maia, 2012; Montanaro, 2012; Chapman and Lowndes, 2014; Van de Bovenkamp and Vollaard, 2017).

Just like elected representatives, non-elected actors can and do claim to represent certain groups based on their identity (e.g. religious groups), their specialist expertise (e.g. medical doctors who claim to represent their patients) or their shared experiences (e.g. single mothers who call upon shared experiences to represent other single mothers) (Saward, 2009). Thus, non-elected representatives not only include traditional interest groups, but also individuals and organizations that become representatives by making claims on behalf of a group of people defined in a certain way. In this fashion, representatives and constituencies are constructed in a creative process of claim-making rather than being constituted *a priori* by the institutional arrangement of political elections.⁶

⁴ Although being well-informed and well-contacted is important here, too, it is less crucial because, first and foremost, representatives should make sure that citizens can make themselves heard and that the processes of network and interactive governance are fair and transparent.

⁵ The empirical evidence on participatory governance is mixed. There are numerous success stories of carefully designed democratic experiments (Berry et al., 1993; Fung, 2004; Denters and Klok, 2010). But at the same time, it has also been shown that greater opportunity for direct participation might not deliver the envisaged results, as it tends to exacerbate existing inequities by attracting citizens who are already politically active (Fiorina, 1999; Michels and de Graaf, 2010; Ladner and Fiechter, 2012; Michels and Binnema, 2016; Bovens and Wille, 2017).

⁶ In this view, political activists (people who use one or more different modes of non-electoral participation) also act as non-elected representatives when they make representative claims. Against this backdrop, for example, Verba et al. (1993) have not only considered the descriptive representativeness of participants, but have also looked into the substantive views of these participants in comparison to non-participants.

Non-electoral representation is seen as a promising avenue for democratic innovation because of its potential to compensate for some of the weaknesses of electoral representation and direct participation. It has been argued that non-elected representatives may be better informed about the needs and preferences of less politically active citizens than local councilors (Saward, 2016; van de Bovenkamp and Vollaard, 2017). Moreover, non-elected representatives might enjoy a greater degree of trust as they are perceived to be (more) authentic, and can flexibly and directly act on behalf of citizen interests based on specific expertise, shared experiences and/or common identity. In contrast, when elected officials use only elections to justify their representative claims, they do so on a rather static and general foundation, on that is disconnected from the real interests and daily life of citizens (Saward, 2009). Additionally, reference to the electoral basis of representative claims may also be perceived by citizens as a pretext for the re-election of representatives while citizen demands and requests are ignored. This may feed into existing distrust of elected politicians (Saward, 2009).

As such, non-electoral representation has the potential to resolve problems associated with representation. But at the same time, non-elected representation may be problematic in and of itself. A possible critique of non-electoral representation is the lack of election as a mechanism for securing authorization (to select and direct representatives) and accountability (to create an obligation on the part of representatives to be accountable to those they represent). Institutionalized mechanisms for authorization and accountability are crucial to securing the democratic nature of representation. In the case of elected representatives, regularly held, strictly regulated, free and fair elections provide this institutional mechanism. But how can these important democratic criteria be guaranteed in the absence of democratic elections? Research on non-elected representation demonstrates that they can and do make use of alternative means of authorization and accountability. Examples of this include organizing petitions, protests, offering membership, accounting for one's actions in public debates, meeting with their claimed constituency and making reports, etc. publicly available (Urbinati and Warren, 2008; Montanaro, 2012; Van de Bovenkamp and Vollaard, 2017). In our analyses, we explore which of these possible mechanisms citizens consider to be important in terms of adequate representation by elected and non-elected representatives.

When we answer our second empirical sub-question (are citizens aware of and satisfied with the activities of any non-elected representatives who may claim to represent their views and act in their interest?), we consider both the potential strengths and the possible weaknesses with regard to authorization and accountability of non-elected representation. Answering questions such as these is important as empirical research on the potential of and problems with non-elected representatives is currently scant (Van de Bovenkamp and Vollaard, 2019).

When considering the strengths of non-elected representatives, we compare our findings with what we know about representation by elected representatives either on the basis of previous research or based on our own data. After all, we are interested in exploring how non-elected representation might complement elected representation. An important point of comparison is also whether or not this alternative form of representation biased in the same way as traditional forms of electoral representation and citizen participation; where the *usual suspects* in terms of gender, age, education and ethnicity, etc. are typically overrepresented (see e.g.: Verba et al., 1993; Denters et al., 2011). When considering the potential problems associated with non-elected representation, we ask how important citizens consider elections

and alternative mechanisms for securing authorization and accountability to be with regard to representation by elected and non-elected actors.

Methods

We use the Dutch Local Election Studies (DLES) as the basis for answering our research questions. There are a few other countries for which local election studies are available, but the DLES is the only survey that includes questions that specifically address both citizen views on the four different interpretations of elected representatives as discussed above (Denters, 2005; 2007) and their views on non-elected representatives (Van de Bovenkamp and Vollaard, 2019). Hence, the Dutch survey provides a solid foundation for answering our questions. Of course, this does mean that prudence is called for when making generalizations about the empirical results of this study. But as the challenges to local democracy in the Netherlands are quite similar to those in many other Western countries, we contend that the implications of our findings in relation to innovating local governance are also of interest elsewhere.

The DLES was conducted between March and April 2018, around the time of Dutch municipal elections, by means of an online questionnaire sent to a sample taken from the LISS-panel (Longitudinal Internet Studies for the Social Sciences). This panel of 7,000 individuals in 4,500 households was administered by CentERdata (Tilburg University, the Netherlands). The panel is based on a true probability sample of households drawn from the population register by Statistics Netherlands. Households that could not have participated otherwise were provided with a computer and an Internet connection. To compensate for panel attrition, the panel is regularly refreshed to ensure its representativeness in terms of known population characteristics. For the DLES-2018, a sample of 3,380 was drawn from the LISS panel of the Dutch population of individuals 18 years and older. The response rate was 78.5% (N=2652).⁷

For the measurement of the four models of representation by elected local councilors, we used essentially the same survey items as Denters (2017).⁸ Table 1 shows the indicators of the measures of the four aspects of representation, plus the scale reliability for the four additive scales. In addition to this, we also asked a general question regarding citizen satisfaction with the way in which councilors fulfilled their representative role overall. The relative importance of the four dimensions was ascertained by regressing these four types of satisfaction on overall satisfaction with the representative role of councilors.

For the measurement of non-elected representation, we asked citizens to consider a list of potential non-elected representatives, such as neighborhood councils, local-government advisory boards on social affairs, general practitioners, environmental interest groups, churches, mosques and other religious organizations, and local media. We then asked respondents whether or not they were aware of any situations in which one or more of these actors defended/advocated the interests of people like them. Only those who indicated as such were then asked whether they were more or less satisfied with these non-elected

⁷ This paragraph is a standard text used to describe the DLES-procedures, which we borrowed from Proszowska et al. (2019).

⁸ But in a departure from Denters (2017), we use the items to measure *citizen satisfaction* (rather than measuring the relative importance of the four interpretations of representation). Moreover, a number of new items were added to the original item-set.

representatives. Subsequently, all respondents were asked how important they considered the following four mechanisms of authorization or accountability for these representatives: being elected; asking permission in advance for acting on a person’s behalf; being very familiar with the situation of those whose interests they claim to defend and explaining afterward what they have done and achieved.

In our analysis of citizen evaluations of representation by elected councilors and non-elected representatives, we also considered differences between different categories of respondents. Here – for the sake of simplicity and to avoid unnecessary analytical complexity – we focused on differences in satisfaction between men and women; differences between people with higher and lower education and differences between younger and older people. As political participation is often skewed toward specific groups these differences between groups are important in order to evaluate the democratic innovation under study (Bovens and Wille, 2017; Michels and Binnema, 2016).

Table 1: Indicators for four representative roles of local councilors

Representative role	Indicators	Scale reliability (Cronbach alpha)
Descriptive representation	Proportional representation of local councilors in terms of: Gender; Age; Level of education; Occupation and income; Ethnic or cultural background.	0.90
Trustee	Local councilors: Focus on the long term; Focus on the municipality’s general interest; Are competent; Listen to others’ arguments and subsequently make a decision based on own insight; Maintain contacts with inhabitants and local organizations; Know what happens locally.	0.91
Party delegate	Local councilors: Present a clear party message in council debates; Follow party program when making decisions; Follow party’s voters when making decisions.	0.87
Democratic watchdog	Local councilors: Guarantee that the opinions of inhabitants and local organizations are taken into account in local decision-making; Provide sufficient opportunities for inhabitants to take part in local decision-making; Guarantee democratic decision-making in the municipality; Explain what they have done and achieved to inhabitants.	0.94

Source: Authors

Results

In the following two subsections we present the main results. The first section deals with electoral representation. Subsequently, we will present our findings for nonelectoral representation.

Electoral representation

With regard to our first research question, we observe that, on average, the satisfaction of Dutch citizens with representation by their councilors is relatively low, with a score of 5.4 on a scale of 0 to 10. For overall satisfaction with elected representatives, there are no statistically significant differences with regard to gender. Overall satisfaction, however, increases with the degree of formal education; 5.31 among the people with the lowest education to 5.76 among those with the highest education. Finally, satisfaction is somewhat higher in the youngest age bracket (< 35 years), as compared to the three other age groups.

In addition to asking about overall satisfaction, we also distinguished four sub-dimensions of satisfaction in order to make a comparison between them, based on separate satisfaction questions regarding aspects of the previously discussed four representation types. Table 2 presents the main results of our analyses.

Table 2: Mean satisfaction scores with four types of representation, in general and for different personal characteristics (only statistically significant differences are included)

	Trustee	Party delegate	Democratic watchdog	Descriptive representation
Don't know (%)	27	38	26	34
Mean score (N)	5.32* (1,978)	5.28 (1,689)	5.19 (2,001)	5.16 (1,783)
Gender				
Male				5.25
Female				5.06
Education				
Elementary/ (lower) vocational school		5.02	4.96	
Secondary/ Middle-level vocational school		5.30	5.22	
Higher-level vocational school		5.49	5.36	
University		5.55	5.48	
Age				
≤ 34	5.52			
35-54	5.31			
≥55	5.26			

*Reading example: when local councilors were evaluated in their role of trustee (first column), the average score of 1,978 respondents who gave their assessment was 5.32 (on a scale of 0 to 10). In this respect, younger people are more satisfied (5.52) than older ones (5.26).

Source: Authors

A first observation is that for a considerable number of respondents, we were unable to ascertain a scale score because they answered *don't know* for all items on the relevant scale. This indicates that there is only limited knowledge of councilors' performance in their four representative roles. On the other hand, this also implies that on all four dimensions, a

majority of citizens does indicate having an opinion, even if this may be based on limited knowledge. When we consider the four satisfaction scales, more people have an opinion about the trustee dimension (73% versus 27% *don't know*) and the *democratic watchdog* dimension (74% versus 26% *don't know*).

Table 2 also shows the mean scores per role model. The differences in the mean satisfaction-scores are relatively small, with satisfaction with the watchdog role and descriptive representativeness being somewhat lower than the scores on the two, other role orientations (trustee and party delegate). As the values in Table 2 indicate, satisfaction with various aspects of the councilors' representative role varies across population categories. On average, women are somewhat more negative about descriptive representation by local councilors. With regard to education, the data show that people with a lower degree of education are less satisfied with representation than highly educated people in two respects: party representation and the watchdog role. In light of the notion of diploma democracy, it is remarkable that despite the vast educational inequalities inherent in descriptive representation (Bovens & Wille 2017), no such differences are exhibited when people with lower versus higher education evaluate representativeness.

Additional analyses provide us with information on the relative strengths of the effects of the four sub-dimensions on overall satisfaction. To this end, we regressed the scores of the four subscales on overall satisfaction. The regression results, presented in Table 3, clearly indicate that the roles of trustee (0.35) and democratic watchdog (0.31) have a far greater impact on overall satisfaction than those of party delegate (0.13) and descriptive representation (0.08).

Table 3: Effects of satisfaction with four types of representation on overall satisfaction of representation by local councilors in general (N=1703)*

	Un-standardized coefficient	Standardized beta	T-value	Significance (P)
Descriptive representation	.079	.080	3.60	.000
Trustee	.315	.347	11.60	.000
Party-delegate	.125	.130	4.84	.000
Democratic watchdog	.279	.306	9.62	.000
Intercept	1.206	--	14.16	.000

* $R^2 = 0.644$; $F = 768.681$; results were checked for possible multicollinearity and a number of robustness checks were performed; these tests suggested no problems and results are available upon request.

Source: Authors

On the basis of these findings, we can conclude, first of all, that overall satisfaction with the representative role performance of councilors is relatively low, a score of 5.4 on a scale of 0 to 10. This suggests that there is considerable room for improvement with regard to citizen satisfaction with local political representation. Moreover, the results presented in Table 3 indicate that in terms of improving overall satisfaction, improvements in the *trustee* and *watchdog roles* clearly have the highest impact. When comparing these two alternatives, the *watchdog role* is particularly promising. On the one hand, our research findings show that dissatisfaction with this aspect of representation is relatively strong (see Table 2). But more

importantly,⁹ this new role, more so than that of the traditional *trustee*, has the potential to influence the adaptation of local representative democracy to meet the requirements of an age of network and citizen governance. This is especially relevant when considering innovation in the roles of elected representatives.

Non-electoral representation

With regard to our second empirical sub-question, we asked citizens to what extent they have experienced situations in which non-elected representatives defended the interests of people like them and to what extent they are satisfied with these representatives. The results are summarized in Table 4. This table shows that in the last four years, almost one-third of the respondents (31%) reported that at least one non-elected actor represented their interests.

Table 4: Representation by and satisfaction with non-elected representatives

	“Has one of these persons or organizations defended the interests of people like you in your municipality in the past four years?” (% yes)	“How satisfied or dissatisfied were you about the way that this person or organization defended the interests of people like you?” (mean score on scale 0-10)
A neighborhood association	15.6	6.8
A general practitioner	7.3	7.7
Local media	5.1	6.8
Church, mosque or other religious organization	4.9	7.5
Health provider (neighborhood nurse or social-care neighborhood team)	4.9	7.4
Neighborhood civil servant, or official from municipality or housing association	4.3	6.5
Representative organizations for patients, people with a handicap or the elderly	3.7	6.5
Environmental organizations	3.3	7.1
Municipal-advisory boards on social and health issues	2.8	6.5
Trade union	1.6	7.4
Migrant organization	0.6	5.5
Representation by one or more organization or person	31.0	7.0 *
N = 2,704, valid N**=	2,266	682

Source: Authors

*Mean score for representative person(s) or organization(s).

**Valid N refers to the number of cases that do not have missing values on the variables shown in the table.

The flipside of this is that about two-thirds of the citizens are not aware of any interest representation by means of non-elected representation. Neighborhood associations and village councils, in particular, were mentioned relatively often (16% of respondents), followed at quite a distance by general practitioners (7%). Though, as we already noted, only one-third of

⁹ After all, the differences in the four satisfaction scores are small.

the respondents reported that non-elected representatives promoted their interests, the satisfaction rates for this type of representation are quite high, with an average score of 7.0 on a scale of 0 to 10. This is substantially higher than satisfaction with elected representatives in municipal councils where the mean score was a mere 5.4.

When we consider how different categories are (not) represented by non-elected representatives, we observe some striking similarities.¹⁰ For example, non-elected representatives represent men and women equally well. And the same holds true when we compare people with more and less formal education. These findings are interesting when we consider them against the backdrop of well-known political inequalities related to gender and education in political participation and elected representation (e.g. Bovens & Wille, 2017). At the same time, we do find differences with regard to age. Older people (older than 55) are overrepresented in the group that reports having been represented by non-elected actors (58%; whereas in the non-represented group, the share of this age group is only 33%).

Equally interesting are the findings when we look at satisfaction with non-elected representatives. Here we do not find *any* statistically significant differences in satisfaction with non-elected representatives: not when we compare men and women; not when we look at differences between people with more and less education; and not when we consider different age categories. The relatively high level of satisfaction with non-elected representatives is fairly equally spread over different segments of the population. This pattern differs from the findings reported above pertaining to satisfaction with elected representatives, where, for example, we found evidence of a diploma-democracy effect.

On the basis of these findings, we can conclude that although representation by non-elected actors is limited to about 30 percent of the citizens, this mode of representation is less characterized by political inequalities in terms of gender and education than most forms of political participation and representation by elected representatives. Moreover, our research shows, that there is widespread, high satisfaction with representation by non-elected actors. These levels of satisfaction compare favorably to citizen contentment with elected representatives.

However, as was stated in the theoretical discussion, this form of representation oftentimes lacks formalized mechanisms for authorization and accountability. In our research, we therefore also asked citizens about their views on the desirability of election-based and other possible mechanisms for authorization and accountability. Firstly, our results clearly show that a distinct majority (77%) considers elections to be a very important mechanism for the authorization and accountability of representatives (see Table 5). Nevertheless, voters consider other non-electoral mechanisms for authorization and accountability just as important or even as more important means of attributing authorization and accountability. In particular, voters attach great importance to representatives being very familiar with what is going on among people whose interests they purport to defend (84.2%) and explaining afterward what they, the representatives, have done and achieved (89.4%) for the benefit of those they claim to represent. Therefore, non-elected representatives can rely on alternative mechanisms of authorization and accountability to obtain legitimacy for their representative claim.

¹⁰ For the sake of simplicity, we have not included tables to present the results of this analysis. We have only presented the most important results in the main text. More detailed results are available upon request.

Table 5: Voter opinion on the importance of various mechanisms of authorization and accountability of representatives

How important do you consider it to be that people that purport to defend your interests....	Fairly to very important (%)
Did ask your permission to do so?	76.3
Can be selected by elections?	77.1
Are very familiar with what is going on among people whose interests representatives claim to defend?	84.2
Explain afterwards what they have done and achieved for you?	89.4

Source: Authors

Discussion

Representative democracy is a key institution of contemporary democracy. As such, this institution is subject to Dahl’s Democratic Paradox. According to this paradox, while most citizens subscribe to democratic values and ideals, they are increasingly disenchanted with the performance of key democratic institutions. Against this backdrop, we have considered how citizens evaluate representative democracy by elected and non-elected representatives at the local level. On this basis, we subsequently looked for “feasible ways of remedying the defects that so many citizens see” (Dahl, 2000: 250).

In response to our first sub-question, we analyzed citizen evaluation of various representative roles of elected representatives. We conclude that, in general, citizen satisfaction with representation by councilors was rather low. This suggests that there is considerable room for improvement of citizen satisfaction with local political representation. Moreover, subsequent comparative analyses suggest that in terms of improving overall satisfaction, the *democratic watchdog role* is particularly promising. In this role, councilors do not act as the *mouthpiece* of citizens, voicing their demands and requests. Rather, they act as democratic facilitators and monitors.

These findings have important implications for the innovation of the role of elected representatives in local democracy. The new *democratic-watchdog* role is particularly relevant with regard to adapting local representative democracy to an age of network and citizen governance (Denters and Rose, 2005; Denters, 2005; Sørensen, 2006; Sørensen and Torfing, 2016). First, in this role, councilors are able to ensure citizen access to otherwise inaccessible and murky governance networks. Second, they can secure the democratic quality of participatory governance: seeking to guarantee the openness, transparency and equality of such new channels (Denters, 2005; 2017). This role is especially relevant because participatory/citizen governance might very well lead to ever greater political inequalities in favor of politically privileged groups of citizens. In the third place, ‘democratic watchdog’ representatives might facilitate further innovation of representative democracy. One way in which elected councilors can strengthen representative democracy is by paving the way for elected representation to be combined with representation by non-elected actors. In answering our second sub-question, we provide new knowledge on this type of representation (Van de Bovenkamp and Vollaard, 2019).

In relation to our second empirical sub-question, we have concluded that about one third of citizens reported that non-elected actors represent their interests in their municipality. So, for quite a few citizens, these non-elected actors provide an alternative for interest representation by elected councilors. Of course, the other side of this is that for the remaining two thirds of the population, elected councilors are perceived to be the only channel of interest representation. Second, we have shown that this alternative type of representation is unbiased in terms of age, gender and education. This finding, in particular, is a highly relevant result, as the literature often points to systematic biases in favor of highly educated citizens in democratic participation and representation (e.g. Bovens and Wille, 2017). Third, this alternative type of representation is much appreciated: our data show that satisfaction with non-elected representatives is actually much higher than satisfaction with municipal councilors.

On the basis of these findings for our second sub-question, we can conclude that non-electoral representation has the potential to play an important role in reinvigorating local representative democracy. This is not to say that non-electoral representation should replace representation by elected councilors. After all, two-thirds of citizens do report that they were not represented by non-elected actors. Furthermore, we have also pointed out that non-electoral representation – distinct from council representation – oftentimes lacks clearly specified, institutionalized mechanisms for establishing authorization and accountability. However, there are alternative, both formal and informal, authorization and accountability mechanisms in place (Urbinati and Warren, 2008; Montanaro, 2012; Van de Bovenkamp and Vollaard, 2017). Our analysis also reveals that citizens generally do consider such mechanisms to be an important condition for representation and that such mechanisms are, therefore, also relevant to non-electoral representation. Elections are among the mechanisms that citizens consider to be important for establishing authorization and accountability. But, they also consider other mechanisms to be important and, in several instances, mechanisms that ensure that representatives know what the represented need and want; and mechanisms that ensure that representatives are accountable to the represented in terms of what they have done and achieved as being even more important than elections. In developing and implementing a strategy of democratic innovation based on including elements of non-electoral representation, this is an important conclusion to keep in mind. Here, councilors – in their democratic-watchdog role – might take the lead.

To this end, a recent Dutch study has suggested that the local council could provide a democratic platform for public deliberation where representative claims of both non-elected and elected representatives are considered (Van de Bovenkamp and Vollaard, 2019). Non-elected representatives, who are often better informed on specific issues and on the views of relevant issue publics, can direct attention to specific interests in public hearings of the local councils. This would offer elected representatives the necessary information to weigh different interests in a public debate with an eye to the general interest. The local council would thus function as a sluiceway between society and the politico-administrative core of a municipality (Habermas, 1996). Thus, the combination of the two avenues of representation ensures checks and balances in the local representative system (Lord and Pollak, 2010; Maia, 2012; Van de Bovenkamp and Vollaard, 2019). However, Van de Bovenkamp and Vollaard (2019) have shown that, in practice, councils serving as this kind of platform are few and far between. Nevertheless, the platform-idea is a good example of how to connect the two mechanisms of political representation.

In sum, on the basis of citizen views on strengths and weaknesses of different modes of elected and non-elected representation, we have sought to identify innovations of local representative democracy that might contribute to reducing the disturbing gap between citizen experiences and widely endorsed democratic ideals and the resulting disenchantment with current practices in representative democracy. For councils, acting as democratic facilitator/moderator is a promising strategy by which to strengthen citizen confidence in local representative democracy. Moreover, complementing representation by elected representatives with that by non-elected representatives is a potentially beneficial strategy. This combination can also meet citizens' (and councilors') legitimate expectations regarding the authorization and accountability of non-electoral representation when local councilors debate and weigh different representative claims in their deliberations.

Conclusion

We conclude with answering our main research question: *How do citizens evaluate innovative roles of elected and non-elected representatives, and what are the implications of these evaluations in terms of strengthening local democracy?* Based on citizens' evaluations we can conclude that both the *democratic watchdog role* and the role of non-elected representatives are promising avenues of democratic innovations. Our analyses of citizen views thus suggest the added value of the two innovations to representative democracy, which both individually and in combination may help to address the challenges inherent in the Democratic Paradox. These avenues should be explored further by scholars studying democratic innovation, as they have a great deal of potential. That non-electoral representation is greatly appreciated by citizens and that this degree of satisfaction is equally spread in terms of age, gender and education, makes its addition a highly promising avenue for democratic innovation.

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