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Bas Denters^a & Pieter-Jan Klok^a

^a Institute for Innovation and Governance Studies ,
University of Twente , Enschede , The Netherlands

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Citizen Democracy and the Responsiveness of Councillors: The Effects of Democratic Institutionalisation on the Role Orientations and Role Behaviour of Councillors

BAS DENTERS & PIETER-JAN KLOK

Institute for Innovation and Governance Studies, University of Twente, Enschede, The Netherlands

ABSTRACT *In this article the old question: ‘Do institutions matter?’ is answered for institutions that define democratic systems as more citizen-oriented as opposed to systems where political parties play a more important role. The focus is on the possible influence of these institutions on the orientations of local councillors regarding their representative role and on their subsequent role behaviour. It is hypothesised that the influence of citizen democratic institutions runs through the political culture amongst councillors and affects their individual support for participatory governance. With regard to the role orientations of councillors, it was found that there was only a very weak, indirect effect of institutions on how councillors valued responsiveness. This indirect effect runs through the individual and collective value orientations of councillors. First, institutional variations go hand in hand with variations in the collective and individual support of council members for participatory governance. There is a tendency for councillors in citizen democratic systems of local government to be (both individually and collectively) more supportive of the idea of democracy as a system of participatory governance than their colleagues in party democratic systems. Second, these individual and collective value orientations in turn have a positive effect on the value that councillors put on responsiveness. With regard to behavioural responsiveness, we found that the weak, indirect institutional effect of this on role orientations did not have a behavioural effect. Quite the contrary, it was found that there was a negative effect of citizen democratic institutions on behavioural responsiveness. We found that*

Correspondence Address: Professor Bas Denters, Department of Public Administration, University of Twente, P.O. Box 217, 7500 AE Enschede, The Netherlands.

E-mail: s.a.h.denters@utwente.nl

the stronger the citizen democratic institutions in local government, the less councillors maintained contact with citizens and local groups.

KEY WORDS: Citizen democracy, participatory governance, responsiveness, councillor roles, institutional effects, political representation

1. Introduction and research question

In the last two decades the nature of democracy in Europe has changed considerably. In response to processes of social and individual modernisation, and the demise of communist regimes in Eastern Europe, democratic reforms have been implemented in many countries (see e.g. Cain *et al.* 2003). Fuchs and Klingemann (1995, pp. 435–438) have characterised these changes as a transformation of representative democracy. A system that reserved a very strong role for political parties and primarily relied on a limited form of citizen participation (voting in periodic elections) was transformed into a system based on less restrictive democratic practices (Fuchs and Klingemann 1995, pp. 435–436). Similar changes took place at the local level (see Kersting and Vetter 2003, Denters and Rose 2005). German local government provides a good example. Vetter (2009) has characterised the democratic reforms in German local government as a change from party-democracy to citizen-democracy. In Vetter's conceptualisation **local party democratic systems** are characterised by a strong institutional position for political parties in a representative system. Characteristic institutional features of such systems are:

- an indirectly elected or appointed (rather than a directly elected) mayor
- the absence of provision for citizen-initiated binding local referendums
- an electoral system that strengthens the position of parties (proportional representation, closed lists)
- weakness amongst local groups, small parties and independent candidates (that pose no threats to the dominance of national parties).

Local citizen democratic systems, on the other hand, are characterised by a weak institutional position for political parties in the representative system. The institutional structure of such systems provides for:

- mayors who are directly elected by citizens
- citizen-initiated binding local referendums
- an electoral system that weakens the position of parties (first-past-the-post, majority or plurality systems)
- strong local groups, small parties and independent candidates that challenge the domination of national parties.

Vetter's distinction between the two system types is useful beyond the German case. It can also be used to characterize the institutional make-up of

local democracy in other countries. Kersting and Vetter (2003, p. 340) have observed that “the implementation of more direct means of participation appears to be spread across Europe rather unsystematically”. In Switzerland, for example, they observe that key elements of citizen-democracy have been a traditional feature of local government. Other systems – like most of the Austrian *Länder*, Italy and Poland – have, like Germany, implemented more or less radical citizen democratic reforms. Other countries, mostly in Northern Europe (the United Kingdom, the Scandinavian countries and the Netherlands) have been more restrained in adopting direct democratic reforms. In these countries small-scale experiments with citizen-democratic reforms have been implemented, but so far no major system-wide citizen-democratic reforms have been implemented. Finally, there are also a number of countries, mostly Southern European ones (Greece, Spain and France), where citizen-democratic reforms have been of minor importance (Kersting and Vetter 2003, pp. 340–341).

Fuchs and Klingemann (1995, p. 437) have claimed that recent democratic transformations in Europe have “produced greater responsiveness on the part of the major political actors towards the demands of citizens”. Likewise, democratic reformers have claimed that institutional reforms will improve the quality of relations between political representatives and citizens. Vetter, for example, set the radical local government reforms in Germany against the background of a “political malaise” at the beginning of the 1990s: In this situation, she claims, “giving citizens more say in politics by directly electing their mayors and allowing for local referendums promised to adjust for democratic failure” (2009, p. 132). Likewise, in the UK, proponents of direct mayoral elections and other ways of strengthening executive leadership have claimed that such reforms would allow non-executive councillors to spend less time in council meetings and would allow them to better represent “their constituents’ aspirations, concerns and grievances” (Rao 2005, p. 48), thus increasing their democratic responsiveness. Recent Dutch council reforms were based on rather similar expectations about the effects of reforms on the responsiveness of councillors (De Groot *et al.* 2010).

In this research we explore whether differences in the design of local government institutions do indeed matter for the quality of democracy. This is a key question of what some have called “empirical institutionalism” (Peters 1999, pp. 78–96) and others “constitutional institutionalism” (Berg and Rao 2005, p. 1): Do institutions matter? And, more concretely, what are the consequences of local government structures for the realisation of key political values like democratic responsiveness (cf. Wolman 1995, p. 135)? The main question in this article is, therefore, *whether and how cross-national variations in the institutions of local democracy affect the responsiveness (in both their role orientations and their role behaviour) of councillors*. In answering this question we will focus on the effects of variations in the degree to which the local system is party-democratic or citizen-democratic.

Answering such questions is not merely of academic interest. Democratic reformers in countries like the UK and the Netherlands have held high hopes regarding the benign effects of institutional reforms. Although caution is due, results from cross-sectional analyses about the effects of institutional variations can provide an evidence base for drawing dynamic inferences about the effects of institutional change over time (Berry 1993, pp. 22–24). In the absence of possibilities for genuine experimentation, cross-national research on the effects of institutional variations may therefore be highly relevant (see Denters and Mossberger 2006). In this article we use data from 17 European countries to explore the possible consequences of variations in the institutional make-up of local governments on the role orientations and behaviours of local councillors, and more specifically on their responsiveness.

2. Theory

2.1. *Democratic institutions and responsiveness*

Differences in local democratic institutions have important implications for the position of the councillor vis-à-vis citizens. In the ideal type of the party democratic model, the individual representative is subordinate to a political party. In this model of political representation, the party serves as the main link between citizens and (local) government. Parties offer citizens – in their capacity as voters – a choice between “different bundles of issues and solutions” (Klingemann *et al.* 1994, p. 8, also see Judge 1999, pp. 70–96) for key political problems. Moreover, once the electoral choice has been made, parties “assume their roles as operators of government (and opposition)” in order to “ensure binding decisions and allocations of appropriate resources”. In this way party democratic procedures will “yield a democratic product” in the form of congruence between public demands and the “policy products” that are generated in the political process (Klingemann *et al.*, 1994, p. 8, also see Judge 1999, pp. 70–96).

On the other hand, in the ideal type of citizen democratic system, the position of parties in the system of political representation is far less prominent, and the system offers citizens a relatively wide range of options for direct participation. In such a system the political party may no longer be the single most important point of reference for councillors, and the indirect links of the representative via the party are supplemented or even replaced by more direct links to local citizens and community organisations. A directly elected mayor is, for example, a highly visible person with an individual base of democratic legitimacy who has a strong position in relation to his party (see e.g. Stoker and Wolman 1992, p. 255). Likewise, in candidate-based electoral systems there “appears to be more emphasis on grass-root links”, whereas in party-based electoral systems there is a tendency towards “tighter controls imposed [by the party] on branches and

members” and an electoral mandate for the councillor which tends to be party-based rather than personal (Farrell 2001, pp. 170–171).

It might be expected that such structural differences will be reflected in differences in the role definitions and frames of reference of councillors in different countries. In a citizen democratic system it is more likely that citizens will vote for a person rather than for a party (and its platform). As Manin argues, this is likely to affect the nature of political representation, by increasing the importance of a personal relationship between representatives and the represented based on the citizens’ trust in “their personal qualities and aptitude for making good decisions” (Manin 1997, p. 221, see also Farrell 2001, pp. 170–171). This raises questions about the role of the representative in relation to the represented. Should the councillor take the role of a delegate with an imperative mandate from his constituents? Or, should he/she rather take the role of a trustee who enjoys partial autonomy to do what he considers best for his constituents? This debate is known as the Mandate-Independence Controversy (Pitkin 1967, pp. 144–167, Judge 1999, pp. 47–69). In the context of this debate, Pitkin has developed her concept of **responsiveness**. This view implies that the essence of representing “consists in promoting the interest of the represented” (Pitkin 1967, p. 155). In order to be able to do so the representative should be well-informed about the needs and preferences of his constituents and accessible to communicate with them. Responsiveness, however, does not necessarily imply that the representative should constantly “actually and literally act[s] in response to the principal’s wishes” (Pitkin 1967, p. 155). But if, in rare situations, the demands of the represented conflict with the decisions of the representative, the latter owes his constituents “a good explanation of why their wishes are not in accord with their interest” (Pitkin 1967, pp. 209–210). In Pitkin’s procedural conception of responsiveness,¹ councillors should (a) be aware of the concerns of the voters and be willing to express these in the debates of the council and (b) be willing to engage in a public debate in which the councillors explain and justify the council’s political decisions to citizens. It might be expected that in citizen democracies, where there is a relatively direct link between politicians and citizens, the personal priority for establishing responsiveness – in terms of keeping oneself abreast of the opinions and needs of citizens and explaining and justifying political decisions – will be higher than in party democratic systems (where the councillors will be more party-oriented, see again Farrell 2001, pp. 170–171).

2.2. The main causal mechanisms

In this subsection we will discuss the main mechanisms that may theoretically be considered to bring about a link between citizen democratic institutions and councillors’ responsiveness. The basic model outlined in this special issue’s introduction (Heinelt 2012a) is used as our starting point. On the basis of this model, we first expect that variations in institutional

contexts will go hand in hand with differences in the value orientations and behaviours of actors in the affected political arenas. An important factor that links institutions with the main dependent variables is their political culture. This is based on the presumption that democracy “will require more than the formal institutions of democracy”, but also needs a “political culture consistent with it” (Almond and Verba 1989 [1963], p. 3). The term political culture – in Almond and Verba’s understanding – refers to a set of psychological orientations (or a system of beliefs) towards the political system (Almond and Verba 1989 [1963], p. 13). In Almond and Verba’s footsteps, research on political culture in democratic systems has focused on the political belief systems of national mass publics. In this article, however, we will focus on one aspect of the collective belief system of a subgroup of a nation’s political elite, the local councillors. For the purpose of our research, the democratic value orientations in the national community of councillors are particularly interesting.

What do councillors see as the essence of democracy? A major issue here is whether councillors feel that the traditional mechanisms of liberal representative democracy – elections and representation by directly elected councillors – need to be supplemented by direct channels for citizen influence in the form of direct elections of mayors, consultations, referendums, and other modes of participatory governance (see also Heinelt 2012b). Our model hypothesises that (1) the more citizen-democratic the institutions of local government in a country are, the more strongly the political culture amongst councillors will be supportive of participatory governance (the expectations are numbered, and the numbers correspond to the arrows in the causal diagram in Figure 1).² Likewise, (2) the councillor’s individual support for participatory governance is thought to be influenced by the dominant belief on this issue of his colleagues and (3) by the nature of

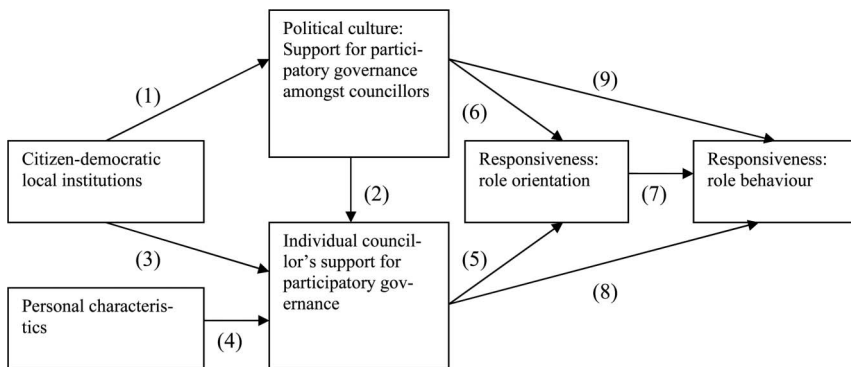


Figure 1. Causal diagram of variables affecting councillor’s responsiveness (orientations and behaviours) and the research hypotheses (numbers correspond to discussion of the hypotheses in the main text).

the democratic institutionalisation. Finally, the basic model defined in the introduction also implies that (4) the individual support for citizen democracy may be affected by the personal characteristics of the councillor.

Subsequently it is assumed that collective and individual democratic values will affect the individual councillor's role conception. In keeping with the arguments presented in the previous subsection we expect that (5) the more an individual councillor is supportive of participatory governance, the more he/she will be convinced that the role of a councillor implies the necessity of frequent interactions with citizens (rather than their party), and will feel the need to explain and justify their political behaviour to the public. Like Fishbein and Ajzen (1980), however, we also expect that such role or behavioural orientations are not only the result of the individual's personal values, but (6) are also affected by the value orientations of his peers. A similar rationale lies at the heart of sociological reference group and role theory (Merton 1957). In this theory, holders of a particular social position (here the position of a councillor) not only define their role in relation to their personal normative beliefs but also refer to the collective beliefs of relevant others (here the collective normative beliefs of councillors about participatory governance). Finally, in keeping with the general logic outlined in the previous subsection, we expect that (7) the role behaviour of councillors is determined by their role orientations: the more councillors value responsiveness the more likely they will be to behave in a responsive manner. Additionally, we also expect that (8) the individual's democratic value orientations and (9) the dominant democratic culture will have an effect on the role behaviour of individual councillors.

What are the implications of this theoretical model for our main question? If we look at figure 1 it is evident that we expect the effect of democratic institutions on responsiveness to be indirect rather than direct. As Kiser and Ostrom (2000, p. 56) have argued, the effects of institutional differences are likely to affect the individual and collective belief systems of the individuals who act in these different institutional environments and these differences in turn are likely to affect these individuals' role orientations and behaviours. Therefore it is our expectation that any effects of the institutional environment will be indirect rather than direct. In Figure 1 this is reflected by the absence of any direct arrows that point from our institutional independent variable to our dependent variables (role orientation and role behaviour).

3. Methods and measurement

This model will guide our empirical analyses. In these analyses we will use data from the MAELG (Municipal Assemblies in European Local Governance) project.³ In order to test our basic model we have used multilevel regression analysis (MLA). This type of regression analysis is indicated because in addition to the many variables in our model pertaining to the individual level of analysis, (for example the two dependent variables: individual councillors'

responsiveness), there are also several variables at the national level of analysis (for example the main explanatory variable: institutionalisation of citizen democracy). In order to obtain adequate estimates of the regressions coefficients and the relevant levels of statistical significance, a multilevel regression analysis rather than the standard ordinary least squares procedure has been employed. We have used the MIXED MODELS module in SPSS release 16.0 to estimate our multilevel regressions.

Before we can start our empirical analyses we first have to develop empirical measures for the key variables in the model.

3.1. Dependent variables: orientations and behaviour towards responsiveness

In our analysis we use two main dependent variables. Both of these relate to the concept of responsiveness. As was argued before, responsiveness pertains to the quality of the communication between councillors and citizens. On the one hand, councillors should be aware of voters' concerns and be willing to express these in council debates. On the other hand, councillors should be willing to engage in a public debate in which the councillors explain and justify the council's political decisions to citizens.

On the level of **role orientations regarding responsiveness** we have operationalised responsiveness by using three survey questions on the importance that councillors attach to the tasks of representing the requests and issues from the local society, publicising the debate on local issues before decisions are taken, and explaining the decisions of the council to citizens. On the basis of these three items an additive index was computed.⁴

The **behavioural responsiveness** was measured using a series of items about the frequency of contacts of councillors with: leading representatives of local voluntary organisations, individual citizens (as part of the role as councillors), and private business representatives. The contacts with individual citizens and representatives of business and voluntary organisations provide councillors with both opportunities to be informed about the concerns within the local community and to explain and justify council decisions. On the basis of these three items an additive index was computed.⁵

3.2. Explanatory variables

The main explanatory variable in this paper is an index measuring the extent to which the institutional setting in a particular country can be characterised as either a party democracy or a citizen democracy. This is done by constructing a composite measure based on the four main characteristics that in Vetter's conceptualisation differentiate between these two institutional regimes:

- direct election of mayor (0 = no, 1 = yes)
- citizen initiated binding referendums (0 = no, 1 = yes)

- electoral system: proportion of councillors elected on the basis of a personal vote (0.00–1.00)
- electoral system: proportion of councillors elected as candidate for a local list or as an independent candidate (0.00–1.00).

More details on the scoring of the four indicators can be found in the appendix. The actual scores for the different indicators and the country scores on the composite measure are presented in Table 1.

On the basis of the results in this table it is clear that the local government systems in Austria, the Netherlands, Norway and Sweden are strongly party democratic. At the other end of the continuum we find the strongly citizen democratic systems of Switzerland, Germany, Italy, Poland and Israel. There may be a variety of reasons for such variations. In part they may be the result of state traditions. Switzerland, for example, has a long tradition of citizen democracy. In several of the other countries currently characterised by strong citizen democratic institutions in local government, this is the result of recent reforms. These reforms occurred after major challenges facing the political system. This is, for example, the case in Germany after unification (Vetter 2009, Gabriel and Eisenmann 2005), Italy after the political crises of the early 1990s (Bobbio 2005), and Poland after the democratic transition (Swianiewicz 2005).

In line with our basic model, the institutional effects are likely to be mediated by the **individual support for participatory governance and the collective support for participatory governance amongst a country’s councillors**

Table 1. Country scores on Citizen Democratic Institutions (high scores = high citizen democracy)

	Mayor	Referendum	Personal Vote	Local parties	Citizen Democratic Institution score*
Sweden	0	0	0.13	0	0.03
Norway	0	0	0.19	0.13	0.08
Austria	0	0	0.24	0.08	0.08
The Netherlands	0	0	0.20	0.27	0.12
England	0	0	1	0.08	0.27
Belgium	0	0.5	0.30	0.29	0.27
Croatia	0	1	0.25*	0.03	0.32
Czech Republic	0	1	0.30	0.22	0.38
Spain	1	0.5	0	0.05	0.39
Greece	1	0	0.30	0.51	0.45
France	1	0	0	0.81	0.45
Germany	1	0.5	0.39	0.15	0.51
Poland (20–)	1	0	0.30	1	0.58
Israel	1	0	n.a.	0.93	0.64
Italy	1	1	0.30	0.35	0.66
Poland (20+)	1	0	1	0.62	0.66
Switzerland	1	1	0.57	0.10	0.67

*For Israel the scale score was computed on the basis of only three indicators.

(political culture). The normative notion of participatory governance implies that the traditional mechanisms of liberal representative democracy – elections and representation by directly elected councillors – should be supplemented by additional more-direct channels for citizen influence in the form of direct elections of mayors, consultations, referendums, and community involvement in public-decision-making (see also Heinelt 2012b). Support for this view on democracy was measured with four questionnaire items:

- ‘Residents should participate actively and directly in making important local decisions’
- ‘Residents should have the opportunity to make their views known before important local decisions are made by elected representatives’
- ‘Political decisions should not only be taken by representative bodies but be negotiated together with the concerned local actors’
- ‘Local referenda lead to high quality of public debate’

For the measurement of the views of individual councillors on this notion of democracy we have computed a composite measure based on these four items.⁶ On the basis of the individual index scores, country averages were computed and these national means were used to characterise the national opinion climate amongst councillors regarding participatory governance.

As Figure 1 indicates, we also expect that personal backgrounds of councillors may be relevant. First, we have included a variable measuring the councillors’ motivation to join politics: councillors that indicate they joined politics in order to do a good job for their party, score high on party motivation and are believed to be more reluctant in their support for participatory governance and less inclined to personal responsiveness towards citizens and citizen groups. Moreover we have also included gender (male = 1, female = 2) and level of education as control variables on the level of individual characteristics, and size of the municipality as a contextual control. Finally we have also controlled for the size of the municipality of the councillor. According to Dahl and Tufte in larger municipalities relations tend to become more impersonal (1973, p. 14) and the likelihood of responsiveness is assumed to be less in larger municipalities (1973, p. 15).⁷

4. Results

4.1. *Support for participatory governance*

Before we will discuss the results for our two main dependent variables we first discuss how citizen democratic institutions affect support for participatory governance. As is evident from Figure 1, the support for this form of governance is thought to be an important intervening variable in our analysis of determinants of councillors’ responsiveness. Therefore it is

necessary to first look at the validity of the hypothesis that pertains to the factors that are supposed to explain this support. In the theoretical model presented in the Figure 1, *collective* support is expected to be higher, the more the local government system is citizen democratic (hypothesis 1). A bivariate regression analysis indicated that this hypothesis is corroborated (standardised regression coefficient $\beta = 0.43$, significance: 0.087, $N = 17$).⁸

Furthermore, the model in Figure 1 also hypothesises that an *individual* councillor's support for participatory governance is dependent on a number of factors. The results of a multilevel regression analysis indicate that an individual's support for participatory governance is not directly affected by citizen democratic institutions (hypothesis 3).⁹ At the same time the prevalence of support amongst fellow councillors does have its expected positive effect on the support of individual councillors for participatory governance (hypothesis 2, β -coefficient = 0.27).¹⁰ In combination the effects of hypotheses 1 and 2 imply that although citizen democratic institutions did not have the expected direct effect on individual support, this institutional factor did have an indirect effect via the collective support factor.¹¹

In addition, only gender had a statistically significant and substantively interesting effect. Female councillors were generally more supportive of participatory governance than their male colleagues.¹² The effects of the other personal characteristics (councillor motivation, education and municipal size) are so small that they can be safely ignored (see footnote 8 for the criteria used).

4.2. Orientations towards responsiveness

In Table 2 the multilevel regression results are shown for responsiveness as a role orientation. It is evident that there are only a few direct effects in the model that are substantively interesting. In the light of our research question

Table 2. Results of multilevel regression analysis of factors affecting councillors' responsiveness orientations (entries in the B columns are standardised regression coefficients). Pooled analysis for all countries. ($N=10855$)

Responsiveness: Role orientations	B	t-value	Significance
Citizen democratic institutions	+0.05	0.65	0.524
Individual support for participatory governance	+0.25	26.82	0.000
Collective support for participatory governance	-0.03	0.47	0.644
Party motivation	+0.12	11.49	0.000
Gender (1 = male, 2 = female)	+0.12	12.97	0.000
Education	+0.05	5.07	0.000
Municipal size	-0.01	0.56	0.559
R ²	0.10	-	0.000

The R² is based on the OLS regression for this model.

it is first important to observe that there is no direct effect of citizen democratic institutions, in keeping with our expectations. Any effect of institutions was expected to run via a number of intermediary factors. We will discuss later whether there is indeed such an indirect effect of the institutional make-up of local democracy. Before we turn to that part of our analysis we first discuss the other potential direct effects in our estimated model.

In Figure 1 we saw that there were two factors that were expected to have a direct effect on the dependent variable. In line with expectations (hypothesis 5) we found that councillors who support participatory governance also value responsiveness highly. This is reflected by a 0.25 beta-coefficient. Unexpectedly (hypothesis 6), however, we did not find a direct effect of the national opinion climate amongst councillors vis-à-vis participatory governance on the dependent variable.¹³

There were also a number of personal background characteristics that might have an effect. Although we expected these characteristics to essentially affect our dependent variables indirectly (as the combined effect of hypotheses 4 and 5) we have also checked for the presence of direct effects.

Unexpectedly we found that councillors who are motivated by the desire to serve their party are not less but more inclined than other councillors to consider openness and responsiveness to be important as part of their job ($\beta = 0.12$). Responsive role orientations were also found to be directly affected by two other individual background characteristics. First, attitudinal responsiveness is more widespread among female councillors than among their male colleagues ($\beta = 0.12$). Second, there is a weak negative effect of education ($\beta = -0.05$), pointing to the tendency for higher educated councillors to attach less value to responsiveness than other councillors. We also find that municipal size does not have a direct effect on councillors' responsiveness. Although it may be more difficult actually to achieve responsiveness in larger municipalities, this does not mean that councillors in larger municipalities consider responsiveness any less important than their colleagues from smaller municipalities.

In the light of our research question it is now time to see whether citizen democratic institutions did have their expected positive indirect effect. Figure 2 demonstrates that there is indeed such an indirect effect.¹⁴ First, the collective support for participatory governance is higher in countries with strongly citizen democratic local institutions (hypothesis 1, β -coefficient = 0.43). Second, in combination with the effect of collective

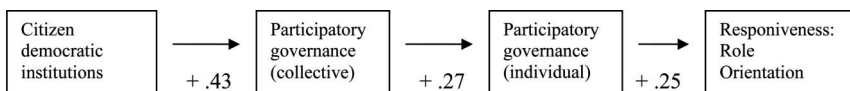


Figure 2. Indirect effect of citizen democratic institutions on individual support for participatory governance and for responsiveness (role orientation).

support on individual support (hypothesis 2, beta-coefficient = 0.27) this establishes an indirect effect of citizen democratic institutions on the individual support for participatory governance. Third, this indirect effect in combination with the direct effect of individual support on responsiveness (hypothesis 5, beta-coefficient = 0.25, see Table 2) produces an indirect path that links citizen democratic institutions with responsiveness. Although each of the links in the chain that leads to this indirect is relatively strong in its own right, the combined effect is only weak.¹⁵

4.2. Behavioural responsiveness

In Table 3 findings are reported for our second dependent variable. In the light of our research question it is important first to observe that, contrary to what we expected, there is a direct effect of citizen democratic institutions on behavioural responsiveness. Theoretically we expected that any effect of institutions would run through a number of intermediary factors. But contrary to our expectations and in contrast to the results for orientations towards responsiveness, we find a statistically significant direct institutional effect (beta-coefficient = -0.16, significance = 0.092). Moreover, this effect is also negative. This negative effect is unexpected because the theoretical presumption was that an effect of citizen democratic institutions would be positive (underlining the importance of being responsive to citizens and citizens groups) rather than negative. But instead we find that the stronger citizen democratic institutions are, the less councillors maintain contacts with citizens and local groups. In the concluding section we will discuss and interpret this surprising result. But before we can do this we should have a broader picture of the results reported in Table 3.

A second important conclusion is that, in line with our expectations, it was found that the degree to which a councillor values responsiveness has a significant positive effect on behavioural responsiveness (hypothesis 7, beta-coefficient = 0.16, significance = 0.000).

Table 3. Results of regression analysis of factors affecting councillors' behavioural responsiveness (entries in the B columns are standardised regression coefficients). Pooled analysis for all countries. (N = 10855)

Responsiveness: role behaviours	B	t-value	Significance
Citizen democratic institutions	-0.16	1.79	0.092
Collective support participatory governance	+0.11	1.50	0.152
Municipal size	+0.09	9.30	0.000
Orientation towards responsiveness	+0.16	17.54	0.000
Individual support participatory governance	+0.02	2.18	0.030
Party motivation	+0.06	5.78	0.000
Gender	-0.09	10.17	0.000
Education	+0.01	0.62	0.536
R ²	0.13	-	0.00

The R² is based on the OLS regression for this model.

This positive direct effect, in combination with the previously discussed positive indirect effect of citizen democratic institutions on attitudinal responsiveness (see Figure 2), counteracts the negative direct effect of citizen democratic institutions. But because the initial positive indirect effect was already weak and because the attitudinal effect on behavioural responsiveness was also rather weak, the produced indirect effect is inappreciable. The negative direct effect therefore comfortably outweighs this negligible positive indirect effect.¹⁶

In the context of the theoretical model it is also interesting to see that collective support for participatory governance failed to have its expected (hypothesis 9) statistically significant direct effect on behavioural responsiveness (beta-coefficient = 0.11, significance 0.152).

Besides, Table 3 also shows that behavioural responsiveness is higher in larger municipalities. Although opportunities for (informal) contacting may be better in small places (see Dahl and Tufte 1973), we still find that councillors' contacts are somewhat more extensive in large municipalities (beta-coefficient = 0.09, significance 0.000). This effect probably reflects the high demand for contacts in larger municipalities: the number of citizens and local organisations is larger in big municipalities and it is more difficult for councillors to share this "contact load" because the number of councillors typically does not grow in the same proportion as the population size of a municipality.

Finally, there is also a weak negative gender effect (beta-coefficient = -0.09, significance 0.000). Although earlier we saw that female councillors valued responsiveness higher than their male colleagues, they apparently find it more difficult than men to act accordingly. The other individual level factors do not add much to the explanation.

5. Conclusions

In recent years many European countries have implemented institutional reforms that have radically changed the nature of local democracy. The institutional reforms of local government at the end of the last century in various German *Bundesländer* are exemplary. As we saw in the introduction, Vetter has interpreted these institutional changes as a shift from party democracy towards citizen democracy. A citizen democratic system is characterised by a directly elected mayor, citizen referendums, a high degree of citizen influence councillor selection, and a strong position for independent and local parties.

In the introduction we have seen that both reformers and scholars expect that such reforms are likely to have a major impact on the functioning of (local) democratic systems. It is thought that such reforms have a tendency to weaken the control of traditional political parties and increase the direct influence of citizens on local political decisions and the choice of political officeholders. Moreover, these changes are expected to strengthen the trend

towards a personalisation of (local) politics. Manin (1997), who observes such a trend in Western nations, has argued that this might change the nature of political representation. Whereas in a party democratic system the role of councillors is typically defined in terms of party discipline, party loyalty and an emphasis on the implementation of the party platform, contemporary politics would require a role conception that emphasises the personal responsiveness of representatives to mature citizens.

A rigorous test of the actual impact of such reforms would require a longitudinal study with pre-tests, post-tests and preferably a control group. Of course it would be hard, if not impossible to provide such empirical evidence to establish the effects of institutional reforms. In this context a cross-national study in which we investigate the democratic effects of institutional differences between local governments in different countries is a good alternative. In this paper we have used data from a survey among municipal councillors from sixteen European countries to study the impact of differences in the institutional structures of local democracy on the role orientations and behaviours of councillors: *whether and how cross-national variations in the institutions of local democracy affect the responsiveness (in both their role orientations and role behaviour) of councillors*. In answering this question we focus on the effects of variations in the degree to which the local system is party-democratic or citizen-democratic.

Our main conclusion casts doubt on the expectations of democratic reformers and some academicians who expected that more citizen democratic institutions would lead to improvements in the relations between representatives and the represented, together with an increase in the democratic responsiveness of representatives. The expectation that the introduction of citizen democratic reforms will lead to a metamorphosis of the system of political representation and urge councillors to be more responsive to their constituents (Manin 1997), receives only weak empirical support.

First, with regard to the orientations of councillors towards responsiveness it was found that there was only a very weak indirect effect on how councillors value responsiveness as part of their role as a representative. This indirect effect runs through the individual and collective value orientations of councillors. Institutional variations go hand in hand with variations in the collective and the individual support of council members for participatory governance. There is a tendency that councillors (both individually and collectively) in citizen democratic systems of local government, more than their colleagues in party democratic systems, tend to be more supportive of the idea of democracy as a system of participatory governance where citizens have more direct political influence in addition to the traditional democratic mechanisms of elections and representation. Subsequently, these individual and collective value orientations have a positive effect on the councillors' valuation of responsiveness.

Second, with regard to behavioural responsiveness, we found that this weak indirect institutional effect on role orientations did not have a

noticeable, continued behavioural effect. Quite the contrary, it was found that there was a statistically significant negative effect of citizen democratic institutions on behavioural responsiveness. We found that the stronger citizen democratic institutions in local government were, the less councillors maintain contacts with citizens and local groups. As we have already seen, this is not because councillors in citizen democracies, in comparison with their colleagues in party democratic systems, think that responsiveness is of lesser importance for their role. There is only a small difference here, and that difference points to a (weak) positive rather than a negative effect. The negative effect is therefore difficult to interpret as the result of councillor motivations. An alternative explanation might start at the other end: not by looking at the willingness of councillors to supply opportunities for contacting, but by focusing on the eagerness of citizens to actually use such opportunities. From this angle the relatively lower frequency of community contacts of councillors in citizen democratic local government systems may be the result of the wider availability of alternative, and perhaps more effective, direct opportunities for voicing citizen opinions and needs in such systems. Local political opportunity structures in citizen democracies offer more points of access (especially a directly elected, oftentimes strong mayor) and channels for influencing policies (referendums), and, because of these, citizens may want to make less use of contacts with councillors to influence local political decision-making than in systems where the council and its members are more central. It is not possible to test this alternative interpretation with our current data, which would require an empirical study of the effects of different democratic institutions on citizen contacting based on an international comparative analysis of citizen surveys. Therefore only further research can shed light on the empirical validity of this alternative interpretation.

But all in all we should not forget that both the positive indirect effect on orientations towards responsiveness and the negative direct effect are both relatively weak. This once again underlines the idea that although institutional reforms are often considered as potentially promising instruments for social and political change, we should not take the effectiveness of such reforms for granted (see e.g. Scharpf 1986, March and Olsen 1989). To the extent that cross-sectional research allows for conclusions about the effects of changes over time, our results indicate that the effects of citizen democratic effects on responsiveness are likely to be only minor.

Notes

1. In the political science literature the term responsiveness is sometimes also used to refer to the substantive agreement between citizen preferences and a. the voting behaviour of (factions of) representatives (e.g. Miller and Stokes 1966, Eulau and Karps 1978, Thomassen 1994) or b. the policies adopted (Getter & Shumaker 1977, Jacobs and Shapiro 1994, Page 1994). In this article however, we will focus on the procedural form of responsiveness that has been defined in the work of Pitkin.

2. The causality here is likely to be bidirectional. On the one hand, institutional regimes are likely to impact upon the individual and collective orientations. On the other hand, institutions are also to at least some extent a codification of a politically dominant set of political orientations. The expression “goes hand in hand with” was used to express the likelihood of this two way process of causation.
3. For more details on the data and this project see Heinelt 2012a.
4. Cronbach’s alpha for this three-item scale was 0.65 (based on an average inter-item correlation of 0.39).
5. Cronbach’s alpha for this three item scale was 0.64 (based on an average inter-item correlation of 0.37).
6. Cronbach’s alpha for this four item scale was 0.58 (based on an average inter-item correlation of 0.26).
7. Because our country samples contain relatively small numbers of councillors per municipality we have treated municipal size as an individual level factor (although in a strict sense in the context of MLA regression the municipal level would have to be seen as a third level in addition to the national and the individual level).
8. In this case $N = 17$ because this hypothesis pertains to an effect of a system-level variable. For hypothesis that pertain to such system-level effects we use a rather lenient criterion for statistical significance ($\alpha < 0.05$, one-tailed test), because with such a small N , adopting a more stringent criterion would imply too high a risk of wrongly rejecting the hypothesis (type II error). In the hypotheses that relate to the effects of individual level variables the N is much larger (over 10,000) and even small effects are likely to turn out as statistically significant. Even if we adopt a very strict criterion ($\alpha < 0.001$, two-tailed test) virtually any coefficient is significantly different from 0.00. It is for this reason that we ignore all individual level effect coefficients that have an absolute value less than 0.05 and will only consider individual level factor coefficients over 0.10 as substantively interesting.
9. The relevant standardized regression coefficient $\beta = 0.02$ ($t = 1.68$, $N = 17$) and is not significant at the 0.05 level for a one-tailed test.
10. This regression coefficient ($\beta = 0.27$, $t = 23.91$, $N = 17$) is significant at the 0.05 level for a one-tailed test.
11. The size of this effect is equal to $0.12 = 0.43$ (beta for effect in hypothesis 1) \times 0.27 (beta for effect in hypothesis 2).
12. This regression coefficient $\beta = 0.10$ ($t = 11.05$, $N > 10.000$) and is significant at the 0.000 level for a two-tailed test.
13. This factor, however, does have an indirect effect (as the combined result of the relations specified in hypotheses 2 and 5). See Figure 2.
14. The beta-coefficients in this figure are in part taken from the results presented in Table 2. But the figure also comprises significant coefficients from results of analyses reported in the previous subsection.
15. The size of this indirect effect is equal to $0.03 = 0.43$ (beta for effect in hypothesis 1) \times 0.27 (beta for effect in hypothesis 2) \times 0.25 (beta for effect in hypothesis 5).
16. The size of this indirect effect is equal to $0.005 = 0.43$ (beta for effect in hypothesis 1) \times 0.27 (beta for effect in hypothesis 2) \times 0.25 (beta for effect in hypothesis 5) \times 0.16 (beta for effect in hypothesis 7). As can be seen in Figure 1, there are a number of other indirect links that connect citizen democratic institutions with behavioural responsiveness, but because of the length of the causal chains and the weakness of the effects, the conclusion remains that the indirect effects are inappreciable.

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Appendix: Measuring the institutional variable Citizen Democratic Institutions

Institutional Index	Sources and description
Directly elected mayor (0–1)	<p>The mayors are designated to the directly elected mayor category when they are either directly elected or when they are the official leader of a majority formed after an election, as is the case in France, Spain and Portugal. In UK and Norway in a small number of municipalities there are directly elected mayors. Most municipalities, however, do not have directly elected mayors. Therefore these countries were coded as 0.</p> <p>Based on: Heinelt and Hlepas 2006, Table 3, column 11</p>
Binding referendums (0–1)	<p>Is there a national (in unitary states) or state (in federal states) legislation that provides the right to call a consultative (0.5) or binding referendum (1.0) on a decision made by a local government? If not: score = 0.0</p> <p>Based on: personal communications by MAELG partners</p>
Electoral system: proportion of councillors elected on the basis of a personal vote (0–1)	<p>% of councillors in a country that were elected by preference votes (based on MAELG survey question). In some countries this MAELG question was not included in the survey. This was the case in countries with a closed list system and in countries with a majority or a plurality system. There we have assigned a score based on the following rules:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 0 = if system is based on closed lists allowing no personal voting whatsoever (France, Spain in municipalities > 250 inhabitants). • 1 = if electoral system is based on majority or plurality system (England, Poland in municipalities < 20.000 inhabitants) <p>For countries with an open list system where the question was not asked we have imputed the sample mean 0.3 of the MAELG survey question (Belgium, Greece, Italy, and Poland in municipalities < 20.000 inhabitants). In Croatia $\frac{3}{4}$ of the councillors are elected through a PR System (with closed lists) and $\frac{1}{4}$ through FPTP. Therefore the country score was coded as 0.25</p> <p>The information on local electoral systems was based on Van der Kolk 2007 and for Poland on Dudzinska 2006 as well as on personal communications with national MAELG team members.</p>
Electoral system: proportion of councillors elected as candidate for a local list or as an independent candidate (0–1)	<p>% of councillors in a country elected on a local list or as independent (based on MAELG survey); scores have been transformed to a scale ranging from 0–1 in order to give this indicator the same weight as the other indicators in computing the composite measure.</p>