Digital Democracy: Opportunities and Dilemmas

What could digital citizen involvement mean for the Dutch parliament?

Arthur Edwards and Dennis de Kool

Rathenau Instituut

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Foreword

Dutch citizens want to have a greater say in political decision-making. Next spring is the first time that the Netherlands will hold a national referendum initiated by the citizens themselves. The report *Meer democratie, minder politiek?* [More democracy, less politics?] by the Netherlands Institute for Social Research (SCP) and the 2013 survey of democratic legitimacy in the Netherlands show that Dutch citizens have long wanted to be more directly involved in policymaking and political decision-making.

Research carried out by the Rathenau Institute reveals that ICT can go a long way towards facilitating citizen involvement in the political process. And that means more than collecting enough digital signatures to call a referendum. Open data, social media monitoring, internet polling, e-petitions, Twitter analytics, text voting: there are numerous tools and channels for informing citizens more directly, letting them provide their own input, consulting them, having them share in decision-making, and allowing them oversight. These tools are interesting for national politics because it is difficult to organise face-to-face encounters between the public and politicians at that level.

Other countries have already been experimenting with digital forms of citizen involvement at the national level for quite some time. For example, the UK Parliament organises online consultations with specific groups of citizens. In Austria and Ireland, citizens are selected – by lottery – to provide input for parliamentary committees, and the Finnish Open Ministry crowdsources legislation. In these countries, digital forms of citizen involvement are an explicit part of the conversation about the future of democracy. Recently, the Senate of Belgium met to discuss how future-proof representative democracy is. Said Christine Defraigne, President of the Senate: 'Today, parliaments are seeing new formulas for participation that allow citizens, all citizens, to give more frequent and direct voice to their opinions about the problems affecting the future of society. … This is most definitely about open participation, the participation of the public in the broadest sense of the word, made possible by digital communication tools.'

The Rathenau Institute has asked Arthur Edwards and Dennis de Kool to survey local, national and international examples of digital citizen involvement. The authors have analysed what we know about the effectiveness, representativeness, legitimacy and real or potential effects of these examples on parliament's work. Their study shows that digital tools not only offer opportunities but also create dilemmas, such as those arising from the tension between new forms of citizen involvement and existing political structures. For example, there is tension between the opinions and preferences being articulated ever more forcefully (online) by individuals and groups of citizens and the freedom that politicians need to form their own opinions on political matters.

The Rathenau Institute informs citizens and politicians about science and technology; in the present case, this means the digital tools that support democracy. This study is part of the 'Dilemmas of digital democracy' project. Researchers Iris Korthagen and Ira van Keulen have written an essay about the lack of digital and other forms of citizen involvement at national level (see

www.rathenau.nl). In the months ahead, we will be elaborating on the most important conditions for facilitating different varieties of digital citizen involvement in national politics.

In the meantime, we are publishing this background study and the essay in order to inform the debate about a proposed government committee to review our parliamentary system. Our message is that a productive debate about a future-proof democratic system should go much further than the future of the Dutch Senate. The entire system of parliamentary democracy can benefit from greater citizen involvement using the digital tools that we have available to us.

Dr Melanie Peters
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Contents

1   Introduction

1.1   Background

This report sketches the contours of a parliament that is better equipped to deal with the digital networked society. Political decision-making often takes place within networks of public and private organisations at subnational, national and supranational level. Even in this societal context, the national parliament is an important – if not the most important – guarantee that political decision-making will reflect the people's opinions and wishes, as well as of public accountability and oversight. One prerequisite is that the parliamentary decision-making process should be transparent and freely accessible to the public. Besides considering the relationship between parliament and the government, then, it is important to study the relationship between the work of parliament and the citizenry.

The 2015 report *Meer democratie, minder politiek?* [More democracy, less politics?] by the Netherlands Institute for Social Research (SCP) shows that the majority of Dutch people (more than 70% in the past decade) are satisfied with the way their democracy functions. On the other hand, they place less trust in specific political institutions such as the Government and the House of Representatives. Trust in the House of Representatives has fluctuated between approximately 45 and 60 percent in the past decade. The Dutch are mainly critical of the way in which political decisions are taken. Many people feel that politicians are not really listening to them; they wonder whether politicians even know what their concerns are, and they want to have more influence on policy.

The internet and social media make it possible to ease these worries and to meet citizens' demands on that score. Many trends and initiatives are already moving in that direction. For example, individual citizens, journalists and civil society organisations are using social media to put issues on the political agenda. Digital tools make political decision-making more transparent and inform citizens about the legislative process. Online surveys reveal what is on the public's mind. In addition, the authorities involve citizens in the preparation of bills, such as on the website Internetconsultatie.nl.

The internet and social media offer various options for increasing the visibility, accessibility and accountability of parliament to the public. Those options fall mainly into the categories transparency, communication and knowledge-sharing. We do not belong to the group of the optimists who embrace technology, however. Using new media for digital citizen participation also raises questions and creates dilemmas. How effective, representative and legitimate are digital tools used in this way? And how do they contribute to the quality of parliament's work? How the new media are utilised also depends on the institutions that populate our political system and on the modes of action of politicians, citizens and other parties, i.e. how members of parliament wish to engage with critical citizens and what citizens, journalists and civil society organisations do with the various options. This study is therefore not about digital tools as such; instead, it poses questions about the design and performance of parliamentary democracy in our 'networked society'.

1.2   Purpose of the study

The purpose of this study, which was commissioned by the Rathenau Institute, is to identify digital tools that touch upon the entire spectrum of tasks entrusted to the Dutch House of Representatives, i.e. representation, deliberation, co-lawmaking, and government scrutiny. These tools include relevant practices and experiments initiated by both Dutch and foreign parliaments, politicians and political parties as well as public authorities, citizens and civil society organisations or interest groups. We cover all the various channels of citizen participation available, ranging from information provision, consultation and active engagement to self-organisation.

More specifically, the Rathenau Institute drafted the following research questions:

a)   What was the purpose of utilising the digital tool concerned, and who utilised it?
b)   How does this tool affect the work of individual politicians and of parliament as a whole?
c)   As far as you are aware, what was the reach and effect of the relevant tool and how was this effect measured and established?
d)   Based on these outcomes, what can we say about the relevant tool's anticipated effect on, usefulness for, or contribution to the work of an individual politician or of parliament as a whole?
e)   What questions and dilemmas do these digital tools raise for the work of individual politicians or of parliament as a whole?

It is not the intention of this study to survey new technological applications, but rather to evaluate those tools that are already being utilised in parliamentary democracy and that have become more or less institutionalised.

1.3   Research design

This section describes and explains the research design. It will address three topics: the classification of digital tools into 'families' (1.3.1); the criteria used to evaluate these tools (1.3.2), and the examples (case studies) selected for examination (1.3.3).

1.3.1   Classification of digital tools into 'families'

This report covers a broad spectrum of digital tools. Some are tools that parliamentarians use to communicate with citizens, for example Twitter and online polling by parliamentary committees. Others are tools launched by civil society organisations, for example to inform citizens about what a politician actually does. And then there are tools used by other government bodies that may affect the role of the House of Representatives, for example online public consultations by government ministries.

To categorise these tools properly into 'families', we began by dividing them into groups using the 'ladder of citizenship participation' concept. This is a typology of democratic practices arranged in a ladder pattern, with each rung corresponding to a level of citizen participation. The ladder of participation used here has five rungs: (1) information, (2) consultation, (3) advising, (4) co-production or co-creation, and (5) co-decision-making (Edelenbos & Monnikhof 2001). These categories set the general pattern for the chapters of our study. We have not devoted a separate chapter to co-production and co-creation but discuss them in Chapters 5 and 6 as a specific form of advising whereby citizens and various other stakeholders work together to draft policy.

Within these categories, we then distinguish between 'top-down' and 'bottom-up' tools, i.e. between tools used by politicians or other actors in the domains of politics and public administration to communicate with citizens and tools used by citizens to communicate with them. Chapters 3 and 4, for example, both discuss how the House of Representatives informs citizens, with Chapter 3 covering information provided 'from the top down' and Chapter 4 information that citizens have explicitly asked to receive.

We have chosen to take a differentiated approach in our discussion of 'open data' and 'open spending' because these initiatives can operate on different rungs of the ladder of participation. To begin with, the open data concept can be applied to data that the House itself produces. See Chapter 3 in this regard (Information about parliamentary politics). Second, citizens can use data made freely available by government organisations to set up their own information systems or to support civil society initiatives. This take on open data is discussed in Chapter 8 (Societal self-organisation). Third, citizens can use open data to propose new policy or changes to existing policy (advising). They can also make such proposals to the House. We discuss the opportunities for doing so in Chapter 5 (Consulting and being advised by citizens).

In the end, we categorised the various digital tools (discussed here) into nineteen families. In other words, we did not group the digital tools by the parliamentary tasks that they are capable of supporting. The various types of tools are not sufficiently differentiated for that, since most tools can in fact support different parliamentary tasks. Appendix 2 reviews the families of digital tools discussed and how they are distributed on the ladder of participation.

1.3.2   Evaluation criteria

In consultation with the Rathenau Institute, we formulated four values (i.e. criteria) for this study that can be used to evaluate the digital tools: effectiveness, representativeness, legitimacy, and quality of parliament's work. These criteria are described in more detail in Appendix 1.

Effectiveness
Effectiveness concerns the extent to which the digital tool works as intended. Is it helping to achieve the aim that its initiator had in mind? This criterion is important mainly because it allows us to define the parameters for success, both in the design of the tool itself and in the context in which it is being used.

Representativeness

Representativeness concerns the traits of those citizens who utilise a particular digital tool. Are these citizens (and the opinions they advance) reasonably representative of the general population (and its opinions)?

When the results of citizen participation are evaluated, 'representativeness' is often the defining factor. However, the composition of the group of respondents is by no means always clear. Numerous studies have revealed an overrepresentation of high-educated individuals in citizen participation initiatives (Bovens & Wille 2006). In addition, initiatives that involve using the internet come up against the 'digital divide' problem. Although much of the Dutch population has physical access to the internet, digital skills and actual internet use vary considerably (Van Deursen & Van Dijk 2012).

A fine distinction must nevertheless be made regarding the criterion of representativeness. In some forms of citizen participation, diversity is more important than representativeness. In addition, whether certain opinions are representative depends on the demographic and social traits of the group concerned, such as educational level (NKO 2010). Educational level matters when polling public opinion on certain controversial issues, especially immigration, European integration and crime, but for other issues a 'representative elite' may suffice (Van der Tuuk 1982). There are also different types of citizens or 'citizenship styles' (Spangenberg et al. 2001), each with its own 'taste' or preference for particular forms of participation. That is why when digital and other participation methods are used to address a specific problem, it is important to seek a combination of methods that will appeal to the 'tastes' of different types of citizens (Edwards 2009).

Legitimacy

Legitimacy is about the extent to which citizens accept political decision-making (Bekkers & Edwards 2007). Do digital tools help citizens make a meaningful contribution to the decision-making process, so that it is clear to them what is involved in decision-making and what is being done with the opinions that they have advanced?

Quality of parliament's work

This criterion focuses on what elected representatives actually do. Do digital tools help foster sufficient interaction between parliamentarians and ordinary citizens (on the one hand), and do they allow parliamentarians enough freedom to form their own opinions and make their own political choices (on the other hand)? How do the tasks of representation, deliberation, co-lawmaking and government scrutiny weigh up against one another?

There is a certain amount of tension between the two criteria 'quality of parliament's work' and 'legitimacy'. For example, legitimacy reasonably requires that citizens' input should be distinguishable in the results of decision-making, but it is the responsibility of representatives to select and incorporate that input into their political choices (Van Gunsteren 2006).

1.3.3   Data collection and case study selection

This report surveys what we know about digital tools while focusing on the relationship between parliament and citizens. Much of this report is based on documents covering e-democracy initiatives and academic publications. We have also conducted a series of interviews to improve our knowledge of specific tools (see Appendix 3).

For most of the families of tools, we discuss examples used in the Netherlands and compare them to their counterparts abroad. Our main criterion when selecting our case studies was that they should be illustrative of the opportunities and dilemmas typically associated with the relevant family of tools. Our secondary criterion was that the case study must have been the subject of research, or in any event an internal or other evaluation. Consequently, this study does not cover tools that are still in their infancy but may well prove interesting in future.

The examples cited from abroad may be regarded as best practices. However, considering how different the United Kingdom, Germany and the Netherlands are in terms of size and political systems, it was no easy matter to compare British and German examples with Dutch ones. Nevertheless, these examples are useful because they help us understand the relevant dimensions of the tools and how we can go about designing them in practical terms.

1.4   Reader's guide

Chapters 2 to 9 consider nineteen families of tools and discuss various case studies. The research questions are addressed in different sections (Description, Evaluation, Dilemmas and Opportunities).

The Description section considers the following questions:
-      What was the purpose of utilising the digital tool and who utilised it?
-      How does this tool touch on the work of parliament as a whole?

The Evaluation section looks at the following questions:
-      What can we say about (1) the extent to which the aims of the tool have been achieved, (2) the reach of the tool among citizens, (3) the tool's contribution to legitimising political decision-making, and (4) the tool's contribution to the quality of parliament's work?

The section entitled Dilemmas and Opportunities concludes the discussion of the entire family of tools. Our discussions of specific case studies almost always include the Description and Evaluation sections as well. The Dilemmas and Opportunities section addresses the following question:
-      What questions, dilemmas and challenges do these tools raise for the work of parliament as a whole?

Appendix 4 provides definitions for the main terms used in this report.

2 Internet and social media use by politicians

This chapter describes a number of digital tools that politicians use to continuously inform citizens of their views, i.e. the 'permanent campaign'. Section 1 explains how new media are used in election campaigns, while Section 2 describes how representatives post on social media. Section 3 tells us how representatives monitor what citizens have to say on social media.

The discussion in this chapter is limited to a few families of tools without going into specific case studies. The text does, however, occasionally refer to a specific case, for example Barrack Obama's election campaigns. The main purpose of this chapter is to describe the changing landscape in which representative democracy operates through the agency of emerging digital tools.

2.1 Use of new media in election campaigns

Description

The internet and social media offer an array of tools that can be used in election campaigns. Two campaign strategies have had an especially big impact on representative democracy: political marketing and narrowcasting.

In political marketing, political parties behave as if they were businesses marketing themselves to a public of self-aware consumers (Bowers-Brown 2003). The party strategically aligns its political programme and the personality and performance of its leader with the preferences of voters to whom it wishes to appeal. The task of a 'political entrepreneur' is to draw attention to the issues and views that match the opinions and preferences of the voters that he or she wishes to reach. In 2001-2002, for example, Dutch politician Pim Fortuyn marketed his party, Lijst Pim Fortuyn (LPF), to a segment of the populace that had been ignored by the established, middle-of-the-road parties – a potentially significant body of voters (Pellikaan, Van der Meer & De Lange 2003). For the first time in their lives, many voters felt that someone was listening to them. Although traditional ideological positioning remains important to established parties because it provides a framework for voter orientation, 'branding' the overall 'product' now takes precedence.

The internet and social media offer outstanding opportunities to support political marketing. First of all, political parties can use new media to disseminate news and reports themselves, bypassing the traditional intermediaries, especially journalists. It should be noted, however, that a combination of social and traditional media can be highly effective because, by selecting and magnifying issues, the mass media has the power to attract a huge audience.

Second, the interactive capabilities of new media are another way to support political marketing. This mainly involves human-machine interaction. The channel or method used can let voters decide

which information they do or do not want to receive, for example by having them identify specific areas of interest. Other examples of human-machine interaction include making a donation and registering as a volunteer. Digital technology also enables political parties to store vast quantities of data on voters, including data 'diverted' from human-machine interactions or from other databases. Research has shown, however, that political parties make little use of new media channels for human-to-human interaction during election campaigns, for example chat sessions or a forum on the party website (Stromer-Galley 2000; Russmann 2011).

Narrowcasting involves formulating specific messages tailored to a particular target group. New media offer many different ways of doing this, mainly by using social networks and targeted email campaigns to reach 'micro-groups'. Narrowcasting offers political parties electoral opportunities, provided that there is a central coordination point that monitors the consistency of the messages. The 2008 Obama campaign was a huge success precisely because it combined narrowcasting with centralised coordination (Towner & Dulio 2012).

Political marketing and narrowcasting touch on the work of parliament because they help define the context in which parliamentary democracy operates. They turn public opinion into a compass with which representatives align the exercise of their mandate. This means that the nature of political representation is changing from a contractual relationship between electorate and elected to a relationship in a permanent state of flux, with politicians constantly being challenged to determine their position vis-à-vis public opinion. The traditional and new media are reinforcing this tendency and facilitating the strategic behaviour among politicians to which it is giving rise (Coleman & Spiller 2003).

Evaluation
Effectiveness
What do we know about the effects of political marketing, especially narrowcasting? Does it lead to political gains? The online strategies employed by the Obama campaigns were successful, although some observers questioned whether they actually made a difference in Obama's election/re-election (Towner & Dulio 2012). Circumstances in Europe appear to be less conducive to effective narrowcasting than in the United States. Party discipline is weaker in the United States than in Europe, leaving more scope for differentiated messages. It is riskier to disseminate isolated electoral messages in Europe than in the United States (Ward, Gibson & Nixon 2003; Cardenal 2011).

Studies carried out in Norway, Germany and Austria show that political parties still make little use of online opportunities to connect with specific groups such as young people, the elderly, women and minorities. This is in part because party strategists are unsure about the effects of narrowcasting (Karlsen 2011; Russmann 2011).

Representativeness
How is the availability of new media during election campaigns influencing political participation? Are the new media making participation more representative, or less? Or is their influence negligible? The many studies that have examined this question differ in their conclusions. The

dispute between the optimists, who believe that the new media have the potential to increase political engagement, and the pessimists, who believe that the new media are only aggravating existing inequalities, has not been settled yet. That is partly because of the way the relevant researchers define the term 'political'. Those who restrict their definition to institutional politics may very well be underestimating the level of political engagement. Another potentially misleading factor is the distinction often made in this dispute between 'information provision' and 'entertainment', the implication being that because lower-educated individuals tend to seek entertainment, they are less likely to come across political information. However, people who seek out environments for entertainment and to indulge their interests may also come into contact with 'politics' (Graham & Hajru 2011), and when it comes to elections, there is no saying how technology can help political parties get out the vote.

Legitimacy
Do political marketing and narrowcasting allow citizens to provide meaningful input for decision-making? The example of Pim Fortuyn shows that political marketing can improve the responsiveness of the political system. In the Dutch system of proportional representation, it is relatively easy for new parties to enter parliament. That low electoral threshold allowed Fortuyn's party, the LPF, to storm the Dutch party landscape, and empowered his voters to influence the parliamentary agenda. Political marketing can also have a negative impact on the quality of participation, however. The risk is that parties will approach voters as if they were consumers whose preferences are not open to discussion. Political marketing thus implies an interpretation of democracy in which such preferences are disconnected from the public conversation that exposes opinions and arguments to critical examination. We could explore whether things actually do work this way, for example by looking at how the media reports on and shapes public opinion about such controversial topics as immigration.

Quality of parliament's work
What are the implications of political marketing and narrowcasting for the quality of parliament's work? Because public opinion acts as a compass with which politicians align the exercise of their mandate, these two methods do little to encourage citizens and politicians to interact and confront each other's opinions. Moreover, the interactive tools that can provide a platform for this are precisely the new media that politicians use only sparingly. Political marketing also tends to reward politicians who are skilled campaigners, perhaps overshadowing their professional reputation as representatives who have to make responsive decisions more or less autonomously and negotiate compromises.

Dilemmas and Opportunities
Political marketing can enhance the responsiveness of the political system. The biggest dilemma is that between following the dictates of public opinion and showing political leadership by pointing the way towards solutions that have so far failed to convince the majority of voters. In narrowcasting, the dilemma is specific profiling by target group versus the party programme as an expression of its vision of the collective good. Political marketing and narrowcasting encourage a relationship between politicians and citizens that resembles that between 'producers' and 'consumers'. This in turn affects the way representatives perform. The mandate model, in which voters give their

representatives a mandate to pursue their vision of the collective good as autonomous actors (but within certain prescribed limits) is being edged out by the delegate model, in which representatives try to meet to their constituents' specific demands (Pitkin 1967).

2.2   Posts by representatives on social media

Politicians use social media to involve and inform citizens of their political views. This section mainly describes how members of parliament (MPs) use Twitter.

Description

More than ninety percent of all Dutch MPs are active on Twitter. They tweet mainly to update the public on recent political matters, comment on these matters, and describe their own actions concerning the same. They write about topical issues, partly with a view to drawing media attention to themselves (Aalberts & Kreijveld 2011, p. 69). When it comes to following others on Twitter, they mainly favour other MPs, journalists (for news items), and experts. Although 44 percent of MPs say they 'find it important to engage in dialogue with citizens', less than one percent actually follows ordinary citizens (Weber Shandwick 2014, p. 17).[1] For the most part, they pay lip service to the claim that they are interested in dialogue with citizens.[2]

International research confirms this evident lack of interaction (see e.g. Leston-Bandeira & Bender 2013). In a study of Twitter use by British MPs, 'impression management' emerged as their main motivation (Jackson & Lilleker 2011). Another study examining social media use by members of Germany's Bundestag and its state parliaments found that there are three types of users (MCM 2013) when it comes to outgoing tweets or posts. The biggest group are the 'high-profilers' (62%), who mainly belong to political parties CDU, SPD and FDP. Their main motivation is to draw attention to themselves (*Eigenwerbung*). They focus on voters, friends in their own party, and the general public. Their tweets and posts consist of comments and reports on their own activities. Almost without exception, they confine themselves to outgoing messages. The second type consists of 'enthusiasts' (24%). They are broadly motivated, for example because they simply enjoy being on social media. They too focus on voters, friends in their own party, and the general public. This group also makes interactive use of social media, for example asking their network to respond to questions. The latter is reminiscent of what Jackson (2008) occasionally saw British MPs doing with their blogs, i.e. using their network as a personal debate platform or sounding board to try out certain ideas. In Germany, this type of user can mainly be found in The Left and CSU political parties. The smallest group are the 'sceptics' (14%), most of whom are members of The Greens and The Left parties. They are not very motivated to use social media and tend to concentrate on friends (in the party) and family members with personal posts or tweets and responses to others.

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[1] http://twittermania.nl/2013/04/twitteren-in-de-tweede-kamer-wie-doet-het-met-wie/
  accessed 12 February 2014
[2] There are exceptions, such as Labour Party leader Diederik Samsom's tweets in November 2012, when there was a great deal of uproar about the Cabinet's plans for health care insurance premiums:
http://www.volkskrant.nl/dossier-kabinetsformatie/diederiksamsom-twittert-zich-suf-over-zorgpremie~a3341510/
See also: http://twittermania.nl/2012/11/pvda-fractieleider-diederiksamsom-doet-de-webcare-erbij/

The few public surveys that have been carried out in the Netherlands reveal that only a tiny minority of the Dutch population uses social media for political purposes. Kruikemeier et al. (2014) found that during the 2010 and 2012 elections, six percent and seven percent of the public respectively followed political posts on social media. An even smaller number of voters (2% and 4% respectively) were active themselves. A study by Aalbers & Kreijveld (2011) of citizens who follow politicians on social media revealed that, in general, they were (apparently) uninterested in interaction. They had begun following certain politicians out of curiosity or interest, but that interest often declined after a while.

Evaluation

Effectiveness
Very little is known about the effectiveness of parliamentarians' activities on Twitter. Researching this would require an in-depth survey of citizens who follow politicians. Part of the effectiveness question overlaps with the question of 'quality of parliament's work' because politicians also use Twitter as an internal political antenna.

Representativeness
The people who use social media for political purposes are not a cross-section of the population. Kruikemeier et al. (2014) found that people interested in politics and higher-educated individuals are especially overrepresented in this group. They correctly comment that this does not put other groups of voters beyond reach, however: 'Journalists keep a close eye on the online activities of political parties and politicians. When they start reporting on these online activities, then they have served their purpose' (p. 120).

Legitimacy
The fact that MPs make almost no use of social media to interact with the public does not bode well for the criterion of legitimacy, for example openness to input by citizens and letting them influence the political agenda (Leyenaar, Van Wijngaarden & Franje 2012; ROB 2012). Nevertheless, social media (Twitter) use could contribute to transparency and accountability. The questions that can be raised in this connection are: do MPs give their followers a realistic picture of what they do, and how do they deal with the expectations that citizens have of them?

Quality of parliament's work
Posting and following posts on social media appears to make only a modest contribution to the quality of parliament's work. In a study carried out by Weber Shandwick, between 50 and 60 percent of the MPs who use Twitter daily indicated that they did so when preparing a political debate, when raising questions in the House, or when submitting a motion. Advantages for the MPs are that they have quick access to news and are able to gauge how other MPs are responding to recent events. There is little, if any, interaction between voters and MPs.

Dilemmas and Opportunities

The most important dilemma with regard to social media use is between the type of use and what can actually be achieved with it. Politicians are often advised to use social media interactively (ROB 2012). But the question is: with whom, and to what purpose? The most important opportunity lies in the specific type of interaction chosen. MPs can create a network that serves as a personal platform for debating and trying out their ideas. This corresponds to what Aalberts & Kreijveld (2011) have recommended: work on a personal profile that concentrates on specific target groups and issues.

2.3   Parliament monitoring social media

Description

Since the rise of social media, ministries, administrative agencies, and, more recently, politicians have found it necessary to continuously monitor the information and posts being shared. This is known as social media monitoring or social media analytics (Bekkers, Edwards & De Kool 2013; Stieglitz & Dang-Xuan 2013). There are different reasons to engage in social media monitoring. Important ones include picking up on relevant rumblings in society in order to avoid strategic surprises, and gauging an organisation's reputation.

We still know very little about the use of social media monitoring by parliaments. Research on social media use by the members of Germany's Bundestag (MCM 2013) has shown that 53 percent check conversations and trends on social media several times a day, while 16 percent do so weekly.

In November 2014, the European Parliament invited tenders for a monitoring tool. In its description of what the EP envisaged, the tender document offers a good impression of what such tools are capable of doing:[3]

> *The EP is continuously looking for an increasingly better understanding of the public debate, among other things to provide feedback on policies and media relations. Additionally, it is important that the EP is able to measure its performance of social media activities and that a clear picture of relevant online stakeholders and multipliers is provided, to make communication efforts more effective.*
>
> *For this end, the EP seeks a (or a combination of) cost-efficient, Web-based social and online media monitoring and publishing tool(s) (hereafter called 'tool') that can be used to track, archive and analyse online and social media posts and conversation in all official EU languages. A specific focus should lay on measuring the various social media accounts run by EP staff. The tool should help in presenting information with attractive and easy-to-understand visuals that accurately guide analysis on the topics identified. It should also serve as a one-stop shop for spreading content on various social media platforms.*

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[3] http://ted.europa.eu/udl?uri=TED:NOTICE:393347-2014:TEXT:EN:HTML

One of the interesting points about the above is the desire to identify online stakeholders and multipliers. This makes it possible to analyse a *retweet network* using certain keywords (for an example, see Stieglitz & Dang-Xuan 2013, p. 1289). The EP's intention sparked criticism by UK newspaper *The Telegraph*. The newspaper quoted a confidential document allegedly saying that the tool was mainly meant to understand 'trending topics' and to join in and influence the conversation, for example, by providing facts and figures to 'deconstruct myths', especially in countries that have experienced a surge in Euroscepticism.[4]

The Dutch House of Representatives' Information Services Department (DIV) launched a pilot in early 2013 with Coosto, a digital tool that monitors posts and conversations on social media. The reason behind this exploratory pilot is the observation that social media can be an important additional source of information for members of parliament. The pilot should make the available options clear and bring the department up to speed with social media monitoring. The DIV confines itself to monitoring factual data and does not interpret the information that it gathers; that is the task of members of parliament.

The DIV is aware that MPs and parliamentary parties monitor social media themselves, but it is unclear how they do so and how MPs perhaps use the data collected to inform their views. When we surveyed a number of parliamentary parties, we found that they do indeed make use of social media analytics. It is not, by definition, the parliamentary groups themselves that engage in monitoring; party headquarters may also do so.

Evaluation

Effectiveness

MPs monitor social media as a source of additional information so that they can gauge public sentiment or take stock of the arguments being advanced. At the moment, it is difficult to ascertain how effective their monitoring is, partly because we have no House-wide survey of these practices. For now, the focus is on experimentation and gaining experience.

Representativeness

There are two reasons to question the representativeness of the opinions shared on social media. The first is that those who use social media for political communication are not a cross-section of the Dutch population. High-educated individuals or people with an interest in politics are overrepresented. The second reason is that the sentiments being expressed are not a reliable reflection of public opinion. At best, then, social media monitoring can only serve as an additional tool for gauging public opinion.

Legitimacy

Social media monitoring can make a contribution – albeit a modest one – to legitimacy. When such monitoring brings 'trending topics' to the attention of representatives, it can help set the agenda.

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[4] http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/europe/eu/9845442/EU-to-set-up-euro-election-troll-patrol-to-tackle-Eurosceptic-surge.html

Indirectly, social media monitoring can even boost citizen participation (and the quality of that participation). That depends, however, on MPs sharing the insights gained in this manner in their communication with citizens. Known as 'webcare', this method is used by commercial enterprises to exercise online damage control and for other reasons (Van Noort Willemsen 2011). An example from politics is PvdA/Labour Party leader Diederik Samsom's 2012 webcare efforts concerning health care insurance premiums (see footnote 2). Such monitoring will also be conducive to responsiveness. However, MPs must be well aware of the potential risk of using monitoring and webcare to enter social networks that the members consider their private domain.

Quality of parliament's work
As indicated above, we still know little about the extent to which tweets and posts on social media influence where MPs stand on the issues.

Dilemmas and Opportunities
Social media monitoring can pose various dilemmas for MPs. The first is the quality of the data versus its intended added value. Communication on social media is ephemeral; people respond to each other in real time. Those responses are also not representative of public opinion. The question, then, is how much significance MPs should ascribe to this data. The risk is that they will allow themselves to be swayed by the issues of the day.

The second dilemma concerns the relationship between the volume of data and its information value. How should MPs deal with the vast amounts of data that might surface? How can they filter the accumulated indicators (perhaps with the help of software) and how can they avoid information overload? Nevertheless, as an additional tool social media monitoring does make certain things possible, for example tracking emerging issues and common arguments, and managing the reputations of parliamentary parties.

3   Information provision about parliamentary politics

The previous chapter described the digital tools that politicians use to tell voters about their political views and activities as part of their 'permanent campaign'. This chapter concerns information furnished to citizens about the workings of parliamentary democracy in general and about the parliament in particular. It covers three types of information: voting advice applications that let voters know which views political parties hold on issues and that help them make informed choices (3.1), parliamentary information made publicly available on the House of Representatives' website, (3.2) and information passed on by third parties ('parliamentary monitoring organisations') about what parliamentarians actually do (3.3).

3.1   Voting advice applications

Description

The Dutch electoral system of proportional representation is meant to reflect the opinions of the various political minorities that populate the Netherlands (Andeweg & Thomassen 2011). Because ties to a denominational or ideological group scarcely play any role these day in MPs' voting behaviour, voters need help finding their way around the current political landscape.

StemWijzer (literally, 'VoteGuide'), a voting advice application introduced in 1994 by the then Institute for Public Affairs and Politics (IPP), was meant to achieve two aims: (1) explain the similarities and differences between the various political party programmes and (2) help voters decide which party would get their vote. StemWijzer compares the user's political profile with the profiles of the political parties by having the user respond to a list of statements. The list is assembled in such a way that it covers the most important points of the party programmes, with each statement showing how the parties differ in their views. StemWijzer is a very popular tool. During the 2012 general election, it was consulted about five million times.

Every election raises questions about the validity of voting advice applications, especially the IPP's StemWijzer (see for example Groot 2003). The debate focuses on whether this application actually gives voters the 'correct' advice. In response, other voting advice applications, vote match systems and similar tools have been developed. The following evaluation concerns the IPP's StemWijzer but also voting advice applications in general, depending on the research available.

Evaluation

Effectiveness

Voting advice applications are meant to help voters make an informed choice during an election and to let them know what views political parties hold. But is that what really happens? In a study by

Boogers (2006) on the IPP's StemWijzer, more than half of those surveyed (52%) indicated that StemWijzer had clarified the differences between the parties for them. A little less than half (46%) said that StemWijzer had helped them decide who to vote for. These responses indicate how effective the tool is from the vantage point of its users. Based on these figures, it is difficult to issue a conclusively positive or negative appraisal of its effectiveness.

Representativeness
Boogers' study revealed that StemWijzer users are reasonably representative of the total voting population. They are more or less evenly distributed across age and gender categories. There is a slightly higher percentage of high-educated individuals among users, however (34%, versus 29% of the labour force in 2006; Ministerie van OCW 2013).

Legitimacy
Do voting advice applications help citizens make a meaningful contribution to political decision-making? We will begin by commenting that the most important – potential – contribution of such applications is that they make the parties' views transparent. As we saw above, more than half of the users surveyed by Boogers in 2006 gave StemWijzer positive marks. That means that using a voting advice application has a modestly positive effect on the quality of citizen participation; it also offers mild encouragement to vote (see Boogers 2006; Garzia, De Angelis & Pianzola 2014). The question of legitimacy also touches on the different choices involved in designing voting advice applications. Those choices can increase or limit the extent to which a certain standard of legitimacy is met. For example, the topics covered by the application may influence notions of what is at stake in the election (citizen's influence on the political agenda). Also pre-programmed is the user's option to rank topics: 'We can imagine that a topic may be so important to a user that he will immediately discount any party whose views differ from his own' (Fossen, Anderson & Tiemeijer 2012, p. 173). The way the statements are phrased and the additional information provided with the statements thus also influence the quality of participation.

Quality of parliament's work
Voting advice applications can have an indirect influence on the work of parliamentarians. Political parties take these applications seriously and try to turn them to their advantage. They can anticipate their use when drafting their election programmes and when helping to compose the list of statements. There is anecdotal evidence that parties think strategically when drafting these statements (note that in the case of StemWijzer, those who draft the statements coordinate their work with the parties) (*NRC Handelsblad*, 7-5-2010; *de Volkskrant*, 25-1-2014). Voting advice applications may encourage parties to echo the preferences of the voters whom they hope to attract, instead of stating their views and trying to persuade voters (according to Walgrave, Van Aelst & Nuytemans 2008). The payback comes when the party becomes part of a coalition government and is unable to stand by the views that it claimed as its own in the voting advice application.

Dilemmas and Opportunities
Voting advice applications communicate a vision of democracy in which voters base their choice of political party on accurate information about the parties' policy views (Downs 1957). In this vision, the quality of representation depends on the degree to which the parliamentarians' voting records

correspond with the specific policy preferences of their constituents. The dilemma that emerges is: what is the relationship between an information system that is (unilaterally) focused on improving transparency in order to match a party's specific policy views with the electorate's policy preferences – therefore emphasising 'issue voting' as a normative principle – and the autonomy of elected representatives? Does it not put too many restrictions on that autonomy?

Matching specific policy preferences to election promises undermines the traditional model of representation, the mandate model. In this model, voters, acting on their convictions, give a party a mandate to pursue a certain political course. Instead, voting advice applications propose a model in which representatives act as 'delegates' for voters, who in turn act as 'consumers' with certain policy preferences that they wish to have satisfied (Edwards 2012; Fossen, Anderson & Tiemeijer 2012).[5]

3.2 Parliamentary information from an Open Data perspective

Over the past decade, interest in parliamentary transparency has been growing around the world, in particular as parliamentary data has been made available to citizens, journalists, civil society organisations and intermediaries. Such data includes transcripts and recordings of parliamentary debates, legislative texts, voting records, budget-related and administrative records, and information on individual representatives. The underlying idea is that more transparency will improve parliament's and individual MPs' accountability to voters, and thus create opportunities to involve citizens in parliament's work.

The *Declaration on Parliamentary Openness* was drafted by OpeningParliament.org in 2012. OpeningParliament.org is a global network of NGOs that work to support and monitor national parliaments and make them accessible to citizens. In their *Declaration*, they advance the principle that the public has a right to access parliamentary information. The *Declaration* puts forward proposals to (1) promote a culture of openness, (2) make parliamentary information transparent, (3) ease access to parliamentary information and (4) enable electronic communication of parliamentary information.[6] In this 'Open Data perspective', parliamentary information must be available in a form that can be reworked for different purposes, further analysis and visualisation.

The UK House of Commons' Digital Democracy Commission published a report in January 2015 (authored by the Speaker's Commission on Digital Democracy) on opening up the workings of the Commons to digital society. The report recommends that by 2016, all parliamentary information and

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[5] Whether voters experience it this way is a matter of speculation. That could be the case if a digital tool were to be developed that compared party voting records with the positions they claim to hold in voting advice applications prior to elections. A recent study explored precisely this issue. It showed that the degree of pre- and post-election concurrence among the Dutch government coalition parties stood at 51% in the period under review, and at 81% among the opposition parties (Fivaz, Louwerse & Schwarz 2014).

[6] http://www.openingparliament.org/declaration

audiovisual material should be freely available online in formats suitable for reuse.[7] The Dutch House of Representatives is also making parliamentary data available for reuse. It is doing so in stages over the course of several years. One of its milestones was the 'hackathon' that it organised on 8 September 2012 in partnership with the Open State Foundation and Netwerk Democratie. On that day, the House made its parliamentary database available to programmers, researchers and other interested parties, who were asked to come up with and contribute apps that would help make its workings more transparent.[8]

It goes beyond the remit of this study to analyse the House of Representatives' information services from an Open Data perspective. An analysis of the House's website will have to suffice. As a case study, the website also plays a programmatic role in our research because its contents offer us an initial survey of tools promoting online citizen participation in the House's work.

3.2.1   Tweedekamer.nl

Description

In 2008, the Inter-Parliamentary Union issued new guidelines (recommendations) for parliamentary websites. We have used these recommendations to evaluate information and participation tools on *Tweedekamer.nl*, the Dutch House of Representatives' website (the English-language website can be found at www.houseofrepresentatives.nl/home). Descriptions of the information and tools provided there have been integrated into our evaluation.

The IPU guidelines differentiate four categories:

1. *General information about Parliament.* This is further divided into a large number of subcategories, including functions, composition and activities (1.3), parliamentary committees (1.5) and members of parliament (1.6). The latter subcategory includes the activities of individual members of parliament, such as legislative proposals, questions, interpellations, motions, and voting record. Information should also be provided on the 'status' of members of parliament, such as parliamentary immunity, inviolability, salaries and allowances, codes of conduct and ethics.

2. *Information on legislation, budget and oversight.* The responsibilities and activities of parliament in these three areas should be explained, and documentation about them must be available. Information should also be provided on the activities of committees. There should be audio or video recordings available of both committee and plenary meetings, as well as the associated documentation.

3. *Tools for finding, receiving and viewing information, including a search engine, alerting services, and services for accessing information and documentation through mobile devices.*

4. *Tools for communication and dialogue with citizens.* These include:
   - General feedback utilities for the website and for contacting members, committees and officials;

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[7] http://www.digitaldemocracy.parliament.uk/
[8] http://appsvoordemocratie.nl/

- Capacity to contact members, committees and officials by email;
- Tools enabling members, committees and officials to receive, manage and respond efficiently to emails from citizens and civil society;
- Interactive tools such as blogs, online fora and e-petitions;
- Systems for allowing online polling, when the subject matter is sufficiently important and the results can be considered helpful;
- Testing and implementation of new methods for citizen-parliament interaction as the technologies emerge and as they prove useful for parliaments.

Evaluation

Effectiveness

We measure effectiveness by the degree to which the website complies with the IPU information-related recommendations (first three categories of the recommendations). The website of the Dutch House of Representatives has no notable gaps in that regard. One significant exception, however, concerns the voting records. The House's website shows the outcomes of votes, but does not provide voting records by parliamentary party, issue or policy domain. This points up the importance of civil society organisations that rework raw, open data into meaningful information. We will discuss their role below (PMOs, see Section 3.3). The recommendation to make voting records publicly available necessitates all sorts of subjective decisions that cannot be entrusted to those who designed the House of Representatives' website. For example, according to which issues should votes be categorised, and how? Which mathematical formula is used to aggregate the votes? Such decisions need to be taken before it becomes possible to provide meaningful information that allows citizens to compare party voting records, for example on environmental issues.

Representativeness

There is no data available about the visitors to the House of Representatives' website (or their composition as a group).

Legitimacy

The website undoubtedly contributes to the House's transparency, but to ascertain the size of that contribution, we would also need to evaluate the IPU's recommendations, something that lies beyond the remit of this study.

The IPU guidelines on 'tools for communication and dialogue with citizens' offer another point of reference for evaluating legitimacy. The House's website includes a page entitled *Uw mening telt!* (Your opinion counts!). It offers a list of different channels through which citizens can express their criticisms, opinions and ideas to the House. The list includes media and internet, political parties, extra-parliamentary groups, demonstrations and campaigns, contacting MPs, petitions, written requests, and citizens' initiatives.

This list is paltry compared to the IPU's suggestions. It does not mention any new methods of direct citizen-parliament interaction. This has little to do with the quality of the website; instead, it indicates that these tools have not been added to the House's external communications repertoire. This accounts for a major portion of the agenda for our study of digital citizen participation.

Quality of parliament's work

There is no direct relationship between the website and the quality of parliament's work. In general, however, if the idea is to make the political considerations of the parliamentary parties more transparent and to make citizen-parliament interaction possible, then the relevant conditions must be created internally, especially in terms of information management and citizen interaction tools.

3.3   PMO information on what parliamentarians do

Parliamentary monitoring organisations *(*PMOs) are active in many countries; these organisations track the activities of parliament and of individual parliamentarians (Mandelbaum 2011; Dietrich 2011). Their aim is to let citizens know what their representatives actually do.

Unlike voting advice applications that advise voters by looking at party election programmes, there is little information available in the Netherlands telling voters what their elected representatives actually do. It is virtually impossible for Dutch voters to find out later what action parliamentary parties have taken on issues and whether they have actually kept their campaign promises. In terms of legitimacy, the latter may be a missed opportunity. In the recent past, two 'retrospective' applications were launched that allowed voters to compare their own views with the parties' voting records during the most recent parliamentary session. This type of tool could turn out to be a useful way for voters to hold political parties accountable for their deeds. In the run-up to the 2006 General Election, Politix.nl launched the Nieuwe Kieswijzer (New Voter's Guide). It covered twenty selected bills; users were allowed to add to this number or select specific issues. ProDemos launched another tool in 2006, the Stemmentracker (Votes Tracker). It asks users to respond to thirty statements; one of the main selection criteria is how much media coverage a particular House vote receives.[9]

In his 1999 dissertation examining the extent to which Dutch political parties make good on their campaign promises (social and economic) after an election, Thomson found that 61 percent of the selected campaign promises by the future coalition parties conformed, 'at least in part', with their subsequent policy deeds. In another dissertation in 2011 exploring conformity between party political positions during elections and their positions in the subsequent parliamentary session (comparing the Netherlands and the United Kingdom), Louwerse concluded that there was a reasonable degree of consistency between election programmes and post-election behaviour.

Election programmes are not by any means the most suitable context for assessing the deeds of political parties in parliament, however. Andeweg & Thomassen (2011) argue that globalisation in particular is making it increasingly difficult to predict the political agenda during a given period of office. They believe that our concept of democracy must change from one in which voters 'influence policy beforehand' to one in which they 'demand accountability for policy afterwards' (p. 115), but

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[9] Critical comments can be found at http://blog.tomlouwerse.nl/2010/05/stemmen-op-basis-van-stemmen-het-spoor.html

without focusing exclusively on – or indeed even leaving aside – the promises made during the most recent elections.

This section reviews the various initiatives undertaken with this in mind. IPP launched the website Geenwoorden.nl (*geen woorden* means 'not words', as in the expression 'deeds, not words') in the 2002 election year in cooperation with KRO public broadcasting association. The site provided information on how well campaign promises had been kept. The second case study is Politix.nl, launched in 2003. It reviewed the way in which the parliamentary parties in the House had voted on various bills. Another example is Watstemtmijnraad.nl, set up by Burgerlink at the initiative of the Ministry of the Interior and Kingdom Relations. The site enabled citizens to track the voting records of a number of local councils (*wat stemt mijn raad* means 'how has my council voted'). The United States and the United Kingdom, where voting is by geographical area (district or borough), have websites where voters can track their representatives' voting record. In our study, we give the example of the website TheyWorkForYou.com in the United Kingdom.

3.3.1   GeenWoorden.nl (2002)[10]

Description

The GeenWoorden.nl project was launched in 2002. It was initiated by the IPP and KRO public broadcasting association. The six-week project consisted of a website and a number of television broadcasts. The project aims were (1) to let voters know how many campaign promises political parties had kept and (2) to urge elected politicians to be accountable to voters.

The Geenwoorden.nl website compared the 1998 campaign promises of the House parliamentary parties with their records over the subsequent four years. As a tie-in, KRO broadcast a series of 'job appraisal' television interviews (entitled 'Who Dares?') in which a minister or state secretary was questioned by a panel of experts from the field. One was State Secretary for Education Karin Adelmund (PvdA/Labour Party), who was grilled by a German teacher, a school manager, and a primary school headmaster. Television journalist Fons de Poel was the moderator and the broadcast was transmitted live from Niels Stensen College in Utrecht.

For the website, IPP compiled summaries of campaign promises on two issues in six different policy domains: multicultural society, education, mobility, health care, ethical issues, and democracy. The political parties provided information about their efforts to live up to their promises (for example in the policy pursued by their ministers, by asking questions in the House, or by extra-parliamentary activities). This information was not to exceed two hundred words per issue. A panel made up of experts, interest group representatives and professionals in the field evaluated the truth and effectiveness of the 'deeds' claimed by the parties in each domain. Again, their evaluation was limited to two hundred words. Their evaluations were also placed on the website. The site also hosted a forum allowing voters and politicians to communicate.

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[10] Our information about this project is based on documentation that the initiators passed on to the author (AE) at the time. See also Edwards (2003).

Evaluation

Effectiveness
Did the project support the aims of providing information and fostering accountability? We assessed its effectiveness by looking at (1) the quality of the information on the politicians' deeds and (2) the quality of the evaluations concerning the relationship between 'words and deeds'. Regarding the quality of the information provided, IPP made several different design choices. These choices influenced the nature of the information provided, for example the policy domains selected. IPP also asked the parties to indicate how they had made good on their promises. The editors considered that this would give the parties the opportunity to present themselves to voters. However, it naturally also allowed them to put a positive spin on their performance. For example, regarding the issue 'multicultural society', some parties took a harsher tone when describing their deeds than they had earlier in their promises, a discrepancy noted by both the panels and website visitors.

Any assessment of the relationship between words and deeds will inevitably be subjective, but having the input of experts, interest groups and professionals in the field allowed for a variety of different perspectives. Journalists and even the KRO programme makers could have done more with the information provided on the website, however. There was a notable lack of fact-checking, critical analysis and commentary by journalists. The information provided was probably not 'pointed' enough for the users.[11] All in all, major methodological problems make it difficult to draw conclusions about the quality of information provision or the evaluations concerning the relationship between 'words and deeds' (De Graaf 2000; Lammers 2000).

Representativeness
Over the six weeks that the website was live, it registered 60,000 visitors. The television broadcasts attracted an average 800,000 viewers, or an average market share of more than 13 percent, which was considered exceptionally large. Viewers gave the broadcasts an average score of 7.4 (on a scale of one to ten), also a good score. There is no data available about the website visitors or the TV audience as a group.

Legitimacy
Did the project foster acceptance among citizens of the political decision-making process? Given the project's aims, transparency and accountability are the most significant measures of legitimacy in this particular case. Our opinion of the project is positive, certainly if we consider the efforts of the editors and evaluation panels. With respect to parties' political accountability to citizens, one highly significant factor is the intermediary role of journalists in analysing and interpreting information and in publicising the most important conclusions. According to the project management, journalists did not do their jobs in that respect. Even the project journalists responsible for the television broadcasts made very little use of the information on the website. There was interaction between

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[11] Journalists insisted on 'report marks'. The KRO project manager calculated a set of figures based on the panel assessments and published them in the broadcasting association's magazine, *Studio*. The political parties' average 'report marks' were very similar and came to an overall average of 5.4.

voters and politicians during the broadcasts, but almost no interaction on the forum. The quality of participation was low in that regard. One can further question whether the website visitors were themselves more interested in information than in conversation. The forum had very few visitors. Of course, this may also be because politicians were absent from the forum, save for one exception.

Quality of parliament's work
It is impossible to say whether this project also improved the professional performance of representatives.

3.3.2   Politix.nl and Watstemtmijnraad.nl

Description
Launched in 2004 by public administration experts Josta de Hoog and Niels de Hoog, Politix.nl was the first Dutch website to track politicians' voting records. The website tracked the records of MPs in their votes on bills and riders. The founders had two objectives. First, they wanted to improve the quality of public discourse about politics. Their main target group was therefore journalists. They believed that to improve that discourse, the public had to know the voting records of parliamentary parties. Second, they wanted to give the public more oversight of their MPs' activities.

The website reviewed the votes of the past week by issue (from a menu of twelve different issues) and by party. A summary of each bill was given along with a link to the original document. The website also made a facility available for engaging in debate: users were allowed to add arguments to bills, vote on bills, or propose their own bills.

Politix.nl was redesigned and relaunched in 2008 in conjunction with Watstemtmijnraad.nl, which went live the same year. Watstemtmijnraad.nl was initiated by the Ministry of the Interior and Kingdom Relations in conjunction with the municipalities of Almere, Groningen, Enschede and Woerden. It was inspired by Politix.nl. and was meant to increase the transparency and accessibility of local councils. More municipalities gradually joined the original group. The website was not meant exclusively for local councils, but also had sections reserved for the House of Representatives, the Provincial Councils, and the Water Boards. The website reviewed all votes, including votes on motions. It was taken offline in 2012.

Evaluation
Effectiveness
To what extent did the two websites deliver the necessary building blocks for transparency and accountability? On their own, both websites clearly only provided 'thin' transparency. Thin transparency makes the raw, original data available, for example voting outcomes, without working that data up into meaningful information. The latter is what happens with 'thick' transparency (Curtin & Meijer 2006).The Watstemtmijnraad.nl homepage claimed that the site made it possible to appraise local councillors by considering such questions as: 'Is a councillor consistent in word and deed (i.e. vote)?' and 'Does a party's voting record keep faith with its views?' But answering these questions requires more than the raw voting data. For ordinary citizens, then, the website was of

limited use. What was needed was an analysis of the data, either on the website itself or by intermediaries (journalists, interests groups and so on), using yet other data.

Representativeness

Politix.nl attracted approximately eight hundred to a thousand visitors a day. Members of parliament were frequent visitors to the site, and so were local politicians (source: interview with J. de Hoog). Journalists and bloggers also frequented the site and (occasionally) made use of the data (source: interview with J. de Hoog). Given the number of visitors, use of the site by ordinary citizens appears to have been low. Watstemtmijnraad.nl also did not see a lot of traffic. The most frequent visitors were local councillors themselves and local journalists (source: interview with M. van Heesewijk). A 2010 poll comparing the visitor numbers of regional websites, carried out by the Enschede Panel (the Municipality of Enschede was one of the site initiators), found that Watstemtmijnraad.nl came in last with a score of 0 percent.[12]

Legitimacy

There is no information clarifying what these websites contributed to the legitimacy of political decision-making.

Quality of parliament's work

Conversely, the fact that representatives made relatively frequent use of the sites indicates that the information provided there was useful to this category of visitor. For example, Politix.nl helped local politicians keep up with matters in the House of Representatives. It is not possible to draw further conclusions about how these websites influenced the performance of representatives.

3.3.3   TheyWorkForYou.com

Description

TheyWorkForYou.com was launched in 2004 by MySociety.org, an open source community that uses digital tools to promote active citizenship. The main aim of the initiators is to provide neutral, nonpartisan information about the actions, words and votes of MPs. Specific aims are (1) value, (2) transparency and (3) engagement (Escher 2011a). The first aim is to provide better information than official parliamentary sites, and in particular make access to information more logical for people who are interested. Another aim is to allow fair judgement of MPs on the basis of what they do and to make MPs feel accountable (reference is made to citizens acting as watchdogs). A final aim is to make citizens better informed and to engage people in politics.

The website provides information on the activities of members of the Upper and Lower Houses of Parliament (including their voting records), their speeches during debates, and questions they have put to government ministers. The website extracts its voting data from *Hansard*, the transcripts of parliamentary debates. Visitors searching for information on their MP must fill in their UK postcode. They then see basic information on the relevant MP, including questions that they have submitted to

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[12] http://portal.gmi-mr.com/207685/9/EnschedePortal/resultaten/nieuwsbrief_peiling6.pdf

ministers (with the answers received) and their voting record on a number of key issues. That record is described in gradations, for example 'consistently voted against', 'almost always voted against', or 'generally voted against'. A specific algorithm is used for this, known as the Policy Agreement Ratio (Mandelbaum 2011, p. 37). MP Diane Abbott, for example, has 'generally voted for more EU-integration', according to the site. A link takes interested visitors to Ms Abbott's votes on specific EU-related issues.

The following sections are based on user statistics and a web survey of 903 users. Visitors were invited at random to take the survey with the teaser 'Did you find what you were looking for?' (Escher 2011a). It is difficult to ascertain how representative the group of respondents is of all website users. Escher believes that 'the bias of the sample might not be too extreme' (p. 58).

Evaluation

Effectiveness

The effectiveness of the website can be considered good. Almost all the respondents believe that it offers them neutral, nonpartisan information. Most also indicate that the website is well structured and easy to navigate. Nevertheless, when asked 'Did you find what you were looking for?', 40 percent said no. That was 20 percent among the survey respondents. About 90 percent of users said the website improved their knowledge about their representatives.

Representativeness

After the launch phase, the website has consistently received 200,000 to 300,000 visits a month since 2007. Usage peaked in May 2010 before the General Election (280,000 visits in a week). Another peak was May-June 2009 during the height of the MP expenses scandal. Most of the visits (60%) concern information on individual MPs. The website's users differ considerably from internet users in general in terms of educational level, gender and age. The biggest difference is educational background. Almost two thirds (64%) have completed a higher education degree (as opposed to 27% among internet users). In addition, 66 percent are male (50% of internet users). People above the age of 54 tend to be overrepresented. The question these figures raise is whether the information provided in fact matches the information requirements and digital skills of low-educated individuals in particular. That applies, for example, to the categorisation of voting records by political issues. A voter who simply wants to know 'What did my representative do for people like myself on this issue?' will have a difficult time finding the answer on the website.

Legitimacy

There are signs of a watchdog function (transparency, accountability), with 30 percent responding that they were checking a fact and keeping an eye on what their representatives do. About half the respondents ('even') believe that the website led to an 'improved opinion' about their representatives (Escher 2011a, p.6). The website also makes a contribution to political engagement. After all, 60 percent of respondents indicated that they had never looked up information on what their representatives were doing before they came across TheyWorkForYou. More than 40 percent had never been politically active before. All these points justify giving the website high marks for its contribution to legitimacy.

Quality of parliament's work

It is difficult to estimate how much the website influences the quality of parliament's work. The website could make MPs feel more accountable to the people. A 2006 article in *The Times* suggested that the statistics on TheyWorkForYou about the number of times an MP has spoken in debates had resulted in an increase of 'unnecessary interventions during debates' (Escher 2011a; Ostling 2012). The reporting of these statistics was subsequently changed to indicate rough trends. This implies a certain tension between politicians' desire to showcase themselves in the political arena and the quality of their performance as parliamentarians. Behaviour intended to improve their statistics (asking more questions in parliament, making more speeches during debates) may be at odds with the quality of their performance in terms of representation, co-lawmaking, or scrutiny.

Dilemmas and Opportunities

The above examples of PMO websites that provide information on what representatives do raise various dilemmas. The first is that transparency does not necessarily contribute to the legitimacy of parliamentary decision-making. The dilemma is even starker when legitimacy is construed as citizen trust in their government and political institutions (Curtin & Meijer 2006; Grimmelijkhuijsen 2012). Helping citizens gain a better understanding of how political decision-making works does not necessarily engender a greater sense of acceptance of that process in them, let alone more trust in the politicians and political institutions underpinning them.

The second dilemma is between 'thin' and 'thick' transparency. Thin transparency makes the raw, original data available, for example the outcomes of votes, without working that data up into meaningful information. Thick transparency, by contrast, does turn the data into meaningful information. That makes the information more useful, but it also necessitates making certain design decisions for every process, thereby influencing the nature of the information provided. Another important question is how the information requirements of voters can be met, especially lower-educated ones. They may be more interested in information that is categorised not by policy domain but by social categories, such as income groups, occupational groups and identities ('people like me') or life-cycle phases. However, organising data by social categories is an equally sensitive design issue, as well as politically controversial.

A further dilemma is that between transparency and the quality of parliament's work. The websites that make large volumes of information transparent put enormous pressure on politicians to feel accountable. It gives citizens an opportunity to keep a close eye on what their representatives are doing. But the risk is that this will lead to strategic behaviour, which could have a negative impact on the quality of parliament's work. That quality is also in the interest of citizens. On the other hand, more pressure to feel accountable could cause representatives to exercise greater prudence when it comes to raising voter expectations.

4   Citizens question representatives

The previous chapters discussed various digital tools that inform citizens about their representatives' political views or activities. In this chapter, citizens play a bigger role. We discuss the digital tools that enable individual citizens to raise a question indicating a specific information requirement on their part.

Asking and answering questions is one of the basic activities of democratic politics. It is easy for citizens to contact politicians. Most do so by email, fewer use the telephone or platforms such as Twitter (Aalberts & Kreijveld 2011). According to Aalberts & Kreijveld (2011, p. 82), however, 'not a single politician … makes a habit of always replying to citizens'.

There are websites that make it easier for citizens to query politicians. The Netherlands has Maildepolitiek.nl (*mail de politiek* = 'email a politician'). Examples in other countries include WriteToThem.com (United Kingdom) and Abgeordnetenwatch.de (= 'MPwatch') (Germany). This chapter will review these three websites. They touch directly on parliament's work, especially its task as a representative body, but also in its scrutiny task, especially if queries by citizens lead to questions being put to ministers.

4.1   Maildepolitiek.nl

Description

Maildepolitiek.nl was set up in 2008 by Stichting Het Nieuwe Stemmen ('The New Voting'), a youth coalition of the CDA (Christian democrat), PvdA (Labour), VVD (conservative liberal) and D66 (progressive) parties. The website is no longer online in its original form. The present version is mainly devoted to political news reporting. It also has a 'Contact politicians' menu with a list of members of the Senate and House of Representatives. Any interested visitor can click a link taking them to the MPs personal page, where contact information is available.

Our description and evaluation concerns the old version of the website because it was specifically meant to help visitors submit questions. Visitors to the old version had to do the following. They first had to type their question into a standardised form. They then had to select a policy domain and the government tier in which they were interested: local, provincial or national. They could subsequently select a single party (it was not possible to query multiple parties simultaneously). Users then had to send off the question themselves. Both the person asking the question and the politician answering it could choose to make the question visible to other visitors. Any questions published on the site were anonymous.

Evaluation
Effectiveness

Beleidsimpuls, an online magazine on public sector innovations, evaluated the effectiveness of Maildepolitiek.nl in 2008. *Beleidsimpuls* ascertained that the website missed the mark when it came to helping citizens query representatives. Many citizens did not know to which policy domain or government tier they should address their question. The website thus assumed that citizens had the necessary prior knowledge.[13] The magazine did not consider the website's potential added value, however. For example, questions published there provided a glimpse of the sorts of issues that preoccupied the public. That knowledge could have been useful to citizens who wanted to lobby for the same issues.

Representativeness
There is no data available on the website's users.

Legitimacy
In principle, the website satisfied various legitimacy criteria, including influence on the political agenda, accessible for citizen input and accountability. Posing questions may be a very simple form of citizen participation, but the quality of that participation must be given high marks when viewed from the citizen's perspective. The score depends to some extent on the quality of the guidance that citizens are given.

Quality of parliament's work
How much freedom did this website give representatives to act autonomously? According to Aalberts, many of the questions put to representatives concerned matters over which they had no say or to which they could not reasonably be expected to respond. In his view, such questions distracted them from their 'real work'.[14] One potentially positive effect on the quality of parliament's work was that raising and responding to questions may have fostered interaction between citizens and representatives (concerning their views) and may have improved parliament's performance with regard to its scrutiny task.

Our evaluation here looks at four aspects that influence the effectiveness and legitimacy of such websites:
- the guidance that citizens receive when seeking the 'right' representatives for their questions;
- the degree of care that the web editors exercise with regard to the quality and wording of the question;
- the extent to which representatives are encouraged to actually answer questions;
- the degree to which the site alerts citizens to further steps if their questions remain unanswered.

These aspects are especially pertinent in our discussion of two foreign websites: Writetothem.com in the United Kingdom and Abgeordnetenwatch.de in Germany.

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[13] http://www.beleidsimpuls.nl/maildepolitiek.php
[14] http://www.thepostonline.nl/2011/07/01/bewijs-emails-van-burgers-aan-politici-missen-ieder-doel/

4.1.1   WriteToThem.com

Description

WriteToThem.com was launched by MySociety.org in 2005 (see p. 33, Section 3.3.3). In its current form, the site has attracted 50,000 to 70,000 visitors a month since 2007; of these, 40,000-50,000 are unique visitors.

The site works as follows. Users type in their UK postcode. They are then shown a list of all 'their' representatives, whether local, regional, national or European. (It is not possible for users to write to a representative of an electoral district other than their own.) There is also a link if users are unsure who to contact with their question. This takes them to a page showing which representative (e.g. MP or local councillor) they should approach with which type of question. Once they have selected a representative, they are taken to a page where they can type in their message. A sidebar offers tips (be polite; use your own words, etc.). They are warned that 'copied-and-pasted identical messages will be blocked'. Users fill in their own details and can then send the message. The website first sends them an email with a link to confirm that the sender is a natural person. Once confirmation is received, the site sends the message to the chosen representative. After two weeks have elapsed, the sender receives an email asking whether the representative has responded. WriteToThem stresses that it bears no responsibility for a representative's failure to respond. It does, however, keep a 'responsiveness league table', a ranking of all MPs based on the number of WriteToThem messages to which they have replied. The site also advises voters on what to do if they do not receive a response.

Evaluation

Effectiveness

The aim of WriteToThem.com is to help citizens reach their representatives. Its system of helping users select the 'right' representative makes it more effective. Users are also given specific advice about what to do if they receive no response.

A user survey conducted by Escher (2011b) shows that visitors are satisfied with the site. User satisfaction is very much tied to the responsiveness of representatives, however. Between 55 and 60 percent of the users had received a reply. Approximately 80 percent of those who submitted messages were happy with the response they received.

Representativeness

Based on educational attainment, age and gender, the website users are not a representative cross-section of the population. They are twice as likely to have a higher degree than the average British internet user. The site also attracts more men and people aged 45 and older compared to the profile of British Internet users (Escher 2011b).

Legitimacy

Does this website help citizens deliver meaningful input for decision-making? The figures about representatives' responsiveness and user satisfaction lead to a moderately positive evaluation of the site's legitimacy. It mainly helps citizens gain access; many people do not expect a response

but get one nevertheless. The site also encourages a relatively large number of people who are otherwise not politically active (Escher 2011b), thereby improving the quality of citizen participation.

Quality of parliament's work

There is no information on what this website contributes to the performance of representatives. Escher's study focused on users, responsiveness of representatives, and user satisfaction. A small survey that he carried out on the number of messages sent to MPs via WriteToThem in relation to the overall communication they receive led him to conclude that the site makes a very small contribution to 'communication demands' on MPs.

4.1.2   Abgeordnetenwatch.de

Description

WriteToThem.com led to imitators in other countries. The successful German version is Abgeordnetenwatch.de, a web platform first launched in 2004 in the State of Hamburg and later extended to the federal level. The platform can be used to query MPs, MEPs, and the members of eight state parliaments and 52 local councils. The main aim is to encourage dialogue between citizens and representatives. In addition, Abgeordnetenwatch.de has increasingly come to focus on transparency in such matters as representatives' additional income-generating and lobbying activities, and finally to inform citizens about their representatives and their voting records.[15] In our description and evaluation, we will focus on the first aim.

The amount of care devoted to the site's quality is notable. A moderation protocol ensures that no one uses the platform for lobbying purposes, that representatives are not subjected to slander or insults, and that racist views are blocked. Questions may not be submitted anonymously. All questions are screened in advance. Fourteen people (freelance workers) make up the team of moderators.[16] Questions are published with the author's full name. The site also posts how many questions each representative has received and how many responses he or she has given.

Abgeordnetenwatch.de attracted more than 2.6 million visitors in 2012. Since 2008, more than 141,000 questions have been submitted and more than 114,000 replies have been received (from all the categories of representatives listed above) (Abgeordnetenwatch.de 2013). The response rate is therefore about 80 percent. The same percentage applies with respect to queries specifically addressing MPs. In 2014, the number of messages sent to MPs came to 10,144 (source: e-mail communication with project team, 27 July 2015).

Evaluation
Effectiveness

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[15] This shows that this website in fact belongs to two families of tools. It also operates as a PMO.
[16] Abgeordnetenwatch.de has an annual budget of more than 300,000 euros. Two thirds of this is funded by donations and a third by foundations and similar sources.

The large number of messages and replies and the speed of response (usually within a few weeks) show that Abgeordnetenwatch.de has built a strong reputation and operates effectively. Albrecht and Trénel (2010) have assessed the quality of both the questions and the replies as good. Quality assurance is also evidently effective.

Representativeness
Men and persons with a higher degree are overrepresented among the site visitors (Albrecht & Trénel 2010).

Legitimacy
The website contributes to legitimacy, especially in terms of access, accountability, and quality of participation. The site reports that 53 percent of those submitting questions were contacting a representative for the first time. According to its editors, journalists also frequently used the website as a source of information (Abgeordnetenwatch 2013, p. 12). However, the newsgathering function mainly concerns another part of the site's mission: to investigate MPs additional incomes. The website actively promotes transparency in party finances.

Quality of parliament's work
Abgeordnetenwatch.de's 2012 annual report states that 300 'parliamentary questions' raised that year were demonstrably based on citizen queries (data based on a web search; Abgeordnetenwatch 2013, p. 13).

Dilemmas and Opportunities
By answering questions via websites, politicians have an opportunity to attract voters' attention to themselves. The biggest dilemma is that between accessibility and quality. The price of offering voters more access to representatives may be a decline in the quality of communication. Quality can be promoted if websites offer support in addressing the 'right' politician and if they invest in moderation. On the other hand, the knowledge that their questions are being vetted in advance could raise the threshold for citizens. However, the quality of the questions and answers, and the high percentage of questions that receive responses (as determined by Abgeordnetenwatch.de) indicate that its approach can be successful.

5 Consulting and being advised by citizens

We have now come to the upper rungs of the ladder of participation, where citizens are given access to parliamentary decision-making by taking part in public consultations or by giving advice (solicited and unsolicited). In this chapter, we discuss two different forms: 1) consultations and advisory projects set up by the executive part of government (i.e. one or more ministries), and 2) consultations and advisory projects set up by parliament. The second category concerns digital citizen participation in parliament's work. The first category is also important for our study, however, because projects organised by the executive may or do exert an influence 'from the outside in' on parliament's position as the final political decision-maker. A form of representative governance practice may develop in which government organisations and civil society parties jointly develop and commit themselves to policy. The two case studies with which we begin this chapter (Section 5.1) show that digital tools can reinforce and deepen this practice. Later, we will look in-depth at the dilemmas this poses for the House of Representatives. In Section 5.2 we discuss various consultation and advisory projects set up by parliament, especially by parliamentary committees. We conclude this chapter with a brief discussion of the significance of open data and open spending when citizens offer their advice.

5.1 The executive consults citizens; citizens advise the executive

The Netherlands has witnessed the emergence of a broad spectrum of citizen participation and co-policymaking practices in recent decades (especially at local level), including those making use of the internet and social media (see e.g. Leyenaar 2009; Sinnema & Van Duivenboden 2009). These projects are usually carried out under the supervision of executive councillors and mayors at local level or a ministry at national level. There are far fewer citizen participation projects supervised by parliament and regional or local councils.

Below, we consider public consultations on draft legislation undertaken by government ministries. The first case study concerns the website Internetconsultatie.nl, through which citizens can provide feedback on bills and other matters. The second case study is a LinkedIn discussion group concerning a new energy policy designed by the relevant stakeholders.

5.1.1 Internetconsultatie.nl

Description
Internetconsultatie.nl was set up in 2009 by the national government. Ministries consult the public online about draft bills, general orders in council, and ministerial decrees. The website's aims are to

increase the transparency of lawmaking, to offer new opportunities for participation, and to improve the quality and practical feasibility of laws and regulations.

Internetconsultatie.nl is regarded as supplementary to consultation practices that are already part of the legislative process. As of our reference date (26 March 2015), 416 online consultations had been completed (source: Internetconsultatie.nl). The House of Representatives sometimes uses the site to consult the public about private members' bills. One example is the bill introduced by MP Ard van der Steur about mediation.

Citizens can respond to a bill by raising questions or concerns, or by uploading a document. Responses are only published on the website with the relevant respondent's consent.

The evaluation that follows is based on an appraisal of the site by the Ministry of Security and Justice (2011), which surveyed the impressions and opinions of participating citizens and staff policy officers by asking them to complete a questionnaire (citizens) or evaluation form and by holding group discussions (staff).

Evaluation

Effectiveness

Do public consultations improve the quality of legislation? According to the policy officers surveyed, Internetconsultatie.nl is mainly effective when the consultation concerns laws and regulations that will considerably alter the rights and duties of citizens, businesses and institutions, or that will have a major impact on practical implementation. Two thirds of the relevant policy officers said they had received useful feedback. Online consultations do require an extra investment of time and capacity. Various staff members indicated that they would like to use the website for other consultations too, for example about proposed policy measures. We discuss the site's contribution to transparency and citizen participation in the Legitimacy section.

Representativeness

The website has recorded more than 497,000 visits by approximately 181,800 visitors in all, who spent an average of 22.5 minutes on the site (Ministerie van Veiligheid en Justitie 2011). On 1 June 2011 it had received a total of 4993 responses. The number of visitors is much higher than the number of responses. That means that the site is also interesting to people who are only looking for information about proposed bills. The number of responses per bill differs considerably and depends in part on the subject, the anticipated effects of the bill, and the target groups affected. Feedback has been provided by private individuals, businesses and civil society organisations. Some online consultation procedures reached target groups that have otherwise not been involved in consultations, for example small businesses.

Legitimacy

Do the participants believe that this tool makes a useful contribution to decision-making? The participants value the openness with which internetconsultatie.nl deals with bills and other proposals. The tool thus improves transparency and accessibility. However, they would like the tool to be promoted more actively and specifically among the target groups. The quality of participation

depends mainly on the speed with which the results of the consultation are reported, the quality of those reports, and information on what has been done with the results (fair procedure and accountability). Quite a bit of time often elapses before the website reports on the most important results and the changes made to bills as a result. Participants indicate that participation should be rewarded, for example by ensuring that responses are published on the site without delay.

Quality of parliament's work
In *Vertrouwen is goed maar begrijpen is beter* [Trust is good but understanding is better] (2012), the former Speaker of the House of Representatives, Gerdi Verbeet, asks whether the website doesn't restrict parliament's freedom to form its own opinion (p. 223). In his book about public consultations, German researcher Dienel (1992) has defined a rule of thumb based on their aim: if a public consultation is meant to guide the work of legislative staff (especially to avoid practical implementation problems and undesirable side effects), then the responsibility for such consultations obviously lies with the executive; however, if the aim is to generate solutions to problems affecting society, then parliament may be the most appropriate body. This rule of thumb is arguable because addressing implementation problems and undesirable side effects can also be regarded as one of parliament's tasks. Our conclusion is that the website ventures into the House of Representatives' domain, but does not necessarily restrict the House's freedom to form its own opinions.

Dilemmas and Opportunities

The main dilemma is that between the political primacy of the House of Representatives and the effectiveness of consultation tools. On the one hand, the results of ministerial consultations bear the hallmark of legitimacy, something that parliamentarians may believe impinges on their political primacy. On the other hand, such consultations serve to test quality assurance in legislative matters, in addition to customary consultations with civil society organisations and experts.

Another dilemma is that online consultation procedures raise expectations. Feedback on what is being done with the results must be provided within a reasonable short period of time, but at an average 2500 responses a year, for example (see above), the question is whether the House can live up to such expectations. Limiting the aim of online consultations to preventing implementation problems and undesirable side effects (Dienel's rule of thumb) is not a convincing solution because this too can be regarded as one of parliament's tasks. One way of circumventing this dilemma is for the House to select draft legislation about which it wishes to consult the public, based on political and strategic considerations. It was in light of a similar discussion concerning the 'ownership' of public consultations on draft legislation that the UK House of Commons and the UK Government launched 'Public Reading' pilots. The Government ran pilot public readings on the Protection of Freedoms Bill and the Small Charitable Donations Bill, while the Commons ran its own pilot on the Children and Families Bill.[17] None of the pilots has yet to be evaluated in a way that sheds light on the questions above.

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[17] For the first evaluation, see http://www.parliament.uk/business/bills-and-legislation/public-reading/

5.1.2   Stakeholder opinions about new energy legislation on LinkedIn

Description

In around 1995, the free market became the guiding principle of Dutch energy policy. As a result, a new Electricity Act was introduced in 1998, and a Gas Act in 2000. During the initial phase of market liberalisation, the relationship between government and the parties in the energy sector became one of mutual distrust, in part because government provided (necessary) supervision as the market was being created. Their relationship ended up in a 'downward spiral', with government providing vertical supervision and the commercial parties acting strategically and waning in their commitment to cooperate with government on achieving public aims, such as sustainability (Van Beuningen & Van Bergenhenegouwen 2013).

It was against this background that the Ministry of Economic Affairs set up the STROOM project, meant as an overall reform of the Electricity and Gas Acts.[18] The Netherlands is on the verge of transitioning to sustainable energy management. New legislation must not only help facilitate the that transition as a policy aim, but also provide the basis for new relationship patterns, for joint problem-solving, and for encouraging the energy sector to shoulder its share of the responsibility. The legislative process must be designed to repair the trust between the parties. That is why the Ministry chose to tackle communication broadly, with a LinkedIn discussion being the most important component of its approach.

Specifically, the designers wanted to 'get away' from bilateral consultations with stakeholders and instead discuss a large number of issues with many different stakeholders (interview with J. van Beuningen). From April to late June 2012, a LinkedIn discussion was organised between 'professionals' (people with expertise and experience in the energy sector) about 'the problems, dilemmas and solutions that the bill should address' (Wierda & Van Bergenhenegouwen 2012). The aim was to field ideas that would lead to better policy proposals, so that the bill ultimately produced would have broad support. The final result of the discussion would be submitted to Internetconsultatie.nl. That happened in early 2014 in the shape of a 'consultation document'. The draft bill was also published on Internetconsultatie.nl that summer.

Evaluation

Effectiveness

The organisers regarded the LinkedIn discussion as a success. The participants greatly appreciated it. The chosen form turned out to be an effective way of generating many useful ideas. During the course of the discussion, the aims of negotiation and consensus-forming were achieved. Transparency was one of the factors responsible for its success. It made it possible to run a 'multi-issue game', with different issues simultaneously becoming topics of discussion, increasing the possibility of negotiation (Van Beuningen & Van Bergenhenegouwen 2013). An online discussion

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[18] STROOM stands for Streamline, Optimise, Modernise (in Dutch: *Stroomlijnen, Optimaliseren, Moderniseren*).

platform helped make the negotiating process comprehensible and, therefore, easier for the participants to manage.

Representativeness
The group 'represented the Dutch energy sector' (Wierda & Van Bergenhenegouwen 2012, p. 7), with 792 members taking part on the reference date (4 June 2012). An analysis (included in the evaluation report) shows that besides the Ministry, the ten best-represented organisations in terms of number of members were NMA (32 members), Eneco (25), NLAgency (25), Essent (24), Alliander (24), Enexis (13), TenneT (11), Stedin (11), E.ON Benelux (9) and First Consulting (8). Alongside these major stakeholders, however, many 'unusual interlocutors' also took part (p. 5), including consumers who generate their own energy, a few local councils, and researchers. The House of Representatives was also on the list of participants (staff members working for various MPs had registered as discussion group participants).

Legitimacy
It is not very useful to evaluate this case study for its democratic legitimacy because the project – unlike the citizen participation projects we will discuss later in this chapter – does not concern a form of democracy but rather co-policymaking by government and stakeholders. Nevertheless, legitimacy does offer certain starting points for a substantive assessment, including the accessibility and responsiveness of decision-making to 'weaker' interests. The project was open to stakeholders other than the major players; representatives of local sustainable energy collectives also took part. It is beyond the remit of our study to appraise the responsiveness of the LinkedIn discussion. This would be a suitable topic for parliamentary review, however; to what extent were certain interests largely overlooked in the final result?

Quality of parliament's work
The key question raised in our evaluation of Internetconsultatie.nl also applies here: does this approach not limit parliament's freedom to form its own opinion? Our documentation shows that this is a sensitive issue for the organisers. They acknowledge that parliament has 'the final word', but that it is 'complicated to involve them, because it removes MPs from their formal position as co-lawmakers'. The organisers claim that they had not actively invited any MPs to join the discussion, but that they would also not have refused any MPs who wanted to take part. They also report that they kept the House of Representatives abreast of progress by letter.[19] In fact, this happened twice, once before the project began (December 2011) and once after it ended (June 2014). Given the history of the old energy bill's passage through the House of Representatives (see Van Beuningen & Van Bergenhenegouwen 2013, pp. 22-23, p. 29), we understand why one of the organisers expressed the hope that 'the quality of the parliamentary debates will improve'. And the following quote says a great deal about the way one might discuss the role of parliament:

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[19] http://prettigcontactmetdeoverheid.nl/nieuws/473/informele-aanpak-bij-de-totstandkoming-van-wetgeving

MPs can come to understand the rationale behind the proposals. One hopes that they will abstain from proposing imprudent changes. Should they do so, they could undermine a structure to which many stakeholders have committed themselves.[20]

If the provision of information is not accompanied by effective tools for adjusting the process and the interim results, then parliament's decision-making freedom would indeed be severely impaired. It should be noted, however, that the LinkedIn discussion was transparent for MPs (or their staff members) who had registered as participants.

Dilemmas and Opportunities

The main dilemma is clear. A ministerial strategy aimed at coordination between stakeholders is at odds with the House's decision-making autonomy. The STROOM approach represents a rational strategic attempt by the ministry to build a basis of trust between actors and to reach agreement on new legislation, but for the House, this approach is a major challenge. It pushes parliament increasingly into the background with regard to expertise and information. Digital tools make it possible to fine-tune coordination between many different stakeholders. That makes it increasingly difficult for parliamentarians to influence the actual substance of policy. The principle that awards them the 'final word' in their formal position as lawmakers is being eroded. A solution to this dilemma is to create closer ties between 'vertical' representative democracy and 'horizontal governance' by defining frameworks, by monitoring and by making adjustments based on agreements between the Government and parliament concerning interim 'calibrations' (Koppenjan, Kars & Van der Voort 2007). This too comes at the cost of parliament's autonomy, however. There is a certain level of self-imposed compulsion in defining frameworks and making interim adjustments, since it will be difficult for the House to go back on any frameworks that it defined at an earlier stage (except in very exceptional circumstances). However, this is not as bad as the erosion of the House's decision-making freedom, as we discussed above. Digital tools do offer the advantage of transparency. In principle, MPs could track the LinkedIn discussion at any time.

5.2   Parliament consults citizens; citizens advise parliament

We start our report on these two families of tools by looking at online consultations organised by parliamentary committees. There have been various cautious experiments with this in the Netherlands. One of the first was the online forum zowilikouderworden.nl (*zo wil ik ouder worden* means 'This is how I'd like to grow old'), organised in 2004 by the House of Representatives' Elderly Policy Theme Committee (Tweede Kamer, 2005). Below, we discuss the online consultation organised in late 2013 by the House's European Affairs Committee. The UK House of Commons has also organised various online consultations since 2000. We describe some of them here. We then discuss two well-known projects abroad that are each other's opposite when it comes to their 'ownership' by parliament. The first is the G1000 experiment in Belgium, which took place in 2011-2012. This online consultation was not a parliamentary initiative, but rather a citizens' initiative aimed at the Belgian parliament. The next project concerns the new constitution of Iceland (2010-

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[20] http://academievoorwetgeving.nl/event/actualiteit-wetgeven-via-linkedin

2011). The draft version of the constitution was written by an assembly of 25 citizens set up by Iceland's parliament. The project gained attention because it made use of crowdsourcing through the new media.

5.2.1 Online consultation by Parliamentary Committee for European Affairs (2013)

In November and December 2013, the Dutch Parliamentary Committee for European Affairs held an online consultation about the role that the House of Representatives might play in European Union policymaking. The consultation targeted 'engaged and interested citizens' and its aim was to generate 'inventive and specific solutions that can help narrow the divide between citizens and European lawmakers'. As background, the committee explained that it had asked its chairperson, René Leegte (VVD/conservative liberal party) to formulate a broadly supported opinion for the House about the EU's democratic legitimacy, and especially the role of national parliaments in that regard, based on conversations with the consultation participants. The Committee came up with a number of questions but also made it possible for participants to comment on matters unrelated to these questions. The responses could be sent in by email.

At this moment, there is no data available on the participants and number of responses, the nature of those responses, and how they are being processed. The Committee's report only offers a general indication of the number of participants ('dozens'). It is therefore impossible to evaluate this experiment in any detail. We can, however, comment on the consultation's design in relation to our criteria.

The first notable point is that the questions are rather sophisticated in nature. They assume that the respondents are well acquainted with parliament's procedures and its ability to influence EU matters (including the 'yellow card' and possible 'green card' procedures). That means there is a considerable chance that only a limited segment of society will have been able to participate in the experiment. Second, the legitimacy of the experiment is questionable. The participants communicate only by sending in their responses. They are unable to read one another's responses and there is no opportunity to engage in dialogue. Finally, nothing is said about feedback being offered either to the respondents or in a public document. However, the participants were probably aware that the Committee would take their responses into account in its report.[21]

5.2.2 Online consultations by UK House of Commons committees

Description
Starting in 1999, various UK House of Commons committees have consulted the general public or specific target groups online. The aim of these consultations was to hear what the people had to

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[21] The report, entitled *Voorop in Europa* (Ahead in Europe) (May 2014), refers to the online consultation. The background section of the report claims that dozens of citizens and experts have provided input: http://www.tweedekamer.nl/images/Voorop_in_Europa_rapport_181-238512.pdf

say and to listen to their stories, and to exploit the specific expertise of direct stakeholders. The consultations covered here took the shape of web forums, thereby making dialogue possible. In its report *Connecting Parliament with the Public* (2003/2004), the Modernisation of the House of Commons Select Committee recommended using online consultations because regular hearings usually only heard the testimonies of experts and interest groups.

The Hansard Society, an organisation dedicated to supporting representative democracy, was commissioned to come up with an approach. Between 1999 and 2003, it ran various online consultations in order to test their feasibility. The online consultation in 2000 of women survivors of domestic violence *(*Womenspeak*)* was a breakthrough (Coleman 2004; Smith 2009). It consisted of a secure online forum that allowed women to contribute anonymously. The consultation was designed to enable these women to submit experiential testimony (for example about crisis services) to a group of parliamentarians interested in developing policy. A permanent online facility, TellParliament.net*,* was set up between 2003 and 2005 for four pilots (Ferguson 2006).

After this period, there were frequent online consultations. Womenspeak was repeated in 2008 and now included 'honour'-based violence and forced marriage. The previous year, there was an online consultation of children who had been victims of domestic violence (Kidspeak). Other examples include online consultations of prison officers and a consultation on the future of the Post Office.[22] Recent consultations concerned access to transport for people with disabilities, care and support legislation (aimed at care providers), and UK consular services.[23] The consultations were run in addition to regular hearings. It is notable how often online consultations target specific groups of respondents.

Those aimed at gathering experiential testimony function well. Less successful are opinion-forming consultations that do not target any specific group (source: interview M. Instone).

The Commons is currently attempting to run web forums on 'third party sites' (online platforms belonging to civil society organisations and other groups). The idea is to reach out to target groups in their customary online environments.

The final case study concerns crowdsourcing. This is a question of co-creation in which citizens are invited to contribute to a public event, in this case a parliamentary hearing. On 31 January 2012, the Commons Education Committee held an 'evidence session' with the Secretary of State for Education Michael Gove. The Committee wanted to base its enquiry on questions raised by members of the public. The Committee received more than 5000 tweets at #AskGove within the

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[22] Sources: http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200708/cmselect/cmhaff/263/26318.htm
Hansard Society (2011): http://www.hansardsociety.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2012/10/Parliaments-and-Public-Engagement-2012.pdf
[23] http://www.parliament.uk/business/committees/committees-a-z/commons-select/transport-committee/inquiries/parliament-2010/disabled-access-to-transport/web-forum/
http://www.parliament.uk/business/committees/committees-a-z/joint-select/draft-care-and-support-bill/web-forum/
http://www.parliament.uk/business/committees/committees-a-z/commons-select/foreign-affairs-committee/inquiries1/parliament-2010/consular-services/web-forum/

specified five-day period; these included questions that the Commons and experts would not have thought of themselves (source: interview M. Instone). The Committee's staff sorted the questions by subject. During the session, the Committee members asked questions that had been informed by the tweets. In the second part of the session, Mr Gove was asked 'rapid fire questions' taken directly from the tweets. A video recording of the session was uploaded to YouTube.[24]

Evaluation

Effectiveness

The literature concerning these consultations turns all its attention to the Womenspeak project. The project led Coleman (2004) to conclude that online parliamentary consultations create opportunities for meaningful communication between ordinary citizens and politicians. Womenspeak gave the participating women a chance to be heard. Their testimonies helped MPs understand the problems that they face and what they want.[25] For the participants, the most successful aspect of Womenspeak was that they were able to offer one another support. There was a high level of interaction between the participating women. They found the experience empowering. Crowdsourcing questions for Mr Gove's evidence session also gave the Education Committee a better understanding of the experiences and concerns of teachers and parents. Sorting the submissions did require a major investment in staff capacity, one of the biggest problems when using crowdsourcing.

Representativeness

It was no easy matter to recruit women survivors of domestic violence for Womenspeak. The Hansard Society recruited the participants in partnership with Women's Aid, an organisation trusted by the target group members. The participants came from throughout England and Wales, with a demographically typical spread of ages and ethnic backgrounds. Prior to the consultation, participants had access to trained workers who helped them use the online forum.

Just under two hundred women registered and participated online and submitted 960 messages. Around 73 percent of users visited the site at least six times, and 18 percent at least ten times. The consultation lasted a month. These figures indicate an intensive level of use. More than three quarters of the participating women lived outside London. There were many low-income participants and single mothers, so the opportunity to participate in a parliamentary consultation without travelling to London was a huge advantage. In addition, many women would not have wanted their names listed as witnesses (Coleman & Blumler 2009, p. 93).

Legitimacy

It is clear that the Womenspeak forum made parliament more accessible to the public. About 58 percent of the participants had never communicated with an MP before. A considerable majority were not politically active. The Womenspeak forum and Mr Gove's evidence session also get

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[24] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gKsApHH0yY8
[25] http://www.womensaid.org.uk/domestic-violence-articles.asp?section=00010001002200390001&itemid=1200

positive marks for 'openness of the agenda'. The participants were more critical about the level of politicians' participation, however. That is why when the online consultation on domestic violence was repeated in 2008, the committee members felt more motivated to take part in the discussion and to show that they were listening to and learning from the responses.

Regarding the criterion 'quality of participation', the case studies have produced a valuable insight. We can distinguish three levels of 'democratic experience', a concept borrowed from In 't Veld (2013). The lowest level is the contribution of a citizen that remains individual and cannot be shared with fellow-citizens. We see this type in the online consultation by the Parliamentary Committee for European Affairs (email without publication on a web forum). A richer democratic experience is when participants can see one another's contributions. The highest level is online dialogue. The House of Commons' consultations initially included dialogue. It has now set its sights lower; the intended dialogue has lost momentum, in part because MPs failed to participate (source: interview M. Instone). Transparency has remained, however, thanks to responses being placed on the website and, in the case of the evidence session, on YouTube.

Quality of parliament's work
The Hansard Society's evaluation report on the second pilot phase contains positive statements about what the consultations have yielded for the House of Commons, in particular a new understanding of the quality of parliament's work (Ferguson 2006, p. 12):

> '*We undoubtedly got some views that we wouldn't otherwise have heard, some of which were worth hearing and some of which missed the point…*' [clerk]

> '*All I can say is that the nature and experiences mediated through the contributions were quite often of a different nature from the, sort of, institutional contributions we would normally expect to get.*' [clerk]

This effect was also felt in the case of the evidence session. The input of ordinary citizens was therefore a valuable addition to that of the usual intermediary organisations. The influence that the consultations exercised on the committees' decision-making was limited or indirect, however. In only one instance was there evidence of a demonstrable impact.

5.2.3   The G1000 in Belgium

Description
The two initiators of the G1000 were writer David van Reybrouck and radio columnist Paul Hermant. After a few months, a group of 27 people had formed an initiative group, whose members included journalists and scientists. It was during this period (following the 2010 elections) that Belgium set the world record for time taken to form a government: 'The citizens had voted and could only stand by and watch while a handful of political leaders attempted to form a government to no avail' (Bell et al. p. 6). The initiators designed a project whose main purpose was to demonstrate the value of deliberative democracy (i.e. democracy based on dialogue).

The project consisted of three phases. The first was an online consultation that served to set the agenda. The initiators launched a website where the public could submit statements identifying what they considered significant societal issues. The site received 5400 submissions. The statements were subjected to an online vote that attracted 25,000 participants. That produced a list of 25 issues that received the highest number of votes. Another online vote was then held, with 8000 people participating. Both votes were open to everyone. The second vote produced three issues to be deliberated during a 'Civic Summit': 1) social security, 2) immigration and 3) prosperity in a time of financial crisis.

The second phase was the one-day Civic Summit. More than 700 citizens gathered at a single physical location to come up with solutions to the three problems. They were recruited by random sampling (based on phone numbers). The meeting took place in Brussels on 11 November 2011. Hundreds of tables had been set up in a large hall; each table could accommodate ten participants. A thousand people received invitations, and 704 actually attended. A moderator was put in charge of each table. Experts provided information on the issues during the initial plenary session. IT facilities during the meeting allowed suggestions to be transmitted to a central desk. The suggestions that gained the most support were projected onto a screen. At the end of the meeting, participants used voting machines to vote for their favourite solutions.

The third phase consisted of a citizen panel made up of 32 people who met on three weekends (September to November 2012) to develop the solutions into specific proposals. The members were selected at random from among the Civic Summit participants who had volunteered for the panel. On 11 November 2012, the participants handed their recommendations to the speakers of the Belgian parliament.

Evaluation

Effectiveness and legitimacy
In view of the initiators' aims, the criteria 'effectiveness' and 'legitimacy' are the same in this project. Our evaluation has produced mixed results. The G1000 scores high marks for influencing the agenda, but only the project agenda, not the parliamentary one. There was a good level of citizen participation in the sense that the Civic Summit approach gave participants the opportunity to make a meaningful contribution. A group of international observers was positive about the procedure itself (G1000 final report, pp. 104-106), although it criticised the role of the central desk in clustering proposals (not transparent enough) and the expert input (subject matter not diverse enough). The experiment gets poor marks for responsiveness, however. The political parties did not follow up on the recommendations in any way whatsoever. Earlier studies have shown that the biggest weakness of citizen forums is that their results have very little political impact (Smith 2009), and that includes forums that the executive or politicians have set up themselves, let alone citizen forums (like the G1000) that are citizen-initiated. This risk factor was there from the very start. The

organisers succeeded in demonstrating the value of deliberative democracy, but their experiment did nothing to show how this form of democracy can be joined to representative democracy.[26]

Representativeness

The one thousand people selected for the Civic Summit were representative of the overall population in terms of education, age category, gender, and region (Flanders, Wallonia). The cooperation of intermediary organisations was sought to recruit participants from ethnic minorities. Even when random sampling is applied, representativeness is always less than ideal because those selected cannot be compelled to take part. This means that a certain amount of self-selection plays a role. Quite a large number of G1000 participants ultimately dropped out. The fact that almost 300 selected participants did not turn up was also due to unforeseen circumstances, for example disrupted train service.

Quality of parliament's work

There was no confrontation between the opinions put forward by citizens and those held by parliamentarians. The project results played no demonstrable role in parliamentary debate. The silence of representatives concerning the results leads us to conjecture that they regarded the G1000 as a disruption rather than an enrichment of parliament's work (Caluwaerts & Reuchamps 2015).

5.2.4   Icelanders draft a new constitution

Description

In 2008, Iceland was hit by a banking crisis that took the country's economy to the very brink of ruin. An enquiry committee set up by the Icelandic parliament, the Althingi, found a systematic lack of transparency, accountability and oversight of power in the banking industry, and attributed these faults to a political culture that permitted such abuses to flourish. The public agitated for fundamental reforms. It wanted to rewrite the constitution based on new political and moral values. The newly elected Althingi decided to assign the task of drafting a constitution to a constitutional assembly of 25 people elected by popular vote. In early November 2010, a government-organised forum of 950 randomly selected delegates met for one day. The forum laid down certain key provisions that had to be included in the new constitution. Three weeks later, there were national elections for the 'constitutional assembly' (CAC). Voter turnout was 37 percent. Owing to (alleged) irregularities, the Supreme Court of Iceland declared the election null and void, whereupon the Althingi simply appointed the 25 candidates who had been elected by the people to the constitutional assembly.

This project came to international attention because the constitutional assembly made use of online and social media crowdsourcing.

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[26] In his book *Tegen verkiezingen* (Against elections) (2013), Van Reybrouck argues in favour of a 'bi-representative system' in Belgium, i.e. a parliament in which representation is achieved through two methods: elections and random selection. The Senate would consist entirely of citizens selected at random.

The constitutional assembly divided its work into different phases. In the first round, it published draft articles of the new constitution every week on its website. Citizens were invited to make comments and suggestions – and not only Icelanders responded, but also people abroad. In the second round, the assembly published the amended versions of the articles, once more inviting comments and feedback. In the final round, the assembly discussed the proposed amendments article by article, and then voted on the final draft.

By the end of July 2011, the constitutional assembly was ready to present its draft to parliament, along with a number of far-reaching proposals mainly concerning the electoral system and the ownership and management of natural resources. The draft constitution met with vigorous resistance from politicians and interest groups, especially the fishing industry. The parliamentary deliberations were troubled. On 20 October 2012, a non-binding referendum was held in which voters could speak their minds about the draft constitution as a whole and about five key issues. This time, voter turnout was 49 percent. The yes camp won on every issue. Regarding the general question ('Do you wish the Constitutional Assembly's proposals to form the basis of a new draft Constitution?'), the yes camp won 67 percent of the vote; regarding the more specific points, the percentages ranged from 57 to 83 percent.[27]

The new government that took office following the 2013 elections has established a committee to prepare further decision-making about the new constitution. The committee published a provisional report in spring 2014 identifying the constitutional assembly's draft as one of several possible alternatives for a new constitution (source: personal communication by Th. Gylfason, member of the CAC).

Evaluation
Effectiveness and legitimacy
In 2008/2009, Iceland found itself in a situation in which its politicians had lost much of their legitimacy, something of which they were acutely aware. The strategy of writing a draft constitution was effective and could lay claim to legitimacy. Nevertheless, the outcome ran up against considerable resistance from institutionalised political circles. The outcome is still uncertain. This makes the Iceland case study a significant example of the tension that can arise between representative democracy and participative democracy.

Representativeness
Voter turnout for the elections was low. The turnout for the referendum was considerably higher and is similar to turnout in national referendums in other countries. The composition of the constitutional assembly was well-balanced, not in terms of statistical representativeness but in terms of diversity (Gylfason 2013a). Iceland has a high level of internet penetration, with approximately 95 percent of the population being online. This put 5 percent of the population at a disadvantage, but the assembly members also answered letters and took telephone calls. Crowdsourcing produced 323

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[27] The proposal to overhaul the electoral system was passed by a 67% majority, and the proposal on national ownership of natural resources by 83%.

formal proposals and 3600 comments (Gylfason 2013a). There were also a number of suggestions from abroad.

Quality of parliament's work
It is difficult for us to say how much this process influenced the quality of parliament's work. That would require in-depth study. The former constitutional assembly was fiercely critical of parliament's deliberations (Gylfason 2013b).

Dilemmas and Opportunities
The main added value of running online consultations with citizens is that it mobilises specific groups to share their practical experience. In addition, ordinary citizens contribute different perspectives than experts. The literature shows that when ordinary citizens and experts and combine their judgements, the results are qualitatively better than when based on the experts' judgement alone (Surowiecki 2005).[28]

Regarding the political primacy of parliament, the dilemma has been described at length in the literature concerning 'interactive policymaking' (see, e.g., Edelenbos & Monnikhof 2001): if consultations are non-commital, many citizens drop out. On the other hand, politicians cannot be expected to adopt citizen proposals without giving them a second thought. Expectations management is therefore an important point of concern. In turn, it requires politicians to commit themselves beforehand to accepting the intended status and impact of citizens' input, and to communicating about the uptake achieved afterwards.

Parliament's most important opportunity lies in a resurgence of its political primacy, precisely now when the networked society is diverting more and more of its power to the market and to networks of stakeholders and supranational organisations. Citizen participation offers politicians strategic opportunities to boost their freedom to make political decisions and, as a result, to give their political primacy a new burst of energy in the networked society. Online consultations, for example, can give the House of Representatives more opportunities to keep close track of how reform legislation and decentralisation are being implemented. They make it possible for the House to hear the views of specific target groups and to use their experiences to make recommendations or initiate public debate about the concerns that have emerged, without infringing upon the responsibility of individual local councils, for example.

5.3   Open Data and Open Spending as a basis for citizen policy initiatives

Description
If the authorities were to make information about their spending and policy results freely available in the form of open data, citizens would be able to track their activities more directly than is now the case (Netherlands Court of Audit 2014, p. 4). 'Open spending' involves making government

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[28] The assembly that drew up a draft constitution for Iceland was a similarly mixed group.

financial data (budgets, revenue and expenditure) comprehensible. The idea was originally the brainchild of the UK's Open Knowledge Foundation. The OpenSpending initiative was launched in 2009.

Openspending.org has government financial data on 76 countries. Wheredoesmymoneygo.org shows how taxpayer money is spend per UK region in various policy domains, for example 'order and safety', and within that category on 'police', 'prisons', 'the courts' and so on. Maps provide quick access to this information. The Netherlands has Openspending.nl, which now covers all Dutch municipalities, almost all of the 12 provinces, and the water boards. The site explains that this data makes it possible to 'evaluate and monitor government spending' and seek out 'possible cost savings and alternatives'. The Netherlands Court of Audit's *Trendrapport open data 2014* (2014) mentions the British website prescribinganalytics.com. This site gives citizens (especially doctors, technical start-ups and researchers) access to open data about prescribing practices in the National Health Service, so that they can help government identify opportunities for efficiency savings.

Although having a direct line to policymaking government organisations seems like the more obvious route for citizens, open data and open spending also make cooperation between citizens and parliament possible, especially when it comes to agenda-setting initiatives and proposals for new policy that require political backing. We have not found any examples of this in the literature, however.

Evaluation

Open data and open spending initiatives are relatively recent phenomena. Their proponents believe that open data offers enormous economic, societal and democratic advantages. The effects of open data and open spending on democratic scrutiny and citizen participation have yet to become clear, however. Some years ago, Worthy (2013) found that the United Kingdom's open data practices had led government organisations to be somewhat more accountable to the public, but they had not led to citizen participation. Participation was in fact limited to those who were already involved in monitoring government organisations before open data practices had been developed. It is really too early for a proper evaluation, in part because there are still many barriers to publishing data in a user-friendly format (Janssen, Charalabidis & Zuiderwijk 2012). We may therefore question the effectiveness of open data in terms of its usefulness for citizens. When it comes to representativeness, Janssen, Charalabidis & Zuiderwijk (2012, p. 265) refer to the 'myth that assumes that open data users have the resources, expertise and capabilities to make use of the data'. Although much can be done to help users (visualisation is one option), little is known about how to convert open data into something useful for the public. In general, the relevant websites give little sign of having figured this out (Janssen, Charalabidis & Zuiderwijk 2012), and there is no real evidence that open data leads to transparency and accountability in and of itself. And even if transparency is achieved, there is no saying that this will engender more trust in government (Grimmelikhuijsen 2012). The lack of research results in this area means that we cannot say anything conclusive about citizen use of open data and open spending contributing to the quality of parliament's work.

6   Citizen-initiated petitions and bills

Citizens can gain access to decision-making in various ways, sometimes by taking action themselves and sometimes because parliament or the authorities consult them. The examples described in Chapter 5 made this clear. In this chapter, the focus is on citizens' initiatives. Section 1 describes online petitions signed and submitted by Dutch citizens as well as other European e-petition initiatives. Section 2 looks at citizens submitting bills online to parliament.

These initiatives once again show how the dividing line between representative and direct democracy is fading. They can be regarded as forms of 'direct democracy through parliament'.

6.1   E-petitions

Citizens have the constitutional right to sign and submit petitions to government; this is the most low-threshold form of political participation. The procedure for petitioning the Dutch House of Representatives is simple and explained on its website.[29] Online petitions appear to be lowering the threshold even more. Various national parliaments and government offices have launched electronic petition (e-petition) systems. The Scottish Parliament was the first parliament to do so. The Netherlands has the privately run Petities.nl.

6.1.1   Petities.nl

Description
Petities.nl was initiated by the Petities.nl Foundation and launched in 2005. The aim is to make it easy for citizens to sign or start up a petition. Petitioners are responsible for submitting the petition themselves and for amassing political support. The website offers petitioners an instruction manual. Various local and provincial authorities have created separate 'petition desks' on the site to allow people to submit petitions directly to them. The website can also be used to petition the House of Representatives.[30] After submission, the petition is recorded in the parliamentary information system and referred to a parliamentary committee.

Five thousand petitions have been submitted since 2005, with half addressing national and half addressing provincial and local issues. Topping the national list in 2014 was a petition to lower the age at which women are screened for breast cancer, which had more than 395,000 signatures.

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[29] http://www.tweedekamer.nl/hoe_werkt_het/uw_mening_telt/petitie
[30] The editors of Petities.nl normally turn petitions intended for the minister into petitions addressing the House of Representatives, unless they concern an individual case such as the Save Mauro Petition (2011), which protested the deportation of eighteen-year-old Mauro Manuel to Angola.

Evaluation

Effectiveness

Given the aim, which is to make it easier for citizens to start up petitions, e-petitions appear to be an effective digital tool. We know too little about their impact on parliamentary decision-making, however. There is an urgent need to study whether the Dutch e-petition system does in fact have such sweeping effectiveness. Based on the evidence provided by such research, it will then be possible to judge the legitimacy of the system by such standards as fair procedure and responsiveness.

Representativeness

Some 4.8 million people have signed petitions since 2005 (as of mid-April 2014). This number does not stand for 'unique signers', but does indicate how low the threshold is to this form of political participation. There are no statistics available on the attributes of those who submit and sign petitions. We can, however, draw a number of conclusions about the nature of their participation. Many citizens submit a petition and take no further steps, such as contacting the parliamentary parties in the House to lobby for their petition. A vast number of e-petitions addressed to the House of Representatives are, to all intents, 'inactive' for that reason. The website editors have attempted to encourage people on that point.

Legitimacy

Does the petition system help citizens deliver meaningful input for decision-making? The website offers a list of all petitions, whether active, submitted or closed. This makes things more transparent and also encourages people to sign and submit petitions (influence on the political agenda, accessibility). On other measures of legitimacy, however, the House's system for dealing with petitions is open to criticism. Its practices have negative impact on the quality of citizen participation in two ways. First of all, petitioners are often not active enough in building support for their initiative among the parliamentary parties. Only in rare cases do the parties and the petitioners engage in conversation. Second, the parliamentary parties provide virtually no feedback on how they have dealt with petitions. There are occasional signs that petitions are being used, for example when an MP quotes from a petition text (usually without identifying it as such); the petitioners themselves are not aware of this (source: interview M. Rustema). The accountability criterion is therefore not being met, and that makes it impossible to ascertain whether the principle of fair procedure has been followed or whether petitions lead to more responsiveness in the final decisions.

Quality of parliament's work

MPs indicate that they find petitions useful as an 'information-rich way of gauging public sentiment' (source: interview M. Rustema). If MPs were to respond to the *substance* of petitions too, then petitions would improve the quality of parliament's work because they would lead to citizen-parliament interaction.

6.1.2   E-petition systems abroad

Description

Lindner and Riehm (2009) have investigated four case studies in-depth. These are the petition systems run by the Scottish Parliament, the Parliament of Queensland, Germany's Bundestag, and local councils in Norway. Since its founding in 1999, the Scottish Parliament has regarded openness and encouraging participation as 'key principles'. The system operated by the German Bundestag since 2005 is similar to the Scottish system.

The landing page of the Bundestag website, Bundestag.de, gives visitors access to a petition page. Petitions must meet a short list of requirements. Anyone can sign an active petition and take part in the online forum. Visitors can also inspect all petitions that have been closed, as well as the document (accompanying each petition) in which the Bundestag states its decision (always supported by arguments).

Under Prime Minister Tony Blair, Downing Street E-petitions was separate from the House of Commons' system (Wright 2012). It was a low-threshold system, having few rules for submission. More than 33,000 petitions were submitted. A new website has been launched under Prime Minister David Cameron, with the Commons and the Government having joint ownership (Hansard Society 2012).

Evaluation

Effectiveness

Petitions key into the need of citizens to demonstrate their engagement in 'single issue' politics. In reality, immediate results are rare. While Downing Street E-petitions was low-threshold, half of all petitions submitted there were rejected and the response to the vast majority of those accepted was a reference ('signpost') to existing regulations and policymaking (Miller 2009).

Representativeness

Lindner & Riehm (2009) found that men, middle-aged persons, and individuals with an above-average education are overrepresented among petitioners. They conclude that e-petitions have not mobilised non-participating or less privileged social groups in the countries that they studied. Research on those who sign petitions or e-petitions in Germany also reveals an overrepresentation of people with above-average education. Men and women are about equally represented, however, and the share of young people signing petitions is also increasing (Lippa, Kubicek & Bröchler 2009; Lindner & Riehm 2011).

Legitimacy

The petition page on the Bundestag website offers transparency about the associated decision (unlike the Dutch House of Representatives website). In their study, Lindner & Riehm (2009) saw indications that responsiveness was improving, but they do not go into specifics. If responsiveness is in fact increasing, that may be because online petition systems make transparency possible, and transparency increases the pressure to guarantee fair procedure. In their study, Lippa, Kubicek &

Bröchler (2009) point out that German citizens have three main demands for the treatment given their petitions: (1) thoroughness, (2) comprehensible feedback, and (3) a swift reply (non-bureaucratic procedures). The criteria 'fair procedure' and 'accountability' therefore take precedence. What is further notable is that people – even young people – prefer to submit petitions by letter and by putting forward their case in person.

Quality of parliament's work
There has been very little qualitative international research on what is done with petitions, let alone what added value they might have for parliament's work. All the research that we have come across is quantitative in nature, e.g. figures concerning petitions submitted, petitioners and signers. There are therefore few meaningful evidence-based conclusions we can draw about the consequences of petitions for the quality of parliament's work.

Dilemmas and Opportunities

The internet has lowered the barrier to this particular form of citizen action, which is already relatively low-threshold. That raises some dilemmas, however. The first is that although petitions encourage parliament in its representative task, an overload of petitions may very well reduce the quality with which it carries out that task. Another dilemma is that e-petitions may encourage a consumer-like attitude towards politics – we see signs of this in the fact that petitioners often go no further than submitting a petition – and that petition initiators may reject institutional politics if the results turn out disappointing. Both dilemmas show the importance of effective admission requirements, scrupulous procedures, and proper communication with and feedback to petitioners.[31]

6.2   Citizen-initiated bills

Switzerland has had the 'popular initiative' since 1891. In this system, any proposal that collects 100,000 valid signatures in 18 months will be put to a mandatory popular vote. Below we discuss how Finnish citizens can submit bills to their parliament. This is part of a new system that makes use of crowdsourcing.

6.2.1   Crowdsourcing bills: Finland's 'Open Ministry'

Description

Legislation enacted in Finland in 2012 enables what are known as 'citizens' initiatives'. If an initiative collects at least 50,000 signatures within six months, then the Eduskunta (the Finnish parliament) debate the proposal. There are two types of initiatives: (1) initiatives asking the Eduskunta to roll out new policy (similar to the 'agenda initiative' in the Netherlands) and (2) initiatives in which citizens themselves submit a bill to the Eduskunta. A citizens' initiative that has collected enough signatures must undergo the regular legislative process in the Eduskunta.

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[31] German researchers Lippa, Kubicek & Bröchler (2009) suggest that the representative for the electoral district in which one of the petitioners resides should act as the petitioners' 'godparent'/contact person.

Technology experts in Finland have set up an online platform for citizens' initiatives known as the 'Open Ministry' (Aitamurto 2012). The platform helps citizens use crowdsourcing to draft a bill. In other words, online tools are used to collect ideas and for discussion and co-creation purposes. Legal experts test and edit the initiatives pro bono. The very first citizens' initiative was a proposal to ban fur farming. It was rejected by the Eduskunta. Initiatives submitted in 2014 included a bill to legalise same-sex marriage and to introduce new copyright legislation. Crowdsourcing played an important role in the latter initiative.[32]

Evaluation

Effectiveness
Do crowdsourced citizens' initiatives achieve their aims, i.e. the drafting of bills? The answer is yes, although the quality of the bills is not always considered satisfactory. The initiative to legalise same-sex marriage was criticised by the Eduskunta's Legal Affairs Committee for having 'technical deficiencies'. Ultimately, the bill was passed by the Eduskunta in November 2014 by a vote of 105 to 92, after the liberal conservative Prime Minister, Alexander Stubb, spoke out in its favour in an open letter.[33]

In September 2014, the Eduskunta's Culture and Education Committee decided to extend the expert hearings on the copyright initiative. The Open Ministry had been worried about an imbalance in the composition of the group of experts. The Eduskunta ultimately rejected the copyright bill.

Representativeness
Crowdsourcing focuses on generating ideas. The main aim is to encourage diversity, not representativeness. What is vital for diversity is the participation of laypersons (non-experts). Concerning the copyright initiative, which involved 1100 people, Joonas Pekkanen, the founder and chairman of the Open Ministry, commented that it was '*a challenge to get regular people who are not motivated by personal interest to get involved. …[I]t's not a representative sample of the population obviously because people chose to participate and people with their own interests of course were vocal about their needs and requirements for the law.*'[34] A survey of users of the Open Ministry conducted at the end of 2012 indicates that the 21-40 age group, males, university graduates and urban residents are overrepresented compared with the general population (Nurminen, Karjalainen & Christensen, 2013).

Legitimacy
E-initiatives that use crowdsourcing lead to citizens making meaningful contributions to decision-making. This increases both their influence on parliament's agenda and the susceptibility of decision-making to that influence. Pekkanen points out the option of using citizens' initiatives to correct a specific component of existing legislation with which people are dissatisfied.

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[32] http://democracyoneday.com/2013/08/21/what-are-the-finns-up-to/
[33] http://yle.fi/uutiset/committee_chair_blames_gay_marriage_bills_technical_deficiencies_for_rejection/732045
2
   http://www.reuters.com/article/2014/11/28/us-finland-gaymarriage-idUSKCN0JC0YX20141128
[34] http://opengovacademy.com/jooanspekkanenopenministry/

Crowdsourcing makes meaningful participation possible; those citizens who do not wish to be involved in drafting an initiative, however, can take the easier route of simply adding their name to it. If the initiative goes through the regular parliamentary procedure (discussion in committee, expert hearing), then the principle of fair procedure has been followed. Transparency and accountability are promoted because the Open Ministry provides detailed information about parliamentarians' comments and voting records on its website.

Quality of parliament's work
Finland's citizens' initiative impinges on the governmental and parliamentary monopoly on lawmaking and puts a certain amount of pressure on parliament's autonomy because it mobilises a large number of citizens in favour of a bill. Unsurprisingly, Finnish parliamentarians have expressed both support and concern about it; for example, they argue that the Government's lawmaking role is validated by elections and weakened by citizens' initiatives.[35] Conversely, a citizens' initiative can promote interaction between citizens and elected politicians about specific issues.

The degree of pressure placed on parliamentarians depends on the issue. With respect to same-sex marriage, they faced a difficult political choice, given the trend towards legalising gender-neutral marriage across northern Europe and the strong support for the bill (170,000 signatures were collected). The copyright bill was meant to moderate the influence of major companies on copyright, an issue that had sparked lively public debate in Finland. Here too, the Eduskunta faced the challenge of explaining the political choices involved and not simply sufficing with a technical discussion.

Dilemmas and Opportunities
There is some tension here between legitimacy as viewed from the people's perspective (in this case the petitioners and their supporters) and parliament's autonomy. That autonomy is important, for example with a view to protecting the rights of minorities. There is little doubt that these forms of citizen participation stimulate 'one-issue politics'. Therein lies the first dilemma, unless parliamentary parties are able to embed separate issues into a broader political strategy. For them to do that, however, parliament must have sufficient autonomy.

The right to submit petitions and citizens' initiatives can only become institutionalised if there is a realistic possibility of the petitions and initiatives being accepted. That is the second dilemma: if there is no real prospect of acceptance, then parliament runs a major risk of losing the public's trust. On the other hand, guaranteeing fair procedure gives rise to opportunities for citizen-parliament co-creation. In other words, precision work is needed to balance representative and direct democracy when utilising these forms of citizen participation.

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[35] See footnote 32. See also http://www.6d.fi/6d/index.php/feature/40-feature/722-power-to-the-people

7 Political mobilisation through social networks

Social media offer citizens new ways to organise into a countervailing force against government. They do so using their own social networks ('connective action', Bennett & Sederberg 2012). Examples in the Netherlands include mobilisations in 2009 against the inclusion of cervical cancer and H1N1 vaccines in the Dutch State Vaccination Programme, and protests by secondary school pupils in 2007 against a mandatory 1040 lesson hours a year (the '1040 hours minimum'). We situate these forms of mobilisation on the 'advising' rung of the ladder of participation. We can see them as 'unsolicited advice', often taking on the form of protests against government measures. Unlike most of the case studies covered in Chapter 5 (with the exception of the G1000 in Belgium), that advice has not been requested by the executive or by parliament, and unlike the case studies in Chapter 6, these examples also do not concern advice that, although initiated by citizens and arising from a certain form of mobilisation (collection of signatures), is offered within a specific institutional framework, such as the petition process. This chapter is about purely spontaneous civil action.

Sometimes, a petition is used as a mobilisation channel. One example is the '*Zwarte Piet Moet Blijven*' petition (331,000 signatures).[36] The petition was preceded by a Facebook campaign that received 2.1 million 'likes', making it the fastest-growing Dutch Facebook page at the time (October 2013).

In this chapter, we discuss the demonstrations held by secondary school pupils in 2007 against the '1040 hours minimum'. We base the discussion on our own study of how citizens use old and new media in their 'battle for political attention' (Bekkers et al. 2009).

7.1   Pupils demonstrate against the 1040 hours minimum

Description

In 2007, secondary school pupils became exasperated at how schools were dealing with the statutory 1040 hours of teaching per year that they were obliged to schedule for pupils. In 2006, the House of Representatives had ordered the Education Minister to oversee enforcement of this minimum. However, it turned out that many schools were in fact unable to organise enough teaching time to comply the standard and had made all sorts of 'alternative' arrangements instead. Pupils referred to these as 'lockup hours' (*ophokuren*).

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[36] Zwarte Piet' is a figure of Dutch folklore associated with St Nicholas, whose feast day on 6 December is a much-loved national holiday for children. The traditional depiction of Zwarte Piet ('Black Pete') has been under fire in recent years (including from the United Nations) as a racist stereotype. This in turn has led to a grass-roots movement defending the tradition.

The existing national action committee for secondary school pupils, known as LAKS, raised the problem with the state secretary of Education. Her response was disappointing: she insisted that the minimum should be strictly enforced. Policymakers at the Education Ministry thought that presenting a 'Quality Agenda' for education, to which most of the parties involved (including LAKS) had agreed, would resolve matters. The Ministry was therefore taken by surprise by the scale of the pupils' demonstrations (Bekkers et al. 2009).

Local groups of pupils began to organise protests against the standard, in part at the instigation of LAKS. Matters came to a head on 23 November 2007 after a pupil sent a message to his friends network on MSN Messenger. Thousands of pupils throughout the country joined the demonstration. Both old and new media played an important role in this. Social media, especially Hyves (the 'Dutch Facebook', now defunct), MSN Messenger, YouTube and text messaging, helped mobilise pupils. Television reports amplified the events, reinforcing the mobilisation effect of social media (Bekkers et al. 2009).

In its emergency debate on the matter, the majority of the House of Representatives continued to support the state secretary's plans. The final mass demonstration, organised by LAKS, took place on Friday 30 November in Museum Square in Amsterdam. Political support for the 1040 hours minimum began visibly eroding in the first few months of 2008, along with the support of the relevant parties in education. The state secretary opted for a tried-and-tested accommodation strategy. She appointed a committee that launched a series of consultations. In November 2008, it presented an advisory report on the standard that was subsequently adopted by the Cabinet.

Evaluation

Effectiveness
The protests, which were supported by social media, depended on people using their own social networks to mobilise like-minded pupils or to set up a network for like-minded pupils offering them a platform. The campaign was an effective one for LAKS and the participants. Because school administrators and teachers also had serious objections to the standard (and especially the way in which it was enforced), the state secretary ultimately had to back down.

Representativeness
There is no data on the pupils who took part in the protests. We can furthermore qualify the criterion of representativeness, since the value of the campaign lay in its allowing a dissenting voice to be heard.

Legitimacy
Social networks do help citizens make a meaningful contribution to political decision-making. Individuals (in this case, school pupils) who utilise their social networks have an easier time attracting politicians' attention and influencing the political agenda. They also have better access to the political decision-making process. They are able to organise a 'countervailing force' that challenges the closed nature of policymaking processes (Bekkers et al. 2009, pp. 235-236).

Quality of parliament's work

Research has shown that the pupils' demonstrations took policymakers by surprise, strategically speaking, mainly because they were unfamiliar with social media at that point. In this case, it was mainly the Ministry of Education that was strategically unprepared (Bekkers et al. 2009). However, strategic surprises of this kind also give parliamentarians opportunities to communicate with campaigning citizens.

Dilemmas and Opportunities

The speed, scale and relative invisibility of social media mobilisation can take politicians by surprise, more so than in the past. For parliamentarians, the main dilemma is to balance the growing pressure to make decision-making open and interactive against the need to guard their freedom to judge matters for themselves and make their own decisions. The political dilemma is more specific for politicians who support a measure against which citizens have revolted: do they back down, do they resist and contradict, or do they accommodate? This is an age-old dilemma that has been aggravated by the speed of social media.

Social media monitoring, discussed in Chapter 2, is a new tool that allows politicians to track and anticipate undercurrents that could lead to mobilisation in future. The implication, however, is that policymakers must make their decision-making processes more open and interactive (Bekkers et al. 2009, p. 237). That raises specific dilemmas and problems for politicians. Should they or shouldn't they participate in the debate on social media? And if they do, what precisely should they contribute to that debate and which social media applications and web forums should they use?

8   Societal self-organisation

In this chapter, we look at the highest rung on the ladder of participation. Here, citizens take steps to solve societal problems by launching their own autonomous initiatives. The examples given in this chapter show that citizens' initiatives are often the result of dissatisfaction with government policy and distrust of established institutions. Many citizens have simply rejected the world of politics or public domain activities; others take on public tasks themselves, especially if they have access to resources (self-confidence, expertise and networks). The opportunities for communication, knowledge-sharing and visualisation supported by new media can facilitate citizens' initiatives.

Citizens' initiatives come in all shapes and sizes. Some are mainly meant to set the political agenda. In our first case study, a group of citizens created an information system that can compete with the information parliamentarians obtain from official sources. The second case study gives an example of an information system that citizens have compiled themselves from open data sources. In yet other initiatives, citizens take on a task for which the government no longer wants to take responsibility or that they believe can only be done properly with input from the community. In the third case study, people help fight crime by using social media to 'name and shame' perpetrators. In other instances, citizens have taken control of the decision-making and implementation of a public task. The fourth case study, about local energy collectives, is an example of this. It shows what is referred to as the 'participation society' in all its glory. We evaluate the first three case studies as a group and the fourth one separately.

8.1   Three citizens' initiatives

Description

Castricum Region Aircraft Noise Pollution Platform
The Castricum Region Aircraft Noise Pollution Platform (PVRC) was founded in June 2003. One of the main motives was the decision by Amsterdam Schiphol Airport to start using the 'Polder Runway'. According to the Platform, this had led to a sharp increase in aircraft noise pollution in the region. The purpose of the Platform is to limit noise pollution caused by aircraft flying in and out of Schiphol Airport. It aims to achieve this through publicity and set up a website for that purpose, Vlieghinder.nl. The Platform also joined forces with Geluidsnet ('Noisenet') – a foundation (now a private company) that installs and manages strategically placed unmanned noise meters – to design an online system that tracks flight movements live in Google Earth (radar.vlieghinder.nl). The website was set up not only to inform but also to mobilise citizens in a way that will influence political decision-making.

Open data: GGB Induced Earthquakes portal
Groninger Bodem Beweging (GBB) – which stands for 'Groningen Earth Movement' – was set up in 2009. It represents the victims of gas extraction in the Groningen gas field, a giant natural gas field

located in the north-eastern Dutch Province of Groningen. One of the GBB's aims is to make information available on its 'induced earthquakes portal' (http://opengis.eu/gasbevingen/). The portal features diagrams with information about gas extraction and its consequences. It also has a number of interactive maps, based (largely) on open data, showing where earthquakes have occurred in the north of the Netherlands. The only data not publicly available comes from the NAM (Nederlandse Aardolie Maatschappij), an exploration and production company and Shell/ExxonMobil joint venture) and concerns damage claims and subsidence (Algemene Rekenkamer 2014). The GBB's purpose is to inform citizens, the media and politicians. It also uses this strategy to exert political pressure.

Citizens posting photographs of rioters online
In June 2011, widespread riots broke out in Vancouver, Canada, immediately after a crucial ice hockey match in which the Vancouver team lost the Stanley Cup to Boston. Victims posted photographs and uploaded videos online in an effort to track down, threaten or punish the culprits. Social media, it seemed, was being used to play judge and jury. One of the biggest risks of posting such images was that innocent bystanders caught on camera were depicted as perpetrators.

Whether ordinary people should be able to post images of perpetrators online has also come up in the Netherlands. In 2011, the Data Protection Authority of the Netherlands advocated imposing large fines in such cases because these posts violated the right to privacy. There have been several instances of individuals or organisations placing photographs of perpetrators online in recent years. Examples are images of burglars uploaded by the Dutch Homeowners Association, a supermarket manager who put photographs of pickpockets online, and an Amsterdam hotel that released images of men who had carried out a hold-up. These incidents became a topic of public debate and a national political issue. In 2011, the House of Representatives passed a motion allowing citizens to put images of attackers and suspects online under certain conditions.

Evaluation
Effectiveness
Do the tools described in the foregoing actually work? Do they achieve what their initiators envisaged? The examples above show that the internet and social media do in fact increase the political pressure that this form of self-organisation can bring to bear. The information-sharing and visualisation capabilities are an important factor. In that sense, these initiatives are effective for citizens. Ultimately, however, their effectiveness depends on how the political world deals with their results.

Representativeness
Representativeness is important mainly in issues where differing perceptions of the problem influence the quality of the campaign and the support that it amasses. That is probably more so in the case of putting photographs of perpetrators online (and generally in citizen's safety-related initiatives) than in the case of aircraft noise pollution. Assuming that there is broad public support for limiting noise pollution, all that matters is the quality of the data, and not the social traits of the citizens who collect that data. That is otherwise when the issue is safety, because different people experience and perceive safety differently. Studies on safety projects in disadvantaged

neighbourhoods reveal that citizen participation depends mainly on the decisiveness of professionals and the active recruitment of citizens (Van Stokkom & Toenders 2010, p. 99).

Legitimacy
The forms of self-organisation that we have discussed here are, first of all, used to set the political agenda. In other words, they place the power to do so in the hands of the people and therefore create more opportunities to increase the level of accessibility. The quality of citizen participation is good owing to the wide array of substantive and organisational tasks. Information provision initiatives, whether or not they make use of open data, are conducive to transparency.

Quality of parliament's work
The initiatives described above leave parliamentarians enough freedom to act in their professional capacity. The initiatives described in the first two case studies can serve as alternative sources of information for parliament alongside the official channels. Provided they meet certain quality criteria, such initiatives can enrich parliament's work, especially in terms of its scrutiny and deliberation tasks.

8.2   Local sustainable energy collectives

Description
Recent years have seen a rising number of 'local energy collectives' (LDEs) in the Netherlands. The members of these self-organised collectives function as producers and consumers of sustainable energy ('prosumers') and decision-makers. LDEs are non-profit organisations; they come up with their own technical and organisational solutions and in doing so create their own revenue models (Ahrens et al. 2013).

ICT is indispensable to how LDEs operate, first of all when it comes to organisational development, knowledge-building and external communication. For example, knowledge-clustering is supported by a website, Hieropgewekt.nl. Second, ICT tools allow the LDEs to align the various energy flows, for example between supply and demand (smart grids) and between measured energy use and recovered energy. The collectives also benefit from their use of open data. One example is information on zoning plans for unused plots of land. LDEs can use these to identify sites for wind turbines or solar panels (Ahrens et al. 2013, p. 27). We view the entire set of ICT applications tailored to LDEs as a 'member' of the family of tools utilised in citizens' initiatives where citizens take on a public task themselves.

The rise of LDEs is helping to create a new playing field in the Dutch energy economy. Other factors are the growing level of policy coordination between stakeholders at national level, as illustrated by the STROOM project (see Chapter 5), and the increasing pressure to develop a Europe-wide energy policy. Parliament is also affected by these changes in the playing field.

Evaluation
Effectiveness

It is difficult in our evaluation to disassociate the effectiveness of the LDEs' ICT use from the effectiveness of LDEs themselves. There has also been very little research on this subject. In analysing the effectiveness of the collectives, including their use of ICT, we have to look not only at their own strength but also at their partnerships with local businesses and institutions and the level of support and cooperation they receive from local councils.

Representativeness
Citizens who initiate LCDs contribute different types of knowledge and experience. In general, they have higher education degrees (Ahrens et al. 2013). The challenge is to extend the appeal of the collectives to a broader target group.

Legitimacy
LDEs derive their 'internal' legitimacy from the commitment and mutual trust of their members. That commitment and trust are also decisive for the quality of citizen participation. Along with responsiveness (the custom services that the energy collectives provide versus the demand for energy and the relevant citizens' convictions about energy provision), these are the most important contributions that LDEs make to legitimacy. The quality of the cooperation between LDEs and the local council is decisive for the development of a local, sustainable energy policy that has broad support in the community.

Quality of parliament's work
Local sustainable energy collectives tend to focus first and foremost on local councils. The Government and parliament are responsible for the nation's energy policy. For parliament, that responsibility is expressed in the following roles: (1) lawmaking and amending existing legislation and policy, giving LDEs sufficient freedom to operate, (2) critically tracking the national government's efforts regarding local sustainable energy supply, and (3) (in its representative role) encouraging citizens, and especially LDEs, to give feedback and building support for sustainable energy generation (UNDP/Climate Parliament, 2013). Parliament can also use digital tools in this third role.

Dilemmas and Opportunities
Politicians are promoting their vision of self-reliant citizens and a 'participation society', but citizens' initiatives can, in turn, pose a challenge to politicians in various ways. Our examples show that citizens can wield their own sources of information against expertise and data that has the institutional seal of approval, or that they can take control in opposing existing policy. (Examples related to refugee shelters and aid would be appropriate additions to the third case study, for instance.) Politicians can impose conditions, for example if it becomes necessary to designate the constitutional limitations, such as the protection of privacy.

Citizens' initiatives that fall into the same category as LDEs – including those in the healthcare sector ('local healthcare collectives') – change the playing field in a particular policy domain. The challenge (and opportunity) for government and the 'major players' is to give these initiatives the freedom they need to grow to maturity. If our 'participation society' does not offer them that

freedom, then parliament can cast itself in the role of their advocate. That assumes that parliament will encourage feedback from local communities to support its scrutiny of the national government.

9 Democratic innovations in political parties

People are becoming less interested in joining and participating in the work of political parties. However, it is difficult to imagine a democracy without political parties and this report is not meant to launch a discussion of that kind. More interesting for our purposes is to discuss which standards of representation and representative democracy are possible, how political parties fit into that picture, and how they can 'revitalise' themselves, for example by making use of digital tools (ROB 2014). Leyenaar, Van Wijngaarden & Franje (2012) argue that political parties should be setting up theme groups, for example on LinkedIn or Facebook. Such groups could function as a component of 'nodal democracy' (see also ROB 2012). Our case study on the LinkedIn energy policy discussion (Chapter 5) shows that this medium has real potential.

Dutch political parties have not had much experience yet with digital tools. One recent effort (2012) was the PvdA/Labour Party's crowdsourcing initiative, '*Doe mee met Diederik*' ('Join Diederik', i.e. Diederik Samson, the Labour Party leader). The party invited citizens to share ideas and suggestions for 'making the Netherlands a better place' and to vote on other people's ideas. The 25 most popular ideas and 25 ideas selected by party elites were then put to a vote. The ten winners were discussed at a national party conference. There was nothing sensational about these ideas, as they were already open to public debate or were simply alternative versions of other proposals.[37]

Below we look in more detail at how the Pirate Party Germany uses Liquid Feedback, a digital platform for sharing opinions and decision-making that applies the 'Liquid Democracy' concept.[38] In this chapter we are once again standing on the 'co-decision-making' rung (combined with co-creation) of the ladder of participation, because as autonomous organisations, political parties nurture representative democracy and, in particular, the judgement of their representatives in parliament.

Liquid Democracy is designed to facilitate grassroots decision-making. One of its key elements is 'delegated voting'. All qualified voters have the option of casting their own vote on a specific agenda item or entrusting someone else to vote on their behalf. Voters can reclaim their delegated vote at any time (with just a mouse click). Liquid Feedback encourages voting but also dialogue. There are digital systems other than Liquid Feedback for opinion-sharing and decision-making in political parties. The Pirate Party Netherlands, for example, uses the Loomio system (www.loomio.org).

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[37] http://www.frankwatching.com/archive/2012/06/14/via-crowdsourcing-naar-verkiezingsprogramma/
[38] https://liqd.net/en/schwerpunkte/theoretische-grundlagen/, http://wiki.piratenpartei.de/Liquid_Democracy.

9.1   Liquid Democracy in the Pirate Party Germany

Description

The Pirate Party was founded in Sweden in 2006. Its programme is predominately concerned with the protection of personal privacy, the reform of copyright and patent law, and direct democracy. The party gained a foothold in Germany in 2009, first in the state of Berlin. Key party issues are copyright and transparency. The Pirate Party makes extensive use of new technology to communicate and collaborate on policymaking. One of its most popular online platforms is PiratePad, a collaborative text editor. Party members use it alongside chat rooms, wikis and mailing lists to work together on policies. They have also experimented with the Liquid Feedback platform.[39]

Members of the Pirate Party Germany can also use these tools to adapt the party platform to reflect new insights. Unlike other communication channels, Liquid Feedback is reserved for party members. The public can, however, keep track of the proceedings.

Odenbach (2012) studied how the Pirate Party of Berlin used Liquid Feedback to draw up its basic programme in 2010. Our evaluation is based on his book. Since then, the Pirate Party of Berlin has encountered several problems in its attempts to implement the system. A few months before we finished our research (August 2015), the board of the Pirate Party of Berlin decided to discontinue the system for the time being.[40]

Evaluation

Effectiveness

Odenbach is positive about the effectiveness of Liquid Feedback, especially because it made structured but open communication about the programme possible. Compare this to the somewhat chaotic communication style of the Pirate Party, and the restricted, hierarchically-routed style of communication in traditional political parties. He also notes that the system fosters constructive discussion, curtailing the scope for emotional or personal confrontation. The participants that he interviewed also appreciated this aspect of the system (p. 83). Decision-making ultimately took place at a party conference, but the foregoing discussions and votes served to structure matters ahead of time (pp. 90-91).

Representativeness

We apply the criterion of representativeness in this instance to the 'breadth' of participation in the party. Ensuring that participants accurately represent the composition of the population raises an entirely different issue, i.e. the representativeness of members of political parties – in this case, the Pirate Party. It is, however, useful to ask which digital tools a political party can use to attract people from population groups that are underrepresented in its membership.

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[39] https://liqd.net/en/schwerpunkte/theoretische-grundlagen/
http://wiki.piratenpartei.de/Liquid_Democracy. The SPD and the Greens are experimenting with a system based on Adhocracy, a user-friendlier alternative to Liquid Feedback.
[40] http://newspiratenparteide.soup.io/post/603454196/Aussetzung-der-SMVB
https://berlin.piratenpartei.de/allgemein/lmv-smv-mehr-partizipation-aber-wie/

Odenbach estimates that of the 654 party members resident in the state of Berlin, 100 to 150 took an active part in drawing up the basic programme. These figures do not lead him to conclude that the party's approach fostered a broader level of participation among its members than comparable offline organisations (p. 98). The system's transparency does, however, give members additional opportunities to participate, i.e. by allowing them to observe the activities of those actually taking part, with the option of intervening.

Odenbach notes that the circle of Liquid Feedback participants accurately reflects the group of members present in the 'real world' within the party. One explanation is that party members who come across technical or content-related problems tend to tackle them by communicating with fellow members in their real-life networks. Liquid Feedback also puts a serious dent in the influence of established party officials. Although the circle of participants reflects the group of active members in real life, it does not overlap with the group of members who have official party posts. Every party member has direct access to the circle of active Liquid Feedback participants. That undercuts the party hierarchy, with the prospect of an evolution towards a 'post-bureaucratic organisation'.

Legitimacy
We can conclude from the preceding that Liquid Feedback contributes to the legitimacy of the decision-making process. It improves access to that process and the quality of participation. One major plus is that the system promotes transparency, including to the world outside. There is a risk that delegated voting will allow delegates to accumulate influence (voting rights). Should anyone abuse the system in this way, however, he or she will forfeit all trust once their strategy has been noticed (p. 85).

Quality of parliament's work
Liquid Feedback makes it possible for parliamentarians (or aspiring parliamentarians) and regular party members to share and debate their opinions. Having that possibility is conducive to the quality of the work undertaken by the Pirate Party's representatives in parliament. Conversely, the work of Pirate Party parliamentarians may be complicated by the fact that Liquid Feedback makes it easier for the party to alter its platform between election cycles. Other parliamentary parties may take issue with a change in the Pirate Party platform, but if the party's base clearly supports that change, it will not necessarily lose its credibility with voters.

Dilemmas and Opportunities
Liquid Feedback makes it possible for political parties to improve the accessibility and transparency of decision-making and the quality of members' participation. As explained above, it can force a breakthrough in the relationship between the party elite and the base. It also raises a few dilemmas that were a particular point of discussion at national level, when the Pirate Party was considering working with the platform. The first dilemma is that between transparency and privacy – a very sensitive issue within the Pirate Party. Being transparent about party members' opinions and decision-making behaviour may generate information that those concerned regard as a violation of privacy. Another dilemma is that delegates who have been entrusted with the votes of other members may accumulate influence and end up creating an informal 'opposition'. In that sense, a tool meant to boost internal democracy would have the opposite effect. Odenbach identifies a third

dilemma. He believes that the success of Liquid Feedback depends mainly on mutual trust, and mutual trust is easier to build in real life. Because they are on a smaller scale, cities like Berlin offer more favourable conditions for building trust than the national state. At that smaller scale, the 'organisation' is more deeply embedded in a 'community' (pp. 106-107). That, in turn, leads to the following dilemma. By operating as the *Netzpartei* (the 'networked party'), the Pirate Party exposes itself to two opposing forces: on the one hand, egalitarian communities can be locally structured and stabilised thanks to digital communication; on the other hand, on large-scale communication platforms (such as a national political party), the power of social media can mobilise spontaneous countervailing forces that in fact have a destabilising effect. 'The Pirate Party faces the challenge of developing an organisational form that will bring these opposing features ... into balance' (p. 109).

10 Conclusions

The present report has reviewed a large number of digital citizen participation tools now in use in parliamentary democracy. We have organised them into a series of 'families' using the concept of the ladder of participation. This is a typology of democratic practices arranged in a ladder pattern, with each rung corresponding to a level of citizen participation. The ladder of participation used here has five rungs: (1) information, (2) consultation, (3) advising, (4) co-production or co-creation, and (5) co-decision-making. Appendix 2 reviews the families of tools covered in this study.

In this chapter we summarise the main dilemmas and opportunities associated with these tools. We then suggest four components that together constitute a strategic approach to using digital tools in support of parliamentary citizen participation.

10.1 Main opportunities and dilemmas associated with digital tools supporting citizen participation

Internet and social media use by politicians

Political parties wage a 'permanent campaign' in which they make use of digital political marketing strategies. These strategies allow the party to align its political programme and the personality and performance of its leader with the preferences of voters to whom it wishes to appeal.

Parliamentarians who use social media also tend to have political marketing in mind. Members of the Dutch House of Representatives use social media (Twitter) mainly to tell the outside world what they do and to keep track of fellow politicians and journalists. Parliamentary parties also make use of social media monitoring to track what voters are saying about politically relevant issues on social media.

These practices help define the arena in which parliamentary democracy operates. They turn public opinion into a compass with which representatives align the exercise of their mandate. That is not so much the result of social media use as a consequence of the interaction between social media and traditional media.

The main dilemma for politicians who use social media is the tension between wanting to follow the dictates of public opinion and one's constituents (on the one hand) and showing political leadership by pointing the way towards solutions that have so far failed to convince the majority of voters (on the other). Opportunities lie in making interactive use of social media, with MPs using networks as a personal digital platform for querying citizens and testing out their ideas. The extent to which that is possible depends on the chosen medium (Twitter, Facebook, blogs, Google Hangouts, etc.).

Information provision about parliamentary politics

The next group of digital tools provides citizens with information about parliamentary politics. First of all, there are the voting advice applications, which are meant to help voters make an informed choice during an election and to let them know what views political parties hold. In addition, there are websites that reveal what parliamentarians do and how they vote.

These types of websites are still in their infancy in the Netherlands. One dilemma is that 'barebones' transparency about voting records is not useful to citizens, whereas (more useful) curated data may involve all sorts of subjective design choices. Examples from abroad, including the UK website TheyWorkForYou.com, offer a possible format. The majority of the UK site's users give the information it provides high marks. Half the respondents believe that the website led to an improved opinion about their representatives. Users with a higher education degree are very much overrepresented, however. The question then is whether these sorts of websites (in their present 'design') mainly satisfy the information demands of high-educated users. Another dilemma is that these websites put pressure on MPs to feel accountable, with adverse effects if they then adjust their behaviour to conform to the indicators against which they are being assessed and compared. These effects led to some discussion about TheyWorkForYou.com.

More transparency concerning both voter preferences and politicians' intentions and deeds may help reduce the information deficit in the relationship between politicians and voters. It may also help improve political accountability. But it also raises a dilemma: what is the relationship between an information system that is (unilaterally) focused on improving transparency in order to match a party's specific policy views with the electorate's policy preferences and the autonomy of elected representatives? Does it not put too many restrictions on that autonomy? It may also put pressure on the mandate model of political representation, in which voters trust a political party to pursue a specific course of action based on its election programme, with those elected still having some freedom to exercise their own judgement. Instead, it tends to favour the delegation model, in which citizens give politicians specific 'policy assignments' and hold them accountable for the outcome.

Citizens question representatives

When the House of Representatives is open to the public's questions, opinions and proposals, citizens can influence the parliamentary agenda, help shape political opinion, and see the outcome of their influence in the decisions that are ultimately taken.

With regard to citizens' questioning representatives, the German website Abgeordnetenwatch.de offers a successful example. The website makes it possible for visitors to ask questions, but also subjects those questions to strict moderation. Approximately 80 per cent of the questions submitted receive answers. Research has shown that the quality of both the questions and the answers is good. The advantage of such digital platforms for parliamentarians is that they can use them to gauge public sentiment. They can also attract voters' attention to themselves. Of those who submit questions, however, people with a higher education degree are overrepresented (although somewhat less so than in the group submitting messages to the UK website

TheyWorkForYou.com). MPs can use the input in political discourse, in lawmaking, and in their scrutiny of government.

The biggest dilemma is that between (a high level of) accessibility and (low) quality communication. Quality can be promoted if websites offer support in addressing the 'right' politician and if they invest in moderation. On the other hand, the knowledge that questions are being vetted in advance may also raise the threshold to submitting them. However, the quality of the questions and answers, and the high percentage of questions that receive responses (as determined by Abgeordnetenwatch.de) indicate that its approach can be successful.

Consulting and being advised by citizens

We made a distinction between consultations run by the executive (ministries) and consultations organised by parliament. In the first category, we discussed the website Internetconsultatie.nl and the STROOM project, in which stakeholders joined a LinkedIn group to discuss new energy legislation. The technology allows such consultations to be broader (representativeness) and deeper (quality and support). They have implications for parliament's ability to govern. The dilemma is that the 'horizontal governance' – in which authorities and stakeholders consult and negotiate new policy (co-production) – needed to gain stakeholder commitment to public objectives (in our case study, sustainability) may be at the expense of parliament's democratic governance capabilities. In Chapter 5 we suggested ways of resolving this dilemma by fine-tuning coordination between parliamentary decision-making and the process of co-production.

In our discussion of consultations organised by parliament, we mainly looked at case studies from abroad. The online forums run by the UK House of Commons committees have been successful. That is especially true of consultations aimed at specific target groups, for example women who have survived domestic abuse, and their experiences. Less successful are online opinion-forming consultations that do not target any specific group.

Another example is Iceland, where a panel of citizens produced a draft constitution (at parliament's request). This was a well-publicised project (including abroad), but the result met with so much resistance from politicians that decision-making in parliament has foundered (despite the positive outcome of a referendum). And although the G1000 project in Belgium was set up as a citizens' initiative, it had no effect whatsoever on parliamentary opinion and decision-making. In this clash between citizen participation and government's political primacy, the biggest dilemma when citizens advise government in a representative democracy is this: how can the results of citizen participation be taken into account without negating parliament's autonomous position in political decision-making? This is a classic dilemma that has been aggravated by the democratic challenges of digital tools.

The best way to tackle these dilemmas lies in creating 'smarter connections' between citizen participation and stakeholder consultations on the one hand and representative democracy on the other. Parliament's political primacy can in fact be enhanced by citizen participation if certain procedural quality demands are satisfied. The input delivered by citizens can nurture the work of parliamentarians and give them a new burst of energy. They can have their political primacy

acknowledged in stakeholder consultations by defining the content-related and procedural context and interim accountability mechanisms. In that sense, digital consultations make transparency possible so that parliament can monitor the proceedings as they unfold.

Citizen-initiated petitions and bills

Citizen-initiated petitions and bills outshine citizen consultations as a form of 'direct democracy through parliament'. There is little doubt that these forms of citizen participation stimulate 'one-issue politics'. Therein lies the first dilemma, unless parliamentary parties are able to embed separate issues into a broader political strategy. The second dilemma is that parliament runs a major risk of losing the public's trust if there is no real prospect of a petition being accepted and if accountability (feedback) is also weak. Nevertheless, here too there are opportunities to improve the work of parliament. What is required is an investment in fair procedures and proper communication with petitioners.

Spontaneous citizen mobilisation through social networks

Social media offer citizens new ways to organise into a countervailing force against government. Citizens use their own social networks in such contexts. One example was the protests that broke out among pupils in 2007 against the '1040 hours minimum'.

The speed, scale and relative invisibility of social media mobilisation can take politicians by surprise, more so than the demonstrations of the past. The question for politicians is how to respond to such rapidly mounting public pressure. For parliamentarians, the main dilemma lies in weighing the growing pressure to make decision-making open and interactive against the need to guard their freedom to judge matters for themselves and make their own decisions. This dilemma, in turn, gives rise to specific questions. Should politicians participate in the debate on social media, more interactively than they presently do on Twitter, and what precisely should they contribute to that debate? Which social media applications and web forums should they use?

Societal self-organisation

Politicians are promoting their vision of self-reliant citizens in a 'participation society'. That vision requires politicians to 'let go'. Citizens' initiatives can put pressure on politicians, especially when the issues involved are controversial and when expertise and information that have the institutional seal of approval are being challenged. The information-sharing and visualisation capabilities of new media are an important factor in this. An initiative such as the GGB's induced earthquakes portal is a striking example. There is, however, tension here between dealing 'receptively' with citizens' input and monitoring the quality of that input and the constitutional limitations. The most important opportunities in terms of parliament's work lie in the alternative information that citizens can provide.

Democratic innovations in political parties

How can political parties use digital tools to breathe new life into their existence? Liquid Feedback allows them to make decision-making more accessible and transparent to 'ordinary members', and to improve the quality of members' participation. It also raises a few dilemmas and problems that

were a particular point of concern when the Pirate Party Germany was discussing introducing Liquid Feedback nation-wide. There is much more tension between transparency and privacy at national level, for example. Another problem is that the success of Liquid Feedback and similar systems depends mainly on mutual trust, and such trust is easier to build in real life. The smaller scale of cities or regions offers more favourable conditions for building trust than a national party, because the 'organisation' is more deeply embedded in a 'community' there.

10.2   Components for positioning parliament in a networked society

This final section sketches the contours of a parliament that is better equipped to deal with the challenges of the digital networked society. We offer four components in response to the major dilemmas and opportunities discussed in this report. These components may be regarded as recommendations for the strategic positioning of parliament – and in particular the Dutch House of Representatives – in our networked society. They are, first of all, meant as input into the relevant public discourse. They can also provide a context for addressing the choice and refinement of digital tools, although we were not tasked with making specific recommendations about that choice or about design aspects.

Towards more 'direct' representative democracy
Stephen Coleman, a leading British researcher on e-democracy, has commented that MPs are uncertain about their role, their legitimacy, and are eager to connect with citizens in new ways (Coleman 2005). To help shape that connectedness, Coleman has introduced a new concept of representation, which he calls 'direct representation'. It involves communicative cooperation between representatives and citizens, which can be supported by digital tools. MPs can connect in three ways: (1) by engaging in a more expansive and interactive form of accountability, (2) by appealing to a variety of social networks, and (3) by seeking out new forums where they can present themselves to the public as politicians, close to the public's own experiences, but with scope for deeper reflection.

We believe pitting 'direct democracy' against 'representative democracy' – as often happens in discussions about referendums – is no longer a very productive approach. Politicians operate in an arena where they must constantly allow for public opinion (the 'permanent campaign'), and where direct and indirect (representative) forms of democracy are becoming increasingly intertwined. Opinion polls on social issues and policy measures, online forums, and voting combined with dialogue (as in the G1000 project) are just a few examples of direct forms of democracy that representatives increasingly face (Hendriks 2012). Specific digital participation tools that involve citizens in parliament's work make it possible to complement representative democracy with forms of direct democracy, even in its parliamentary 'heart'. Citizens still value the division of labour between voters and professional politicians so characteristic of representative democracy. At the same time, they want politicians to listen to what they have to say about the societal problems affecting them. Many people want to have more influence on policy, and sometimes they also want citizens and politicians to cooperate on certain issues.

Bring parliamentary democracy more into line with the networked society

The Dutch Council for Public Administration (ROB) (2010) has observed a 'new divide' between the 'horizontal' networked society and the 'vertical' structure of politics and governance. It makes a case for creating 'new connections' between the two.[41] Parliament can do its part, and the Council has made two recommendations in that regard that concur with the conclusions of our report. The first recommendation is: Make the House of Representatives a knowledge-acquisition platform:

> At present, the House *follows* the debate in the public domain … It would be better for the House to enter the public domain and draw it in. It can itself gather the information needed to engage in debates … For example, debates in the House should not concern what our MPs have picked up from the public debate about the privatisation of the home care sector. Instead, they should invite those concerned to a parliamentary hearing so that they can hear, straight from the people, what works and what needs improving. In short, the House must return to being a knowledge-acquisition platform. (ROB 2010, p. 61-62)

This report has discussed various examples of digital tools that can support this platform function.

The second recommendation is: Differentiate between 'ultimate' (having the final word in political decision-making) and 'primacy' (having ascendency in the decision-making process) in terms of who occupies these two positions, parliament or the citizens:

> Parliament's monopoly on political primacy should not be sacrosanct. For each issue, we must consider how best to involve citizens in policymaking or decision-making. If an online consultation or citizens' panel has already given them a major say in planning, then the ultimate … should rest with parliament. If the primacy in planning lay with the Government and parliament, then call a referendum giving the ultimate to the people. The significance of the chosen process will thus be every bit as crucial as the programmatic outcome. (ROB 2010, p. 61)

We must comment here that this recommendation may be appropriate for citizen participation, but not for stakeholder co-production. The political ultimate cannot be placed in the hands of stakeholders who have reached agreement on policy. After all, unlike co-production between stakeholders, citizen participation is a form of democracy that *can* lay claim to democratic legitimacy. And while a referendum can serve as the democratic ultimate, that is not true of a contract between stakeholders.

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[41] It is important to note here that the Council defines 'networked society' as the system of horizontal linkages between citizens (established with the aid of social media). In our report, 'networked society' means the system in which public and semi-public organisations – usually at national and supranational level – and commercial parties take collective (i.e. 'political') decisions. Both definitions are relevant here, but the difference between them must be kept clear.

In this report, we have in fact extended the Council's second recommendation by suggesting that the House of Representatives can improve its political primacy by involving citizens in its work. That is certainly true within the context of the networked society. By allowing citizens to participate in its work, the House of Representatives can in fact nurture and energise the exercise of its power and influence over decision-making in networks where commercial parties and supranational organisations have the upper hand. That brings us to the third component.

Ensure a communicative balance of influence

In 't Veld (2007) calls the system of checks and balances – which allows different institutions to keep the others from becoming too powerful – the most important design principle for democracy in our complex society. At macro-level, this applies to the relationship between parliament and the networked society (see above), but also to information and communication that flows around and within parliament itself. Digital tools that offer a finely tuned form of transparency and communication with citizens can counterbalance the purely outgoing communication of politicians in their 'permanent campaign' and, for example, the ease with which lobbyists and the representatives of established civil society organisations can access parliament. When applied in the force field between parliament, the Government, citizens, stakeholders and the media, the principle of a 'communicative balance of influence' – with different parties using information and communication flows to influence and correct one another – can offer important guidance when introducing digital tools into parliament's work.

Foster democratic division of labour between citizens

A recurring theme in our study of digital citizen participation is the overrepresentation of high-educated individuals – sometimes referred to as 'diploma democracy' (Bovens & Wille 2006). The degree of overrepresentation is not always the same; the problem is smaller in forms of participation that rely less on self-selection, like the G1000 (where participants are randomly selected) and online consultations targeting specific groups.[42] In terms of citizen participation, however, overrepresentation mainly becomes a problem when the opinions of high-educated and low-educated citizens diverge and the latter's opinions are not expressed as forcefully as the former's in the political arena. Opinions between the two groups clearly do differ on a number of controversial issues (European unification, immigration and crime are particular examples), but these are fractional differences that by no means imply that high-educated and low-educated people fall into homogenous groups that share the same political views.

That brings us to the fourth component: make a democratic 'division of labour' possible between citizens (Edwards 2009). As correctly noted in the report *Meer democratie, minder politiek?* [More

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[42] Random selection does not by any means definitively solve the problem of overrepresentation of high-educated individuals, if only because those selected are not compelled to take part. Still, random selection can promote greater representativeness. When the Province of Flevoland experimented with citizen juries in 2005, with participants being chosen by random selection, the three juries were fairly well balanced in terms of educational background: 30% were low-educated, 40% medium-educated and 30% high-educated (Edwards, 2007).

democracy, less politics?] (2015) by the Netherlands Institute for Social Research (SCP), 'many people do not plan to immerse themselves in every political issue and participate at every opportunity' (p. 98). Citizen participation is about having a sufficiently diverse set of participants; statistical representativeness is less important. The idea of a democratic 'division of labour' between citizens corresponds with the distinction between different citizenship styles, each with its own 'taste' or preference for certain forms of political participation (Spangenberg et al. 2001). Forms of participation that appeal mainly to high-educated citizens (structured dialogue), those that (also) activate the low-educated (voting and informal conversations), and other forms (for example gaming) can complement each other. For example, the fact that websites providing detailed information about MPs' voting records attract a relatively large number of high-educated visitors need not be an issue as long as the degree-holders keeping a critical eye on parliament include conservatives as well as 'post-materialists' and 'cosmopolitans'. The House must seek to combine forms of digital citizen participation that will appeal to a broad segment of the population; at the same time, the overrepresentation noted above is no reason not to encourage digital citizen involvement in parliament.

These components will allow the House of Representative to position itself in a way that will improve the quality of democracy in our networked society, in both senses of the word as defined above. The threats arising from 'doing nothing' outweigh the dilemmas outlined in this report. Digital citizen participation makes it possible to enhance the position of parliament and its performance, and to improve the connectedness between parliament, civil society and the public sphere.

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Appendix 1: Criteria for assessing digital tools

Effectiveness

The degree to which the digital tool achieves the initiators' objectives. Does the tool work as intended?

Representativeness

The degree to which citizens who use the digital tool are representative for the general population in terms of their educational level, age, gender and other socio-demographic characteristics.

Legitimacy

The acceptability of political decision-making processes from the citizen's perspective. Does the digital tool help citizens make a meaningful contribution to the decision-making process, so that it is clear to them what is involved in decision-making and what is being done with the opinions that they have advanced? To assess a digital tool properly on the basis of this question, we have applied the following criteria, specifically with regard to parliament (Bekkers & Edwards 2007):

- influence on agenda: whether citizens have a chance to influence parliament's agenda;
- accessibility for citizen input: whether citizens can advance their opinions and proposals during the parliamentary term;
- quality of citizen participation: whether citizen participation mechanisms (during and between election cycles) are designed to permit them to influence political decision-making in recognisable ways;
- fair procedure: whether citizen input is properly and recognisably taken into account in judgements and decision-making;
- responsiveness: whether the decisions ultimately taken correspond reasonably closely to the problems, demands and convictions of citizens, including minorities;
- transparency: whether information about what parliamentarians/parliamentary parties actually do is accessible and useful for citizens;
- accountability: whether citizens can keep a critical eye on parliamentarians/parliamentary parties, including what they do with opinions and proposals that citizens have advanced.

Quality of parliament's work

The freedom to act in a professional capacity as a parliamentarian. The following questions serve as indicators:

- how do the tasks of representation, deliberation, co-lawmaking and government scrutiny weigh up against one another? The balance between these different tasks ensures the convergence of intuitional, dramatic and intellectual elements of parliamentary politics;[43]

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[43] Based on the interview with Ankersmit in Verbeet (2012); we have added the words 'deliberation' and 'explicit'.

- Do politicians and ordinary citizens interact enough by sharing their opinions with each other (Van Gunsteren 2006)?
- Do parliamentarians have enough freedom to judge, select and consider matters for themselves and to negotiate compromises?

Appendix 2: List of 'families of digital tools'

This appendix lists the families of digital tools discussed in Chapters 2 to 9 in the order in which they appear on the ladder of participation.

Informing

Chapter 2: Internet and social media use by politicians
- digital tools that can be used for political marketing, and especially narrowcasting in election campaigns
- digital tools (including Twitter) that MPs use to communicate current political issues or events, their comments about these issues, and their own political activities
- social media monitoring by parliamentarians [providing MPs with information about citizen communications on social media]

Chapter 3: Information provision about parliamentary politics
- voting advice applications
- parliamentary websites
- digital tools, especially websites, set up by parliamentary monitoring organisations (PMOs) to keep track of what parliamentarians do

Chapter 4: Citizens question representatives
- websites that help citizens ask their MPs questions

Consultation and advice

Chapter 5: Consulting and being advised by citizens
- websites set up by the executive or by parliament that enable citizens to comment on draft legislation
- online forums (or digital tools supporting a physical forum) set up by the executive (e.g. a ministry) to encourage dialogue and/or negotiations with citizens and (other) stakeholders in order to arrive at a broadly supported policy proposal (co-production)
- online forums (or digital tools supporting a physical forum) set up by parliament (e.g. a parliamentary committee) to hear what citizens have to say and to discuss a social problem, new policy or legislation, or how existing policy is being implemented
- digital tools used by the executive or parliament inviting citizens to contribute to new policy or other policymaking tasks or to the parliamentary decision-making process (co-creation)
- online forums (or digital tools supporting a physical forum) used by groups of citizens to initiate and engage in discussion and/or to write policy proposals and submit them to parliament
- open data and open spending as specific digital tools used by citizens to make proposals to parliament

Chapter 6: Citizen-initiated petitions and bills
-    e-petition systems
-    digital tools that help citizens commence legislative initiatives

Chapter 7: Political mobilisation through social networks
-    digital tools that support the spontaneous mobilisation of citizens

Decision-making

Chapter 8: Societal self-organisation
-    digital tools that enable citizens to set up their own information systems, in some cases
     based on open data, in order to keep close track of policy, how it is implemented, and what
     impact it is having
-    digital tools that support public initiatives in which citizens themselves take on a specific
     public task

Chapter 9: Democratic innovations in political parties
-    digital tools (systems) that help the members of a political party shape their opinions and take
     decisions

Appendix 3: List of interviewees

Interviewees	Date	Organisation
Josta de Hoog	5 February 2014	Initiator of Politix.nl
Mieke van Heesewijk	7 February 2014	Co-director of Netwerk Democratie (project manager of Watstemtmijnraad.nl for ProDemos, 2010-2011)
Reinder Rustema	14 March 2014	Manager of Petities.nl
Jan Paul Benard and Yvette Molkenboer	26 March 2014	House of Representatives' Information Services Department (DIV)
Matthew Instone	22 September 2014	Head of Online Engagement, UK House of Commons
Jan van Beuningen	1 June 2015	Legislative lawyer, Ministry of Economic Affairs, former project manager for STROOM

Appendix 4: List of key terms

Checks and balances: a dimension of the design of a political system in which differing institutions, for example the government, parliament, the judiciary, and certain advisory bodies, have the means to exercise 'power' and 'countervailing power', allowing them to correct one another.

Co-creation: citizens and, potentially, other stakeholders sharing ideas and engaging in dialogue to develop a certain policy or produce a public service [crowdsourcing can be used in this context]

Co-production: cooperation by means of dialogue and negotiation between government organisations and civil society (stakeholders) in order to arrive at broadly supported policy proposals. [coproduction, as we use this concept, always involves barter]

Crowdsourcing: an open invitation to citizens to contribute to a policy proposal or other public tasks, the aim being to mobilise the expertise that citizens possess about the relevant subject.

Delegation model of political representation: in this model, representatives articulate the specific policy preferences of their voters and defer to those preferences in their decision-making. In other words: representatives take the decisions that their voters would have taken. [The guideline is the party's election programme; if that does not provide a definitive answer, then representatives will have to use other means to find out what voters prefer]

Deliberative democracy: a form of democracy that depends on deliberation (dialogue, discussion) between citizens. An open exchange of information and arguments, in which all the participants are equal, serves to critically examine whether the problem definitions and proposed solutions, as well as citizens' preferences, are based on sufficient empirical evidence, normatively appropriate and effective.

Direct democracy: a form of democracy in which the members of a political community take political decisions themselves by voting (referendums). In this report, the term has been extended slightly to cover all forms of citizen participation in which individual citizen preferences or expressions of support are mobilised and counted, for example opinion polls and collecting signatures for petitions and legislative initiatives.

Mandate model of political representation: in this model, voters, acting on their convictions, give a party a mandate to pursue a certain political course in the upcoming term in office. The guideline is the party's election programme, but representatives remain free to exercise their own judgement.

Networked society: this term can be interpreted in two ways: (1) the system of horizontal linkages between citizens (established with the aid of social media) and (2) the system in which public and semi-public organisations – usually at national and supranational level – and commercial parties take collective (i.e. 'political') decisions. In this report, we adhere to the second definition.

Nevertheless, both definitions are relevant when it comes to aligning our representative democracy with the realities of the networked society.

Parliament: the body that represents the people, in the Netherlands consisting of the House of Representatives (elected directly by voters) and the Senate (elected by the members of the Provincial Councils, and thus indirectly by the people). [This study focuses on citizen participation in the House of Representative, but it goes without saying that the Senate can also make use of digital citizen participation tools.]

Parliamentary democracy: may be regarded as a synonym for representative democracy, except that it specifically addresses the democratic relationship between voters, parliament and the government.

Representative democracy: a form of democracy in which political decision-making is delegated to a small number of professional politicians elected by the people in free, honest, and regularly scheduled elections.

Appendix 5: About the researchers

Dr Arthur Edwards is a political scientist. He is an Associate Professor of Public Administration at Erasmus University Rotterdam. In his research, he explores the meaning of the internet and social media for democracy. He co-authored *Governance and the democratic deficit: Assessing the democratic legitimacy of governance practices* (2007) and *De virtuele lont in het kruitvat* (2009). He has also authored a long list of articles and book chapters on aspects of e-democracy for both Dutch and international publications. He managed this project and wrote the final report.

Dr Dennis de Kool (1977) received his Master's in public administration at Erasmus University Rotterdam in 2000. He obtained his PhD there in 2007 for his research on the impact of monitoring in inter-administrative relationships. He became a post-doctoral researcher in September 2006. Since 2008, he has worked for Risbo, a research institute allied with Erasmus University's Faculty of Social Sciences. Much of his research concerns innovations in public administration and how they interact with society.

Who was Rathenau?

The Rathenau Institute is named after Dr G.W. Rathenau (1911-1989), Professor of Experimental Physics at the University of Amsterdam, Director of the Philips Physics Laboratory in Eindhoven, and a member of the Netherlands Scientific Council for Government Policy. He gained national fame in 1978 as the chairman of a government-appointed committee charged with investigating the impact of the micro-chip on society. One of the committee's recommendations was to systematically monitor the social significance of technology. Dr Rathenau's activities led to the founding in 1986 of the Netherlands Organisation for Technological Assessment (NOTA). On 2 June 1994, the name of this organisation was changed to 'Rathenau Institute'.

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