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**Intermediate structures of democracy and administration:
The Netherlands in a European perspective, 1880-1940**

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Abstract

This working paper aims to inform the reader about my postdoc research project on the history of intermediate institutions connecting state and society in the Netherlands and Europe from the late nineteenth century up until the outbreak of the Second World War. Central to this research is the changing relationship between a host of extra-parliamentary institutions, the administrative segmentations and extensions of the state, and the accepted institutions of parliamentary democracy. A working hypothesis attached to my work is that from the late nineteenth century onwards these emerging intermediate structures, either perceived as functional extensions of the state – assigned with advisory, regulatory, executive, or legislative capacities – or as an alternative circuit of democracy, are incremental to the history of modern democracy.

This project is part of the larger research programme Alternatives of parliamentary democracy. The Netherlands in a European comparative perspective, 1880 to the present, which is being conducted at Utrecht University. Other research includes the post-1945 history of advisory councils and an inquiry into contemporary regulatory agencies.

Introduction

This study will posit that the displacement of political governance to extra-parliamentary organs amounted to an alternative circuit of democracy both alongside and within the trajectory of electoral-representative democracy in several European countries from the late nineteenth century onwards. It will give testimony to the hypothesis that the neo-corporatist collusions from the 1950s onwards and the emergence of regulatory agencies and quangos since the 1980s are rooted in long-term developments and transformations of modern democracy. These consecutive processes occurred mainly outside the classical institutions and arenas of parliamentary democracy, but simultaneously had impact on the postulates of modern democratic thought and practice.

Here analysis will be limited to the developments preceding the post-World War II welfare state. Throughout Europe, myriad, initially experimental, liaisons between organised groups in for instance industry, commerce, and agriculture, and (semi-)institutionalised connections between the (local) state and societal groups emerged in the late nineteenth century. These institutions gradually became part of advisory, regulatory, legislative, or executive schemes of governance which developed as part of what Jürgen Habermas dubbed as the dual – and dialectic – process of a ‘societalization’ of the state and a ‘stateification’ of society.¹

These configurations have only been addressed succinctly in the literatures on (the history of) industrial relations, state bureaucracy, corporative economy, and, in the wake of Phillippe Schmitter’s seminal article, neo-corporatism.² Generally, scholars implicitly set post-war tripartite capitalism as a benchmark for pre-war achievements, and as such employ a rather unambiguous historical narrative of failure and limited significance of conciliatory, consultative or bargaining institutions during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

¹ Jürgen Habermas, *The structural transformation of the public sphere : an inquiry into a category of bourgeois society* (Cambridge 1989) 142.

² See for instance: Philippe C. Schmitter and Gerhard Lehmruch ed., *Trends toward corporatist intermediation* (London 1979); Suzanne D. Berger ed., *Organizing interests in Western Europe : pluralism, corporatism, and the transformation of politics* (Cambridge 1981); Charles S. Maier, *Recasting bourgeois Europe : stabilization in France, Germany, and Italy in the decade after World War I* (New Jersey 1975); Ilja Scholten ed., *Political stability and neo-corporatism : corporatist integration and societal cleavages in Western Europe* (London 1987); Wolfgang Streeck and Philippe C. Schmitter ed., *Private interest government : beyond market and state* (London 1985); Alan Cawson ed., *Organized interests and the state : studies in meso-corporatism* (London 1985); Colin Crouch, *Industrial relations and European state traditions* (Oxford 1993); Stefan Berger and Hugh Compston ed., *Policy concertation and social partnership in Western Europe : lessons for the 21st century* (New York 2002); Colin Crouch Wolfgang Streeck ed., *The diversity of democracy : corporatism, social order and political conflict* (Cheltenham 2006); Karel Davids, Greta Devos and Patrick Pasture ed., *Changing Liaisons. The Dynamics of Social Partnership in 20th Century West-European Democracies* (Brussels 2007).

Alternatively, scholars postulate a twentieth century continuum, indulging in an alleged non-normative assessment of intermediate structures – with the intention to mitigate the pejoratives of inter-war corporatism.

Lacking in most historical analyses, however, is an assessment of the edifice of intermediate bodies as an expression and locus of extra-parliamentary democratic practice and reflection. In many of the early bi- or tripartite arrangements, initiated by either state interventionism or by bottom-up self-regulation, resonated the critiques on the liberal tenets of parliamentary democracy. These strands of thought, which surfaced from the mid nineteenth century onwards in many philosophical and ideological guises – ranging roughly from social Catholicism, German organicist state theory, Anglo-Saxon pluralist thought, notions of corporatism and collectivism, French syndicalism, to forms of council democracy –, have been subject to scholarly debate and production for decades.³ Cecile Laborde lucidly captures the essence of this body of ideas by sketching a shift from dichotomous liberal thought (state-individual) to trichotomous considerations (state-group-individual) of democratic theory.⁴

The actual (experimental) practice of intermediate bodies, which in many instances can be conceived of as the materialisations of various alternative conceptions of democracy, has largely been neglected in intellectual history however. Although some works on the history of industrial relations cursory hint at the link between democracy, public administration, corporatist rules and intermediate structures in for instance Britain, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands and Scandinavia in the period 1880-1940, only for France, and to a lesser extent Belgium, elaborate accounts have been published which transcend the framework of mere (socio-)economic interpretation.⁵

Hence, this study aims to sketch the emerging and changing landscapes of extra-parliamentary intermediate institutions from the late nineteenth century up until the outbreak

³ Thought-provoking studies, among others, in this respect are: Ralph H. Bowen, *German Theories of the Corporative State with Special Reference to the Period 1870-1919* (New York 1947); Matthew Heath Elbow, *French corporative theory, 1789-1948 : a chapter in the history of ideas* (London 1966); Antony Black, *Guild & state : European political thought from the twelfth century to the present* (New Jersey 2003); Marc Stears, *Progressives, pluralists, and the problems of the state : ideologies of reform in the United States and Britain, 1909-1926* (Oxford etc. 2002); David Runciman, *Pluralism and the personality of the state* (Cambridge 1997); Peter J. Williamson, *Varieties of corporatism : a conceptual discussion* (Cambridge 1985).

⁴ Cf. Cécile Laborde, *Pluralist thought and the state in Britain and France, 1900-25* (Oxford 2000).

⁵ Exemplary studies are: Steven L. Kaplan and Philippe Minard ed., *La France, malade du corporatisme? XVIIIe-XXe siècles* (Paris 2004); Alain Chatriot, *La démocratie sociale à la française. L'expérience du Conseil national économique 1924-1940* (Paris 2002); Pierre Rosanvallon, *Le peuple introuvable : histoire de la représentation démocratique en France* (Paris 1998); D. Luyten, 'Politiek corporatisme en de crisis van de liberale ideologie (1920-1944) : deel 1', *REVUE BELGE D'HISTOIRE CONTEMPORAINE* (1992) 493-559 ; D. Luyten, 'Politiek corporatisme en de crisis van de liberale ideologie (1920-1944): deel 2', *REVUE BELGE D'HISTOIRE CONTEMPORAINE* (1993) 107-184 ; Geoff Eley, *Forging democracy : the history of the Left in Europe, 1850-2000* (Oxford 2002).

of World War II in Western Europe (i.e. The Netherlands, France, Germany, Britain, Belgium, and, to a lesser extent, the Scandinavian countries), though excursions into central and Mediterranean Europe, and the United States will be made occasionally. Whereas the European cases will be mainly distilled from scholarly literature, the Dutch case will also be based on primary sources. As such the particular Dutch case will stand out from the other national cases. Nevertheless, all cases will be inquired comparatively and considered as interconnected endeavours in terms of shared discourses and border-crossing interchange of achievements and experiences. Furthermore, the emergence of intermediate bodies was not confined to nations, but, though modest, had a transnational equivalent too during the late 1920s and early 1930s – which will also be probed into. Next to making a (incomplete) European ‘inventory’, this research aspires to interlink these extra-parliamentary intermediary structures with the simultaneous development of parliamentary democracy and the emergence of new administrative state institutions.

During the formative era of extra-parliamentary intermediate democratic and administrative practice studied here, various societal or functional domains were not as well contoured in law and custom as during the second half of the twentieth century. From this follows that, despite the aforementioned critique on a predominant socio-economic scholarly outlook, the cases in this study cover a whole range of overlapping and rather undistinguishable realms which relate to economic activity in one way or the other. Housing, health care, education, culture, recreation, for instance, were only gradually articulated as divergent domains – leaving aside the question what and who constituted such a domain for now – distinct from socio-economic interests in trade, commerce, agriculture, and industry. In other words, the differentiation and specialisation of these intermediate institutions will be dealt with, although arrangements concerning economic activity and regulation inevitably remain predominant in historical analysis of the period at issue.

Historical contexts of intermediate structures

In historiography several historical contexts are delineated which propelled the establishment of intermediate structures throughout Europe. I will condense these contexts to four, partly overlapping, backgrounds varying from country to country against which rapprochements between state and society and vice-versa, or between various societal groups took shape and can be interpreted. First, reference needs to be made to the incorporation of expert knowledge – e.g. statistics, medical knowledge and applied social science – in government as a corollary

to the implementation and execution of social legislation from the end the of the nineteenth century onwards.

In other words, to act upon 'the social' and social politics, as conceived of by collectivist reformers and sociological theorists by the end of the nineteenth century, had to be couched in several scientific and numerical languages of administration.⁶ This techno-administrative register was largely employed by specialists who were gradually included in consultative agencies subservient to government. Furthermore, the expansion of the state apparatus as a concomitant of increasing government intervention, opened up (local) state bureaucracy to experts at the higher echelons as well. Expertise, thus, served as an avenue in at least two ways (through consultative agencies and executive officialdom) to sustain a permanent connection between state and society.

The inclusion of experts into all sorts of advisory, deliberative, executive, and regulatory procedures of public administration, is linked to the second impetus of the establishment of intermediate structures: the displacement of legislative and executive tasks from parliament and government to bureaucratic or intermediate levels, especially after the Great War. Intermediate institutions can be considered as one of several types of organisation – next to ministerial departments, research commissions, or state agencies for instance – which were utilised within the expanding complex of extra-parliamentary political governance. Thus, intermediate bodies are but one means of facilitating a certain 'task' in governance, either assigned by the state or created from the bottom-up. As such the emergence of extra-parliamentary, intermediate institutions can be conceived of as part of a process involving the delegation of administrative or parliamentary tasks – in some contemporary literature referred to as the extension of the 'parliamentary (governance) chain' – as well as alleged feasible 'alternatives' to parliamentary democracy which seek to adjust the 'institutional superstructure' of democracy.⁷

In the build-up to and during the Great War this complex of extra-parliamentary political governance was further inflated by perforce collaborations and interconnections between private and public agencies. This amounts to the third historical setting which boosted the establishment of intermediate structures: wartime crisis politics. The demands of

⁶ For the impact of statistics and social science on government intervention see for instance: Peter Becker and William Clark ed., *Little tools of knowledge : historical essays on academic and bureaucratic practices* (Ann Arbor 2001); Theodore M. Porter, *Trust in numbers : the pursuit of objectivity in science and public life* (Princeton 1995); Mitchell Dean, *Governmentality : power and rule in modern society* (London 1999); Patrick Joyce ed., *The social in question : new bearings in history and the social sciences* (London 2002).

⁷ Cf. Anne Mette Kjaer, *Governance* (Cambridge 2004) 49-50; Jos C.N. Raadschelders, *Government: a Public Administration Perspective* (New York 2003) 109-112.

war profoundly reshaped the relation between the state and society. Organised interests were involved and incorporated into temporal schemes of governance aimed at ensuring a minimum level of the citizenry's well-being and economic activity. Although most wartime arrangements were abolished shortly after the Versailles peace treaty, its underpinning structures of consultation, decision making, implementation, and execution remained partly intact – although this differs from country to country. In peacetime, permanent dialogues were established between the government, its executive branches, and the councils and boards in which organised interests were increasingly clustered during the late 1920s and 1930s, accumulating to what Charles S. Maier has described as pyramids of interest representation.⁸

This 'new corporative collusion' of groups of civil society and the state cannot solely be explained by the urgencies of war.⁹ A vast body of literature points at the advent of voluntary associations in the western world from the late eighteenth century onwards.¹⁰ From this follows the fourth historical development underlying the emergence of intermediate structures. From the last two decades of the nineteenth century or so onwards, these associations turned in to active social movements (e.g. trade unions, associated industrial militancy, women's movements, and a vast array of single-issue campaigns) which sustained new gains of democratic citizenship: initially franchise, later additional social rights and power claims in the public sphere.

Ultimately, governments at all layers, mostly reluctantly, had to accede to the pressures exerted on parliamentary democracy by extra-parliamentary movements. An illustrative case is the manifestation of the (local) state as a weighty employer to blue-collar and white-collar workers who, in the course of the twentieth century, were represented in various participatory schemes ranging from collective bargaining to full-blown workplace democracy or self-management. These and similar overtures resulted in a renegotiated, modified social contract, entailing not only enlarged franchise, the appreciation of trade unions, and social legislation, but also the thickening of civil society's fabric and the enhancement of its organisational degree. Consequently, debates about interest representation within the intermediate structures between state and society became ever less tentative.

⁸ Charles S. Maier, *In Search of Stability: Explorations in Historical Political Economy* (Cambridge 1987) passim.

⁹ Geoff Eley, *Forging democracy*, 221.

¹⁰ Good introductory and bibliographical accounts are: Stefan-Ludwig Hoffmann, *Geselligkeit und Demokratie : Vereine und zivile Gesellschaft im transnationalen Vergleich, 1750-1914* (Göttingen 2003); John Markoff, *Waves of democracy : social movements and political change* (London 1996). Seminal in this respect are the works of Thomas Nipperdey.

From these four historical contexts (the rise of the expert in government, the displacement of administration to extra-parliamentary institutions, the acceleration of state-society rapprochement during the Great War, and the toughening of civil society) ensues the temporal framework of this study. For the sake of analysis three shorter time spans can be distinguished for the period 1880-1940 in which all of the aforementioned historical processes were manifest to different degrees and in various stages.

First, the sub-period 1880-1914 is dubbed as the genesis of the consultative state, borrowing the words from Pierre Rosanvallon.¹¹ With this is meant the direct association of non-state actors in affairs of state interventionism through a set of novel or regenerated institutions which, from the late nineteenth century onwards, were consulted by the executive especially with regard to the implementation and enactment of social legislation. Examples of these institutions include: the *Conseil supérieur de travail* (1891), *Conseil supérieur des beaux-arts* (1875), *Conseil supérieur de l'Assistance Publique* (1888) in France; the *Landesökonomie-Collegium* (founded in the 1840s, but reinvigorated in the late 1870s), *Centralverband Deutscher Industrieller* (1876), *Volkswirtschaftsrat* (1880) in Prussia and Germany; the *Conseil supérieur de l'industrie et du commerce* (1890), *Conseil supérieur du travail* (1892) in Belgium; and, though established earlier, the Austrian *Kammer* for trade, crafts, and agriculture (1848) as well as similar centralised chambers elsewhere in Europe. Furthermore, some of the private bipartite conciliatory arrangements between employers and employees at the local and regional level, which in some instances had already amounted to proto-institutions of collective bargaining since the 1870s, were gradually recognised or promoted by the state. In this respect one can think of the labour councils or chambers of labour Belgium, Catalonia, France, Britain, and Germany.

Dutch case-studies will include the *Kamers van Arbeid* (private in the early 1890s, legalised in 1897), the *Mijnraad* (Mining Council 1902), the *Centrale Gezondheidsraad* (Central Health Council 1902), the *Centraal Bureau voor Sociale Adviezen* (Central Bureau for Social Advices 1899), the *Commissie voor Handelspolitiek* (State Commission for Trade Policy 1891), and the *Centraal Bureau voor de Statistiek* (Central Bureau for Statistics 1899).

The majority of these institutions initially derived their legitimacy from their advisory capacity to government. But as these institutions were connected to the advent of electoral-representative democracy in political and intellectual discourse by opponents of liberal parliamentarism, they were also conceived of as sites of experimentation with forms of extra-

¹¹ The term was originally used as 'administration consultative' by the renowned French jurist Maurice Hauriou (1856-1929). See: Pierre Rosanvallon, *Le peuple introuvable*, 333.

parliamentary representation and regulation. In other words, adjacent to the laborious trajectory of parliamentary democracy, one can discern the vague contours of what to some was perceived as the re-corporatisation of society, the anew appreciation of group interests, or the parcelling out of state sovereignty by which liberal democracy was to be circumvented. Similar arguments were even stretched further in the inter-war critiques on parliamentary democracy throughout Europe.

The second sub-period comprises the Great War. As stated above, the urgencies of war prompted interconnections between state and society in order to sustain interventionist agendas particularly in economic production and consumption. The omnipresent crisis of wartime allowed for a rather uncomplicated legitimation or recognition of extra-parliamentary representative institutions – alleged undermining effects on parliamentary democracy were subsidiary against the background of social unrest, unemployment, and scarcity.

In the belligerent countries Germany, France, and Britain, but also for instance in the US – at least to some extent – and neutral the Netherlands, labour was among the most important interest groups accredited to participate in consultative and deliberative schemes of wartime politics. More generally, state interventionism with regard to price-making, the allocation of labour and material, the distribution of consumer essentials, and the regulation of retail trade entailed the delegation of regulatory authority to boards and committees comprised of various interest groups.¹² Clear separations between private and public institutions quickly subsided in the gospel of rationally and scientifically managed economies, promoted by Taylorists and such administrators as Walter Rathenau. What is more, the new intermediate levels, at which public and private actors assembled, further obscured the private-public dichotomy.

The Dutch case-studies for this sub-period are: the *Nationale Woningraad* (National Housing Council 1913), the *Nederlandsche Werkloosheidsraad* (Dutch Unemployment Council 1909, 1914), several subcommittees and departments of the *Koninklijk Nationaal Steun-Comité* (Royal National Support Committee 1914), the *Commissie voor de Economische Politiek* (Commission for Economic Policy 1917).

After the Versailles peace treaty, crisis policies and arrangements were largely reversed. However, the institutional substrate of the state-society collusions developed into the building lot of a vast welter of extra-parliamentary representative bodies throughout

¹² See among others: Maier, *Recasting Bourgeois Europe*, chapter 1; Joseph A. McCartin, *Labor's great war. The Struggle for Industrial Democracy and the Origins of Modern American Labor Relations, 1912-1921* (London 1997); Ivo Kuypers, *In de schaduw van de grote oorlog : de Nederlandse arbeidersbeweging en de overheid, 1914-1920* (Amsterdam 2002).

Europe during the 1920s and 1930s – again at intermediate levels. The inter-war period, consequently, serves as the third sub-period in this research.

In 1937 Karl Loewenstein retrospectively witnessed an omnipresent advance of schemes of functional and economic representation in the two decades succeeding the Great War. These schemes stretched from institutions with ‘merely consultative functions’ to ‘an exclusively economic parliament with full political powers’.¹³ According to Loewenstein the former scheme manifested itself to the fullest in Weimar Germany and Czechoslovakia, but was also discernable in many traits throughout western and central Europe by the end of the Great War. The latter scheme of a superseding economic parliament was present in fascist Italy, Portugal, and Austria. Loewenstein’s observations are only but one fragment of an enormous corpus of academic publications of similar interest in the 1920s and 1930s. Whereas Loewenstein was one of the most prominent opponents against ‘corporatism’ or ‘occupational representation’ as the solution to the alleged crisis of parliamentary democracy – or in his own vocabulary: ‘*la malaise parlementaire*’ –, the Romanian minister and intellectual Mihail Manoïlesco favourably proclaimed ‘*le siècle du corporatisme*’, as has been frequently echoed in more recent literatures.¹⁴

To mention but a few examples of these mainly – though not exclusively – socio-economic institutions witnessed by Loewenstein: the provisional Weimar constitution included a *Reichswirtschaftsrat* (1920); in France the *Conseil national économique* started its work in 1925; in Britain an Economic Advisory Council was founded in 1930 after long discussion; in most new central European democracies socio-economic councils were established in the early 1920s; around 1930, councils in Belgium, Greece, the Baltic and the Scandinavian states were founded; in fascist Italy (1922) and corporatist Austria (1934), Portugal (1933), and Spain (1924) similar institutions based on functional representation were established as (partial) replacements of political parliaments to different extents.

The Dutch cases under investigation include: the *Nijverheidsraad* (Council of Industry 1919), the *Middenstandsraad* (Council of Shopkeepers 1919), the *Hooge Raad van Arbeid* (High Council of Labour 1919), the *Economische Raad* (Economic Council 1933), and some concise digressions on the *Bedrijfsraden* (Joint Industrial Councils 1919) and some local representative bodies (for instance the food council of Amsterdam 1933).

¹³ K. Loewenstein, ‘Occupational Representation and the Idea of an Economic Parliament’, *Social Science* 12 (1937) 420-431, 529-530, there 423.

¹⁴ Mihail Manoïlesco, *Le siècle du corporatisme : doctrine du corporatisme intégral et pur* (Paris 1936)

Though varying in constituency (i.e. societal groups, unions, bureaucrats, external experts), compositional mechanism (i.e. election by a defined constituency, appointment by the state, delegation by interest groups), function (ranging from advisory to legislative mandates), position (ranging from completely autonomous to subservient to state bureaucracy) and life span, all of these examples were to some extent conceived of as either a bulwark against or a fortification of parliamentary democracy. At this instance, thus, the emergence, development, and abolishment of all sorts of representative bodies with deliberative, advisory, regulatory, executive, or legislative capacities, became a significant reference in the vehement discussions about (parliamentary) democracy during the inter-war years.

Dealing with and questioning intermediate institutions

From this contextualisation and periodisation one might suspect an inclination towards a rather unambiguous generational or linear conception of institutional progress. It might seem as if the three sub-periods each represent part of an increasingly steeper gradient on the growth curve of pre-1940 intermediate institutions. Additionally, one might get the impression these institutions are exclusively addressed in terms of creation and formation. I do, however, want to stress that analysis will not merely elaborate upon institutional genesis and stasis, to reiterate Kathleen Thelen's – among others – long heard objections of constant-cause explanations of institutional innovation, reproduction, and change in different currents of historical institutionalism.¹⁵

Although principally interpretative and heuristic in approach, this research does borrow some considerations from historical institutionalism from the social sciences. Without intent to expound the ongoing theoretical debates about historical institutionalism at this instance, I subscribe to those tenets of path dependency theory suggesting that the factors and conditions responsible for the genesis of institutions – at 'critical junctures' – differ from those buttressing it – the process of institutional reproduction as a result of feedback mechanisms and/or increasing returns within a (bounded) 'developmental pathway'.¹⁶

¹⁵ Kathleen Thelen, 'Comparative Historical Analysis in the Social Sciences', in: James Mahoney and Dietrich Rueschemeyer ed., *Comparative Historical Analysis in the Social Sciences* (Cambridge 2003) 208-240; Kathleen Thelen, *How institutions evolve : the political economy of skills in Germany, Britain, the United States, and Japan* (Cambridge 2004);

¹⁶ See for instance: James Mahoney, 'Path dependence in historical sociology', *Theory and Society* 29 (2000) 507-548, there 515.

Yet, at the same time I share the criticism on the deterministic axiom behind path dependency in historical institutionalism. Despite its temporal dimension, path dependency in essence allows little speculation about, for instance, negative feedback, institutional failure, and institutional evolution – though some path dependency scholars opt for the neo-Darwinist inspired concept of ‘punctuated equilibria’ with regard to institutional change. Moreover, institutions are mainly conceived of as reflecting and enforcing power relations between societal groups in this view. Several authors, though, have insisted on dialogues or even convergences of seemingly juxtaposed conceptions of institutional history and change, which in some instances result in appreciations of less defined notions of institutional evolution, layering, conversion, or contingency.¹⁷ It is within this conceptual vocabulary where historical institutionalism and interpretative heuristics conjoin and, subsequently, become instrumental in historical analysis into intermediate institutions in relation to parliamentary democracy.

In this research, as explained above, the history of intermediate institutions will be linked to the theory and practice of parliamentary democracy. Thus, the foundation, change, growth, conversion, demise, or abolishment of intermediate institutions will be construed relationally. This draws on the assumption that intermediate institutions, at least to some extent, were epistemologically, discursively and practically related to the development of parliamentary democracy; questions of legitimacy, sovereignty, political representation, accountability, and legislation, I think, applied to both circuits of democracy. Sometimes this amounted to a dialectic relationship between parliamentary and extra-parliamentary democracy. In the first sub-period (1880-1914), for instance, democratic practice in private bipartite councils in industry or church councils regularly incited discussions about the extension of franchise in (local) parliaments.¹⁸ Conversely, the democratic experimentations at intermediate levels, particularly during the inter-war years, were also regarded as subversive to accepted – yet contested – institutions of electoral-representative democracy. As such, intermediate institutions are not only sites of contestation, concertation, equilibrium-finding or conflict, but are in essence objects of and subject to ongoing contestations about the

¹⁷ See for instance: Ira Katznelson Barry R. Weingast ed., *Preferences and situations : points of intersection between historical and rational choice institutionalism* (New York 2005); Paul Pierson, *Politics in time : history, institutions, and social analysis* (New Jersey 2004); James Mahoney Dietrich Rueschemeyer ed., *Comparative historical analysis in the social sciences* (Cambridge 2003).

¹⁸ In Belgium and the Netherlands, some of the private labour councils were the first institutions to grant franchise to women.

organisation of democratic governance, as becomes clear from the parliamentary, intellectual, and public debates surrounding them in the period 1880-1940.¹⁹

Besides their linkage to the theory and practice of parliamentary democracy, intermediate institutions will be interpreted as one of many institutional 'outcomes' – next to for instance state commissions or agencies of state bureaucracy – in the segmentation of the administrative state from the late nineteenth century onwards. Whereas conceptions of intermediate institutions as democratic institutions put emphasis on their representative credentials, the incorporation of intermediate institutions into the machinery of government added to this a technocratic argument. As such, various intermediate institutions were or became hybrid institutions combining elements of expertise and group interest in their composition and function. This arises the question what considerations favoured the establishment of intermediate institutions.

Ultimately, analysis will revolve around four sets of guiding questions which do not all apply entirely to each sub-period. First, matters involving the foundation of extra-parliamentary organs. What underlying motivations and thrusts for erecting ad hoc or permanent intermediate agencies can be noticed among which actors? Which explicit and implicit aims were attached to them? To what extent were these aims considered part of democratic or administrative enhancement? Who were the main initiators and to what conceptual and discursive underpinnings did they adhere?

Second, questions involving the composition of the organs at hand. Who decided upon the constituent members of intermediate organs? What sorts of constituent mechanisms (ministerial appointments or elections for instance) were employed? How were territorial and functional divisions combined? Who or what was entitled to participate in or vote for them? To what extent were considerations of (political) representation – of individuals, organised interests, bureaucrats or external expertise – elaborated upon? And by whom? How and to what purposes were discrepancies between techno-administrative inspirations and participatory, representative convictions addressed in political and public discourse?

Third, issues entailing the tasks, activities, and legal status of intermediate structures. These issues bring to the fore the question about the formal and informal radius of action of extra-parliamentary organs and the way in which this changed over time. What administrative tasks (ranging from noncommittal advice to specific legislation) were assigned to these organs and by whom? How does the legal status of certain intermediate structures, whether

¹⁹ Gerard Alexander, 'Institutions, Path Dependence, and Democratic Consolidation', *Journal of theoretical politics* 13 (2001) 249-270.

recognised or incorporated by the state, or privately founded regulatory bodies, then relate to their respective mandates? Moreover, can one discern transformations of the edifice of intermediate structures from ad hoc to permanent, from private to state-embedded, from custom to law, or from local action to national action?

Fourth, and finally, questions relating to the legitimisation and the situation of extra-parliamentary organs will be addressed. How was the expanding edifice of intermediate bodies reflected upon in political and public debate? What rhetoric and argumentations were used about the establishment, expansions, or abolishment of these organs in parliamentary or governmental debate? To what extent were extra-parliamentary agencies equated or perceived anomalous to peer-institutions or even (local) parliament? Were intermediate structures conceived of as either supportive or subversive to parliamentary democracy in this respect? How did references to particular historical precedents or foreign examples (also from authoritarian regimes) of intermediate structures rendered proof of democratic enhancement or decay?

By addressing these issues I hope to re-orient the historiography of democracy and government in the Netherlands, by focusing on democratic and administrative forms in intermediate institutions outside the established institutions of parliamentary democracy or government, and to connect this alternative history to a European-wide debate on the development of these alternatives.

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