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Government Transparency in Historical Perspective: From the Ancient Regime to Open Data in The Netherlands

Albert Meijer

School of Governance, Utrecht University, Utrecht, The Netherlands

This article presents an analysis of the history of government transparency over the past 250 years. While this analysis is to a certain extent specific to The Netherlands, the analysis will also identify more general patterns that are arguably relevant to the development of transparency in other Western countries. The overview highlights how, when, and why transparency was conceived as a cornerstone of *representative democracy* to allow the people to monitor their representatives and evolved into a fundament of *participatory democracy* that allows people to participate in the public domain.

INTRODUCTION

Government transparency is increasingly regarded as a vital component of good governance (Hood & Heald, 2006; Roberts, 2006). The dominance of the liberal democracy and the opportunities offered by modern information and communication technologies are pushing countries around the world to establish various forms of open government (Erkkilä, 2012). Many analyses of government transparency focus on new—and even future—developments. Information and communication technologies are seen as an important driver of transparency, and it is often equaled to information on a government Web site. These analyses are helpful for understanding the current issues but often fail to put these issues in (historical) perspective. This results in an overemphasis on the "newness" of current developments and a failure to position these within long-term transitions in governance.

Hood (2006) and Roberts (2006) have indicated that transparency has a long history and describe how transparency has developed and transformed over time. They highlight that transparency can be qualified as a *modern* idea that is connected to the Enlightenment and mention the Swedish Freedom of the Press Act of 1766 as an important starting point (but it took 200 years before this example of a legal right of access to government information was followed by other states (Erkkilä, 2012)). Hood (2006) traces the roots of government transparency back to the Greek city states but stresses that the Enlightenment Thinkers (Rousseau, Kant, and Bentham) and the French Revolution have played an important role in the growing attention for transparency as a means to check the abuse of power.

The historical analysis of Hood (2006) is important, but it does not qualify as—neither was it meant to be—a systematic analysis of the social, political, and technological construction of transparency over time. His analysis is meant to introduce and position the subject of transparency before moving on to current issues and they do not analyze the various interrelations systematically. This article builds upon Hood's (2006), Roberts' (2006), and Erkkilä's (2012) historical analyses and takes these one step further by systematically analyzing the roles of societal trends (cultural, economic, and infrastructural) and political developments (state reform, general legislation, and party politics).

The first aim of this article is to analyze the historical trajectory of transparency in order to understand its current forms and show the different meanings that are embedded in the concept. Transparency is seen as a crucial component of good governance, but we know surprisingly little about how it has acquired this central position in democratic societies. Similar to Beniger's (1986) analysis of the role of information in government control, this article will

Correspondence should be addressed to Albert Meijer, School of Governance, Utrecht University, Bijlhouwerstraat 6, 3511 ZC Utrecht, The Netherlands. E-mail: a.j.meijer@uu.nl

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analyze the role of transparency in developing systems of check and balances in the modern state. The concept and practice of transparency will be "unpacked" to understand the current debates and I analyze the present-day government transparency as a layered concept that mirrors different perspectives on democracy. The second aim of this article is to contextualize transparency by analyzing its connection with political and societal developments. The analysis highlights that the development of transparency is directly related to specific periods—revolutions—in history and that we need to understand the dynamics of these revolutions to understand the current debates about transparency (Hobsbawm, 1962). The historical analysis will show that the fierce debate between proponents and opponents of transparency (for an overview: Bannister & Connolly, 2011) mirrors the debate about the merits and demerits of the French Revolution and the revolution of the 1960s.

This article specifically analyzes the history of transparency in The Netherlands over the past 250 years. This article will present an in-depth analysis of the construction of ideas, transparency laws, and administrative practices. While this analysis is to a certain extent idiosyncratic and specific to The Netherlands, the analysis will also identify more general patterns that are arguably relevant to the development of transparency in other European and Western countries. In that sense, this historical analysis can be regarded as a case study that provides more general insights into the development of transparency. This article will help transparency scholars to position the current debates and developments in relation to long-term societal and political transformations.

STUDYING THE SOCIOPOLITICAL CONSTRUCTION OF TRANSPARENCY

The perspective of historical sociology is used to study the history of transparency. Historical sociology is a branch of sociology that analyzes societal changes over time by positioning them in historical trends and developments. Hall and Taylor (1996) highlight that historical institutionalism puts an emphasis on the creation of sets of rules in a certain moment of times based on the ideas and preferences of that situation. The premise of this approach is that current situations can only be understood if we know how they have developed over time, and the idea of path dependency is at the heart of this approach. Pierson (2000, p. 251) stresses that path dependency focuses our attention on the idea that we should not only question what happens but also when it happens to understand the "process of increasing returns" as Levi (1997, p. 28) put it: "Path dependency has to mean, if it is to mean anything, that once a country or region has started down a track, the costs of reversal are very high. There will be other choice points, but the entrenchments of certain institutional arrangements obstruct an easy reversal of the initial choice." The sequence of events matters for the outcome.

The studies of the tradition of historical sociology focus on enhancing our understanding of the origins of current institutions. The studies describe and analyze the origins of institutions within the context of the power relations, value patterns, and cognitions of the time of origin to understand the current makeup (Zwaan, 2001). Transparency can be seen as an institution in the sense that it contains a set of (formal and informal) rules that regulate social behavior around access to information (cf., Hall & Taylor, 1996). A historical analysis will help to understand why we have these rules in the existing form in the current situation and how they originated from previous power relations, values, and cognitions.

Classical work in historical sociology has been conducted by Karl Marx and Max Weber, but one could argue that the dividing line between history and sociology has become more distinct since the beginning of the twentieth century (Zwaan, 2001). Most sociologists started to focus on the analysis of contemporary society, while historians did not use their historical analyses to enhance our understanding of current structures. The historical sociology is an academic subdiscipline that reconnects sociology and history. Norbert Elias (2000 [1939]) played a crucial role in reconnecting sociology and history. Elias studied the process of civilization and focused on the development of European standards regarding violence, sexual behavior, bodily functions, table manners, and forms of speech. He shows how internalized self-restraint was imposed by increasingly complex networks of social connections in early modern societies. This study provided important insights into the relations between changes in societal structures and behavioral norms. Another crucial study is Beniger's (1986) analysis of the control revolution. His study analyzes the long-term relation between the development of new information technologies—scripture, printing press, etc.—and systems of managerial and government control. The in-depth analysis presents important insights into the current relations between information technologies and control.

The principles of historical sociology have also been used in the study of public administration to analyze the development of administrative structures. Van Bockel (2009) studied the balance between bureaucratic and professional regulation of civil servants in the Dutch Golden Age to enhance our understanding of this same balance modern bureaucracies. Groenveld, Wagenaar, & van der Meer (2010) studied Pre-Napoleonic centralization in The Netherlands to understand the current debates about centralization and decentralization. At first glance, these studies seem to be irrelevant to the current debates about new forms of government organization but, with some effort, the analyses help to present new and often surprisingly insightful views on current debates. A nice example of a historical study that provides directly relevant insights is Weber's (1999) study of the history of accountability. Weber identifies the different roots of perspectives on accountability and locates these within specific periods
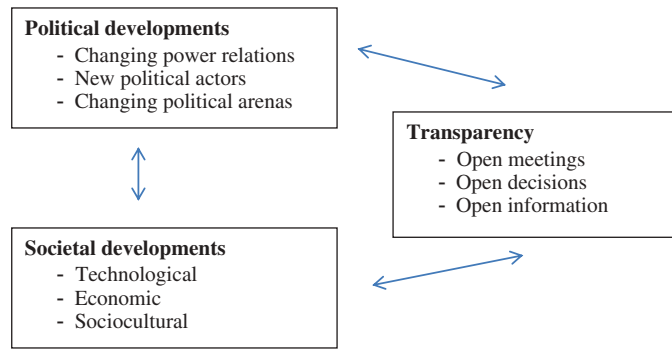
FIGURE 1   Research model.

of history to inform and enrich current debates. The ambition of this article is also to inform current debates about government transparency by taking one step back and putting these debates in the context of long-term transformations of the modern state.

A historical analysis reconstructs how transparency transformed from a (normative) idea into a taken-for-granted and natural practice. I will use the perspective of historical sociology to analyze the development of transparency in The Netherlands over the past 250 years and to understand how the current set of informal and formal rules was constructed over time. The development will be analyzed by mapping when different forms of transparency were created and how the creation of these forms of transparency relates to societal and political developments.

Transparency is widely debated, and many different definitions are provided in the literature (Heald, 2006; Piotrowski, 2007; Roberts, 2006; for an overview: Meijer, Curtin, & Hillebrandt, 2012). Key elements of transparency are the (timely, accessible) availability of information and the potential usage of this information by outsiders. This article follows the definition of transparency that has been developed at Utrecht University and defines it as the availability of information about an actor allowing external actors to monitor the actions and decisions of that actor (Meijer, 2013). The availability of information can be provided not only through documents but also through access to meetings or publications of performance or decisions (Meijer et al., 2012). A fishbowl is a metaphor for transparency: those outside the fishbowl can see what those inside of it are doing.

The idea of historical sociology is that the origins of current institutions such as government transparency can be understood by analyzing them in the context of the societal and political situation of the time. Societal and political developments are highly related but not in a deterministic manner: similar societal developments in different countries may result in different political developments. Political developments can be conceptualized as changes in power relations based on new positions and roles in the political system. In their study of the unification of The Netherlands, Knippenberg and De Pater (2002) make

a distinction between three types of societal developments: infrastructural, economic, and sociocultural developments.[1] The authors acknowledge that, again, these trends are interrelated, but they can be analyzed separately to enhance our understanding of these complex processes of change. For this reason, I will analyze societal and political developments both separately and in relation to one another. These developments are studied to understand the social construction of transparency in a specific context (Meijer, 2013).

The sociopolitical construction of transparency refers to the cognitive, strategic, and institutional processes that give meaning and content to transparency (Meijer, 2013). Transparency is not just an idea developed by philosophers, enacted by lawmakers, and implemented by civil servants. It is a disputed domain that is the subject of much debate between politicians, governments, stakeholders, journalists, scientists, citizens, etc. The complex dynamics of these interactions between the various groups need to be studied to understand the specific forms of transparency. In an earlier work, I have presented a framework for studying this sociopolitical construction at the meso-level of transparency in a policy domain over decades. This article will present an additional perspective to study this construction at the macro-level of a country over a period of hundreds of years (see Figure 1).

Figure 1 highlights that both political and societal developments influence not only transparency but also one another. In return, both political and societal developments are influenced by changes in transparency (Meijer, 2013). In-depth, historical analyses are needed to study the patterns that emerge from these various feedback loops over time.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study is based on a review of primary and secondary literature about the history of transparency and relevant societal

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[1]Knippenberg and De Pater (2002) also analyze political developments as a societal trend but in this analysis of government transparency I have chosen to analyze political trends separately.

and political trends in The Netherlands. For additional information, government documents, newspaper articles, and Internet sites with information about transparency were analyzed. The search was limited to documents, reports, and Web sites that could be accessed directly through the Web site of Utrecht University. Separate searches were conducted for reconstructing the changes in government transparency and societal and political developments. The analysis was based on over 60 historical studies, 26 government and Parliamentary documents, and an analysis of relevant legislation (most importantly the constitution of 1801 and the access to information legislation of 1980).

The difficulty of finding relevant sources is that terms such as "transparency," "access to information," and "open government" (in Dutch: transparantie, openbaarheid van bestuur en open overheid) are of a recent date and, therefore, yielded few historical sources. The references that were found on the basis of these terms were relevant for the last part of this study, the analysis of developments in the second half of the twentieth century, but provided little information about earlier developments. The methodological problem here is that the term itself has changed over time from a term as publicity (in Dutch: "publiciteit") to open government (in Dutch: "open overheid"). This change of terms is part of the study but requires that a variety of terms are used to find relevant information sources. Historical overviews of government transparency were used to identify a variety in search terms (De Haan & Te Velde, 1996; Janse, 2007; van Sas, 1988). This resulted in the following list of terms: transparency, open government, publicity, openness, access to information, open meetings, open decisions, secrecy, and disclosure.

The reconstruction of societal and political trends was based on a variety of historical books that provide comprehensive overviews of developments in The Netherlands. Specific searches were conducted to find sources that related to the various societal developments (infrastructural, cultural, and economic) and political developments (state development, legislation, and politics). The analysis of these trends focused on the most prominent and for the development of transparency most relevant trends. A comprehensive reconstruction of these trends would require a separate research project. This line of argument resulted in four periods that were analyzed: building the fundamentals of transparency (1750–1813), one step backward, one step forward (1813–1848), stability in transparency rules and expanding practices (1848–1966), and development of access to information (1966–2012). The start date is 1750 and the final date is 2012. On the basis of a first reading of the literature, the French period (1801–1813) was identified as a crucial period for the first development of transparency legislation and practices. To be able to position this period, the analysis starts in the period before the French occupation. 1750 is a rather arbitrary date and was chosen only to include societal and political developments leading onto the French period in our analysis. 2012 is just as arbitrary and only constitutes our present situation.

The key ambition of this study was to reconstruct the development of transparency in The Netherlands, but additional work has been conducted to position it in relation to developments in other parts of the world. Specific studies of government transparency (Erkkilä, 2012; Hood, 2006) and more general studies of world history (Beniger, 1986; Finer, 1997; Hobsbawm, 1962) were used to position Dutch developments in a broader framework. This study, however, does not pretend to be comprehensive in a comparative sense and is built upon the idea that an in-depth understanding of the construction of transparency practices requires an in-depth analysis of their history in one specific country.

RECONSTRUCTING THE HISTORY OF TRANSPARENCY IN THE NETHERLANDS

Revolution and Building the Fundamentals of Transparency (1750–1813)

Hobsbawm (1962) observes that the eighteenth century was a long era of demographic expansion, growing urbanization, trade, and manufacture supported by the growing importance of international trade and colonial exploitation. While larger European states such as France and England were accumulating economic power, the eighteenth century was not a wealthy period in Dutch history. After the "Golden Age" when The Netherlands had developed into a world economic power, it fell back after losing a series of wars with England. It lost another war to England in 1780 and the English blockade of Dutch trade resulted in a further decline of the economy. Unemployment was at a high, and this spurred societal unrest. The country seemed ready for political change.

Even though The Netherlands was no monarchy like many other European states (Hobsbawm, 1962), it did have a form of elitist rule with little involvement of most citizens. Even though The Netherlands was one of the first modern republics and even though citizens had been playing a key role in public administration since the 1600s, it had developed into a form of elitist government with participation of only rural nobility and the urban upper class and selection through co-optation (Pots, 2000). This political situation was largely accepted until the 1750s when the (English and French) ideas of the Enlightenment started to influence political debates. Enlightened citizens in various Dutch cities started to gather in meetings and to wonder "whether they should not be involvement in debates about affairs related to the public interest" (Pots, 2000, p. 434). Van de Sande (1996) highlights that the revolutionary movement in The Netherlands was a manifestation of a worldwide process of change with the American and French Revolutions as key events.

The Enlightenment also resulted in new forms of active citizen involvement in politics and public affairs such as more direct involvement in the selection of administrators (De Bruin, 1996). These ideas about popular sovereignty came to be discussed in coffeehouses where societies met to discuss public affairs. In addition, a national press in the form of magazines was emerging. These national magazines contributed to the sense of national unity and "government actions, (. . .), foreign affairs, religious conflicts and societal problems were now discussed permanently" (Mijnhardt, 2006, p. 431). This process of state unification and the emergent national polity in The Netherlands was symptomatic for a process that occurred all over Europe in this period (Toebes, 1996).

The combination of the societal unrest that had been nourished by the bad economic situation and the lost war and the availability of idea about more responsive forms of government and popular rule resulted in significant changes (De Bruin, 1996; Toebes, 1996). With French support, the "patriots" seized power, and in 1798 they enacted a constitution that effectively turned The Netherlands into a unitary state with democratic representation and citizenship for all people living in the country. This first constitution was to lead a short life since a small group seized power in 1801 with French support and created a new constitution. The constitution of 1801 was a key moment in Dutch history since it created The Netherlands as a unitary state and that is what it has been since that moment.

The Enlightenment had resulted in a new form of government, in a constitution and also in transparency of meetings, decisions, and information (De Bruin, 1996). Horn (2011) highlights that the shift in societal structure in Western countries in Europe and America resulted in a delegitimization of arcane practices in the political sphere. Representative democracy was constructed as the successor of authoritarian rule, and representative democracy came to be embedded in a new set of rules and practices. For transparency in The Netherlands, it was important that the meetings of Parliament were public and could be attended by all citizens. In addition, decisions of Parliament were to be made public so that all citizens could know what had been decided by their representatives, and these transparency ideals of Enlightenment became, for the first time, to be enacted in the form of a legal obligation for government. The constitution of 1798 contained articles about "open government" which mainly consisted of transparency of public finances. Government was obliged to present its budget in October to Parliament. Its annual report was to be presented before the end of July, and this report was also to be published and publicized. This highlights that the basic fundaments of transparency, even though limited according to our current standards, were created in this period of Dutch history: open decisions, open meetings, and open information.

The changes in the late eighteenth century constituted both a shift from authoritarian rule to representative democracy and from regionalized to centralized government. This shift also called for new checks and balances on the representatives of the people, and transparency can be regarded as one of them. In that sense, the current emphasis on transparency in the European Union forms an interesting parallel with this period in Dutch history.

One Step Backward, One Step Forward (1813–1848)

The defeat of the Napoleon and the creation of a large Dutch state—consisting of The Netherlands, Belgium, and Luxemburg—resulted in a strong monarchy. The revolutionaries kept silent, and national unity was considered to be of the utmost importance. King William I presented himself as the father of the Dutch nation (Aerts, 2004) and pledged to strengthen the economic and political power of The Netherlands in Europe. The new constitution of 1815 did away with all the rights that had been given to citizens and restored the authoritarian situation that had existed before the revolution and the French occupation. The old revolutionary Van der Palm now considered the previous experiments with representative democracy as "follies," and he hoped that the nation would now be "one happy family" (Van der Palm in: Aerts, 2004, p. 65).

In the first half of the nineteenth century, there were a few unsuccessful attempts to change the constitution. There was no strong movement that pushed for change and, as a result of this, all attempts to make the nation more democratic were stalled. This was no incident: Hobsbawm (1962) emphasizes that—with the US as the most important exception— monarchy was still overwhelmingly the most common mode for governing modern states. This suddenly changed in The Netherlands and many other parts of the world in the revolutionary year of 1848. The revolutions all over Europe and worker strikes in Amsterdam convinced King William II that he needed to grant more power to the people. "Not out of conviction but out of panic," the king himself took the initiative to change the constitution (Van Oudheusden, 2000, p. 93). The king created a commission to draft a new constitution, and within nine months the new constitution was drafted and enacted.

The new constitution of 1848 is considered to be the most important constitution in the history of The Netherlands since it changed the country from a monarchy to a (representative) democracy (although then still limited to male citizens paying taxes). Current political debates still refer to this constitution in relation to issues of ministerial responsibility and relations between local and central government. This constitution emphasized that the ministers were responsible while the king was "inviolable" and was not allowed to do politics (Blom, 2002, p. 320). In addition, the constitution granted an important role to citizens, and publicity was to play a key role in a system of control on the abuse of power.

In terms of transparency, the first part of this period in Dutch history can be characterized as "one step backward."

The "family ideal" encouraged citizens and their representatives to not interfere in matters of the state since this could disrupt unity (De Haan & Te Velde, 1996, p. 92). Many affairs such as foreign affairs, national defense, and finances were the king's affairs and therefore not a subject of parliamentary oversight and transparency. The meetings of Parliament were still open, but minutes were no longer published (Santegoeds, 1996), and so, in that sense, the construction of transparency was reversed. In addition, the power of this institution had been reduced drastically. Parliament could only discuss the budget once every ten years, and these periods were characterized by more attention for transparency (De Bruin, 1996).

The constitution of 1848 can be considered as a "step forward" in government transparency. The liberal Thorbecke that played a key role in drafting the new constitution emphasized that "the public cause wants to be dealt with in public" (Te Velde, 2004, p. 104). The people had a right to know how their representatives came to decisions. The emphasis on transparency did not only result in transparency legislation, as had happened in the revolutionary period, but also in concrete actions to ensure that the open decisions and open meetings would actually be effective. The meetings of Parliament were to be transcribed fast and efficiently to ensure that the public could have timely access to this information. To this end, stenography as a technology for recording information was introduced in 1849. This shows that this period did not show an increase in the domain of transparency compared with the revolutionary period, but it did result in improved transparency practices.

Stability in Transparency Rules and Expanding Practices (1848–1966)

The period between 1848 and 1966 covers nearly half the period under study, but, still, the changes in transparency are limited and that is the main reason why this period is not divided up into shorter periods. This does not mean that the period is not full of societal and political changes, but, surprisingly, these changes had relatively little effect on fundamental ideas about transparency. This period is the period in which technology was used to develop a modern government apparatus (Finer, 1997; Beniger, 1986), and, at the same time, more sophisticated ways to actually realize the potential of transparency for a broad group of citizens emerged.

The second half of the nineteenth century can be characterized as the unification of The Netherlands. Infrastructures played an important role in this process of nation-building and the shrinking of regional differences due to better connections (Blom, 2002). In this century, roads, canals, railways, mail, telegraph, and telephone infrastructures were constructed to facilitate travelling, trade, and communication (Knippenberg & De Pater, 2002). In parallel, the mass media expanded from 14 newspapers in 1869 to 760 newspapers

in 1894. The Netherlands developed into a nation, and this also meant that national government and politics became increasingly important.

The nineteenth century was a period of steady economic growth in The Netherlands. The industrial revolution spurred economic development, and the colonies in Asia and America added to the increasing wealth. The construction of factories resulted in much more visibility of the poverty to the rich urban elites and fed the debate about the "social question." Economic growth also resulted in growing self-consciousness of workers and new forms of political organization in the form of unions and political parties. Politics transformed from small meetings in coffeehouses to mass gatherings. The right to vote was expanded to all male citizens and, in 1919, also to women.

All over Europe and North America, the process of nation-building and the process of industrialization resulted in an expansion of the state and legislation to protect workers and safeguard their health and economic position (Finer, 1997). These new forms of government intervention needed to be based on sound knowledge of society, and therefore in 1894 the Central Bureau for Statistics was created to provide information for government policies (De Haan & Te Velde, 1996).

World War I passed The Netherlands by but generated the sense that The Netherlands should stand united in difficult times (De Rooy, 2004). This was specifically challenging in The Netherlands in view of the religious division between Protestants and Catholics and, in addition, the strong position of Liberals and Socialists. To be able to build a nation with these differences, the so-called Pacification (of political and societal controversies) was developed: the country developed a system of "pillars" that coexisted in many domains of society and provided separate domains for these groups while coordinating policies at the top level. National government was to facilitate societal activities but was not to impose upon the different groups. The elites of the four "pillars" negotiated about general issues, and secrecy was a key element of the system of Pacification to ensure that these (precarious) negotiations were not to be interrupted by public debate.

As one will understand, government transparency during the German occupation in World War II was extremely limited. This was clearly a period of government secrecy. In the period after the war, the whole country dedicated itself to the reconstruction. After being criticized for a brief period, the pillarized system was reinstalled and survived for a long period. The Dutch received Marshall help from the Americans, and the country was quickly rebuilt. Economic and technological progress continued from the 1950s onward, and in the 1960s the country had become a relatively wealth nation (Woltjer, 2005). Government communications had been important during the war—from London—and continued to be important after the war to create support for government policies (Hajema, 2001).

This period can be characterized as a "normalization" of transparency: there are no fundamental changes in legislation but practices of transparency—in relation to the representative democracy—expand. In the nineteenth century, the growing role of newspapers and the introduction of political organizations played an important role in transforming transparency from an elite practice to something that was relevant to all citizens since they could read about parliamentary decisions and meetings in newspapers and could hear about them at party gatherings. This indicates that the *effective transparency* (Heald, 2006) increased, while the *formal transparency* (Heald, 2006) stayed at the same level. The first half of the twentieth century witnessed a reverse movement, and citizens only obtained access to limited information within their own pillar. Lijphart (1984) emphasized that the newspapers played a key role in the system of non-transparency since editors and journalists had effectively become part of the elites of the pillars and therefore supported the system of elite negotiations between the representatives of the people. After World War II, government communications about policies and results became increasingly important and became a dominant source of information for citizens, even though this form of transparency was sometimes criticized for bordering on government propaganda.

Development of Access to Information (1966–2012)

The growing economic wealth, secularization, depillarization, and technological progress resulted in drastic political changes in the Dutch political landscape in the 1960s, with a much stronger emphasis on participatory democracy. 1968 is sometimes referred to as the revolutionary year of this period, but part of the "revolution" took place earlier. Blacks called for civil rights in the United States and students protested against the hierarchical university system in Paris and Berlin. Citizens called for freedom in Czechoslovakia in 1969. There was societal unrest all around the world, and The Netherlands was no exception. The marriage of princess—later queen—Beatrix with the German Claus von Amsberg in 1966 led to riots and smoke bombs, students protested for more university democracy, and progressive politicians founded the political party D(emocracy)66. The political system was shaking (Hajema, 2001).

Television played an important role in this push for change. There were 2.2 million televisions in The Netherlands in 1966, and for the first time in history people could get direct, visual information about situations in other parts of the country and other parts of the world (Lindner, 2003). The growing influence of television also had an impact on the broader media system: newspapers loosened their ties with the "pillars" they originated from and emphasized free and critical news reporting (Hajema, 2001, p. 54). These changes contributed to a looser tie between citizens and political parties. The so-called Korsten

Affaire resulted in a push for more transparency. Ben Korsten was an advisor to ministers from one of the Christian-Democratic parties, and he openly spoke about his influence on politics. Parliament was "not amused" and demanded more openness. The prime minister created a commission to revise government information, and this commission published their report in 1970 (Commissie Heroriëntatie Overheidsvoorlichting, 1970). This commission concluded that the communication between government and citizens was hampered by a lack of knowledge among citizens about policies and their foundation and a lack of knowledge among government about the position of citizens. The commission emphasized that more transparency was needed, and they emphasized that this does not only require obligations but also a culture of openness in government. Specific recommendations were presented for weekly press conferences to inform citizens about government plans and decisions.

The most important part of this report was an outline for Access to Information Legislation. This outline stressed that a citizen request for government information was to be granted unless one of the grounds for secrecy applied. This proposal was received with much appreciation from all except government. The prime minister highlighted that this level of openness would frustrate government decision-making. Government promised to come with Access to Information Legislation, but this law was only sent to Parliament in 1975. The law was approved and finally came into effect in 1980. The law was evaluated in 1983 and renovated in 1992 without fundamental changes but with more precise articles about (passive and active) access to government documents (Scholtes, 2012). More recently, in September 2013, the need to strengthen the active component of access to information has been legalized, and the minister of Internal Affairs sent an open government vision and action plan to Parliament.

New forms of transparency in government were also related to administrative reform (Erkkilä, 2012) such as the introduction of New Public Management in The Netherlands (and other countries around the world). This movement put an emphasis on measuring the performance of public-sector organizations and also on customer choice (Pollitt & Bouckaert, 2000). This resulted in the publication of growing numbers of performance tables and benchmarks of public-sector organizations. Citizens could easily retrieve information about the inputs, throughputs, outputs, and sometimes even outcomes of these organizations which enabled active citizen participation.

Technological changes in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries called for new adaptions to the transparency regime. There was a shift toward more actively making government information through Web sites. These changes highlight how the push for more participatory democracy in the 1960s in combination with technological developments resulted in a strong increase in transparency in The Netherlands in the past decades.

TRANSPARENCY IN A REPRESENTATIVE AND PARTICIPATORY DEMOCRACY

The historical analysis helps to understand and deconstruct transparency as a layered concept that gained new, additional meanings, throughout the period of its development. The analysis shows how transparency developed from a formal broadly defined right op openness, to a practice embedded in the polity as a representative system, to a detailed legislative framework, and, finally, to transparency embedded in direct relations between government and society. The basic principle of openness is given new meanings by applying it to different actors—first Parliament and later government—and by giving it different forms—first access to meeting and minutes and later access to documents and data. The overview highlights that this construction of meaning takes place both through deliberate, legalistic action and through the development of (technologically mediated) practices.

Two phases can be identified in the history of transparency. The first phase can be labeled as *transparency in a representative democracy*. The analysis shows that the conception of transparency in the late eighteenth century was tightly connected to the construction of a representative democracy as propagated by the American and French Revolutions. Schumpeter (1942) conceptualizes this form of democracy as a competition of leadership, and openness is seen as a crucial precondition for fair competition. The people were to rule the country, and those in power, the representatives of the people, should conduct their business out in the open so that the people could monitor them. This idea was enacted on the basis of the French Revolution, but it took a long period, the 19th and most of the twentieth century, to turn this idea into a democratic practice. Intermediaries such as media, interest groups, and political parties turned the formal principle of openness of decision-making processes in an actual practice.

The second phase is *transparency in a participatory democracy*. The analysis shows how the Revolution of the 1960s resulted in another conception of the role of transparency in a democratic state: democracy was no longer seen as only choosing representatives but also about actively participating in public affairs (Barber, 1984). While previously the relation between citizens and government was seen as vertical (citizens as objects of government policy), the relation was increasingly seen as horizontal (citizens as coproducers of government policy). Citizens were to engage not only with their representatives but also directly with government officials on the basis of rights of participation. Active participation was to be facilitated by access to information, and for this reason freedom of information legislation was enacted. Citizens were to be able to use information to engage on an equal basis with government agencies and officials.

In both phases, transparency is about opening up the corridors of power to the possibility of monitorial scrutiny to strengthen popular rule. The corridors of power were located in the legislative branch in the early 1800s, but executive agencies assumed more power in the twentieth century, and therefore these new corridors of power were also opened up to public scrutiny. The two phases in the historical construction of transparency and the resulting layers are summarized in Table 1.

The analysis presented in this article is a specific analysis of the development of government transparency in The Netherlands. Several elements make this a specific case, and the observed patterns can certainly not be generalized to other European countries (let alone countries on other continents). The case clearly highlights the importance of the French Revolution, which was important in other European countries but certainly not the whole continent. The central role of the French Revolution certainly does not apply to all European countries let alone countries in other parts

TABLE 1
Transparency as a Layered Concept

Phase in the construction of transparency	Period or year	Layer of transparency	Changes in formal transparency	Changes in actual transparency	Driving force
Transparency in a representative democracy	1801	Legal fundaments of transparency	Access to political meetings, to minutes of Parliament, and to formal documents	—	French Revolution
	1800s, 1900s	Transparency embedded in the polity	—	Media and political parties divulge transparency to broader population	Industrial revolution
Transparency in a participatory democracy	1980	Detailed transparency legislation	Access to information legislation	—	Revolution of 1960s
	1990s, 2000s	Transparency embedded in individual government–society relations	—	Widespread availability of government documents on Web sites	Internet revolution

of the world. At a fundamental level, however, the development from a representative to a participatory democracy can be observed in the history of many European and American states (Erkkilä, 2012; Roberts, 2006).

CONCLUSIONS AND REFLECTIONS ON THE FUTURE OF TRANSPARENCY

The study highlights the connection between long-term contextual developments—political and societal changes—and changes in transparency and, in that sense, expands the analysis of Roberts (2006) and Erkkilä (2012). The empowerment of citizens both in the second half of the eighteenth century and from the 1960s onward and the introduction of new technologies for disseminating information through printed newspapers and digital Web sites called for more transparency. In that sense, this study forms an addition to studies that highlight the influence of political conditions at one point in time (e.g., Grimmelikhuijsen & Welch, 2012) by showing that structural changes in transparency are linked to structural political and societal changes. The increase, however, is not a continuous process: it takes place through "transparency revolutions." The analysis highlighted that key moments in the development of transparency could be identified: the constitutions of 1801 and 1848 and the Access to Information Law of 1980. This shows that the long-term structural changes built up momentum for changes in transparency, but the specific timing and form was still dependent on political dynamics at a certain moment in history. These findings highlight the Pierson's (2000) assertion that political development is punctuated by critical moments that shape the basic contours of social life.

The importance of critical moments in history means that the specific dynamics in different countries in these periods may account for different transparency regimes that exist today. The fact that England, for example, was not directly influenced by the French Revolution may explain why this country had little emphasis on transparency, and it took till 2000 for access to information legislation to be introduced. The global nature of the Revolution of the 1960s may account for the subsequent push for freedom of information in countries all around the world (Erkkilä, 2012; Roberts, 2006). A further analysis of these critical junctures in history may help to enhance our understanding of differences—and similarities—between transparency regimes in different countries.

The analysis shows that the increase in transparency is tightly connected to the modernization of the state. The study highlights the progressive character of transparency. Transparency was reversed during a few periods in history—French rule, German rule—but clearly rose over the period of time we studied. Transparency evolved from a cornerstone in a representative democracy to a fundament of a participatory democracy. This highlights that an increase in transparency can be seen as a component of the development toward a modern state. Temporary drawbacks are related to pleas for national unity. In the period of study, there were several periods, e.g., after the French period in the early 1800s and after World War I, where there was more emphasis on national unity in the face of external threats. These periods witnessed a (temporary) drawback in transparency as this is seen as a source of conflict with the "family." In line with Pierson (2000) and Levi (1997), these drawbacks stall rather than actually reverse the movement toward more transparency.

Trust is a recurring theme in the history of transparency. The current debate about the question whether transparency strengthens or undermines trust (Etzioni, 2010; O'Neill, 2002) has old roots. In each period of history, there were opponents highlighting the drawbacks of transparency and arguing for less openness. Proponents argue that transparency will empower citizens, and, in the end, these empowered citizens will trust the system that has empowered them. In contrast, opponents in all periods argue that citizen empowerment will nurture discontent and undermine the legitimacy of government. The historical pattern confirms Rosanvallon's (2008) observation that the history of the institutions of democracy is founded upon distrust: distrust with the ancient regime in the late 1700s and the ruling elite in the 1960s formed the basis for new waves of transparency.

Quo vadis, transparency? Predicting is very difficult, especially about the future, but on the basis of this analysis we can reflect upon current trends and venues for the future. The current emphasis on open data can easily be conceived as a manifestation of a participatory democracy: the do-it-yourself mentality of the sixties is mirrored in the do-it-yourself democracy of the early twenty-first century (Rushkoff, 2003). In that sense, the current period is a period of realizing the promise of the revolution of the 1960s just as much as the nineteenth and twentieth centuries were the periods in which the promise of the American and French Revolutions came to be realized. The question is whether we can expect another revolution that will refocus our idea of transparency and add an extra layer. Following the argument that was developed on the basis of this historical analysis, a new layer can be expected when new corridors of power need to be opened up to scrutiny by the people. The governance paradigm highlights that power is relocated to diffuse networks of public and private actors (Koppenjan & Klijn, 2004; Torfing, Peters, Pierre, & Sörensen, 2012), and the next step could be that there will be a stronger push for more transparency of these networks and, as a consequence, transparency will also become a requirement for the private sector. Bovens (2003) has already highlighted the need for more private transparency, and Brin (1998) even speaks of a transparent society, but it may take another revolution before these ideas will come to be realized.

The key message of this article is that we as administrative scholars need to study specific issues such as transparency to be able to develop a theoretical understanding of

causes and effects. However, at the same time, we should position specific issues as transparency within the broader framework of societal, political, and administrative developments to understand the roots of current situations and to understand the way transparency is embedded in the development of the modern state and of (representative and participatory) democracy. A better understanding of the critical moments in the history of transparency—most prominently the French (and American) Revolution and the Revolution of the 1960s—and their impact in specific countries helps to grasp the roots of and current manifestations of transparency.

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