



# Determining the Democratic Quality of Non-Electoral Representation in Local State–Society Networks

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## INTRODUCTION

The democratic quality of electoral representation at the local level faces serious challenges across Europe. Even though they play a crucial role in local democracy, political parties and elected politicians cannot count on strong appreciation from citizens. Parties also struggle to recruit candidates to stand in local elections, as citizens fear the associated workload or aggression from fellow citizens. In addition, turnouts in local elections are often much lower than in national elections. As the preferences and interests of non-voters do not necessarily overlap with those of voters,

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lower turnouts undermine equality, a fundamental principle of democracy. Finally, low turnouts decrease elected politicians' legitimacy to speak on behalf of the people.

Participatory and deliberative innovations are increasingly employed to foster citizen involvement in their neighborhoods, villages, or cities. However, participatory innovations are often used by citizens whose views have already been expressed through other channels, such as elections (Hendriks, 2008, 2009; Sørensen & Torfing, 2018). Therefore, these innovations tend to increase inequality when the interests of participating citizens are voiced more often than the interests of those who do not participate as much or at all.

Political theorist Michael Saward (2010) highlighted a democratic innovation that could redress democratic inequality. Using the concept of *representative claim*, he focused on elected and non-elected individuals and organizations claiming to act on behalf of a cause or a particular group of people. These claim makers can seek to represent voters, non-voters, and the voices of plants, animals, future generations, and people living outside the local territory. Elected councils and councilors as well as non-elected individuals and organizations can base their claims on expertise, shared experiences, or a shared identity with the people or causes they seek to represent (Van de Bovenkamp & Vollaard, 2018). Therefore, representatives and constituencies are not simply decided in elections. Instead, both elected and non-elected actors are involved in a process in which representatives and constituencies are constructed in a creative and dynamic process of claim-making (De Wilde, 2013, 2019; Saward, 2010).

Even though non-electoral representation may decrease inequality, questions remain about the democratic quality of representative claims when claim makers do not rely on elections to legitimize such claims. The question of democratic quality is particularly relevant for non-elected representatives, who cannot even make implicit references to their elected status. In another chapter in this volume, Hubert Heinelt and Björn Egner discuss how non-elected representatives in local state–society networks legitimize their positions. This chapter focuses on the authorization and accountability mechanisms used by participants in non-elected local state–society networks. Non-elected representatives who cannot rely on elections may use non-electoral authorization and accountability mechanisms to enhance the democratic quality of non-electoral representation. Such mechanisms include petitions, protests, internal procedures for nominating representatives within civil society groups participating in a local

state–society network, and giving account to the chosen constituency referred to in a representative claim via websites and meetings (Montanaro, 2012; Van de Bovenkamp & Vollaard, 2019; Denters et al., 2020). We are fully aware that elected representatives can also make (non-electoral) representative claims, but our focus here is on non-elected actors making representation claims who cannot rely on elections to legitimize their claims.

In recent years, empirical examinations of representative claims and their democratic potential have increased (e.g., Chapman & Lowndes, 2014; De Wilde, 2019; Fossheim, 2022; Guasti & Geissel, 2019; Denters et al., 2020). Although various non-electoral authorization and accountability mechanisms for non-electoral representation have been discussed in case studies, to the best of our knowledge, there is no comparative cross-country analysis of the frequency of these mechanisms at the municipal level. Moreover, even though existing studies acknowledge the significance of the context such as country and governance levels for understanding non-electoral representation (see, e.g., Dovi, 2017; Wagner, 2019; Saward, 2020), the factors contributing to the democratic quality of non-electoral representation have not been thoroughly explored.

As a first step to bridging this research gap, we examine the non-electoral authorization and accountability mechanisms from the perspective of non-elected members of local state–society networks in numerous European countries. Such networks operate between local governments and societies. Their forms range from formally mandated councils for the elderly to informal, inclusive local development groups. Therefore, the networks have different forms, functions, and labels depending on the country. Similarly, network members include representatives of businesses, employers' organizations, labor unions, volunteer organizations, and NGOs, as well as experts and private individuals. Such a variety of actors increase the importance of mapping non-electoral authorization and accountability mechanisms. In addition, this variety also allowed us to check the strength of explanatory factors at the macro level (e.g., democracy type), meso level (e.g., network autonomy), and micro level (e.g., education level). The research question addressed in this chapter is as follows: *Which factors affect the democratic quality of non-electoral representation in local state–society networks?*

We are well aware that this study is just a modest step toward understanding the democratic quality of non-electoral representation. First, we did not examine the non-electoral representation practices of elected

politicians. Second, our analysis did not show whether non-elected representation increases equality in the entire local governance system, as we only examined existing networks. Third, our assessment of the democratic quality of non-electoral representation was based on non-elected members' perceptions, which did not fully reflect the actual quality of authorization and accountability. Despite these limitations, our study is a crucial step. If even participants perceive their networks to be of low democratic quality, non-elected representation, at least in the form of network participation, constitutes a problematic type of democratic innovation. An exploration of the factors contributing to the democratic quality of non-electoral representation may shed light on how the democratic quality of non-electoral representation can be improved.

The chapter proceeds as follows: First, in the theoretical section, we discuss our understanding of non-electoral representation and its democratic quality, and we consider the factors that influence the democratic quality of non-electoral representation. Then, we explain how we used survey data gathered from members of local state–society networks in Europe to find empirical answers to our research question. Finally, in the Results section, the research question is divided into the following two sub-questions: (i) Which non-elected representatives use non-electoral authorization and accountability mechanisms, and (ii) which factors determine the democratic quality of non-electoral representation as perceived by non-elected representatives?

### CONCEPTUALIZING THE DEMOCRATIC QUALITY OF NON-ELECTORAL REPRESENTATION

In studies of local-level representation, the focus is usually on elected representatives. However, as Hannah Pitkin (1967) and others have pointed out, representation also involves non-elected representatives, such as traditional interest groups, individuals, and organizations, who become representatives by making claims on behalf of a cause or a group of people (Saward, 2010, 2020). Claim-making, which is the core of representation, is exercised by elected and non-elected actors alike, which means that elected local councilors can also speak on behalf of people and matters *beyond* their voters or geographical constituency and base their representative claims on grounds other than their elected status. Non-elected actors include a wide range of actors, such as appointed and self-appointed

experts, social movements, civil society groups, celebrity activists, interest organizations, private individuals, businesses, media organizations, and NGOs (Maia, 2012). Representative claims can be made on various grounds, such as expertise (e.g., a doctor claiming that she knows what the elderly need to live healthily), shared experiences (e.g., a patient referring to others suffering from a similar disease), or common identity (e.g., a reverend or an imam calling upon people of the same religion). Non-electoral representation concerns claim-making based on these kinds of non-electoral grounds. As stated previously, we focus on the representative claims of non-elected actors participating in various local state–society networks rather than on those of elected actors.

Non-elected representation by non-elected actors may entail more advantages than just making unheard voices present. Such actors may be better informed regarding the needs of people less active in electoral or participatory channels than politicians representing an entire municipality (Saward, 2016; Taylor, 2010; Van de Bovenkamp & Vollaard, 2018, 2019). In addition, non-elected representatives may be trusted more than elected politicians, as the former may be perceived as more authentic. References to non-electoral grounds by elected officials may be perceived as an electoral strategy rather than a genuine concern with the interests of ignored citizens and causes (Saward, 2009). Therefore, non-elected representatives may be perceived as more authentic and trustworthy, although it remains to be seen whether these potential advantages are real. Here, we focus on the democratic quality of non-elected representatives, who cannot rely on the traditional legitimation mechanism of elections. However, this may be an advantage in disguise, as elections are often criticized as a source of legitimacy for the reasons mentioned at the start, for example, the exclusion of marginalized interests. More importantly, the legitimization of non-elected representatives' claims requires the self-proclaimed representatives to actively engage with their chosen constituencies as they cannot derive legitimacy from a once-upon-a-time election process. Therefore, such representatives must obtain fresh and up-to-date mandates from their constituencies. However, representatives of civil society groups with internal authorization and accountability procedures may feel less of a need for constant efforts to legitimize their claims. When such representatives make claims on behalf of non-members and only a limited number of members are involved in authorization and accountability activities, further engagement efforts are needed to uphold the representatives' democratic quality.

To sum up, to be considered democratic, representatives need to be authorized, directed, and held accountable by their respective constituencies (Pitkin, 1967; Saward, 2020). Self-proclaimed representatives can give accounts of their actions to their chosen constituencies by providing information via websites and meetings. The more representatives are authorized, directed, and held accountable by their constituencies, the higher their democratic quality.

## EXPLAINING THE DEMOCRATIC QUALITY OF NON-ELECTORAL REPRESENTATION

Non-electoral representation is a much more variegated phenomenon than electoral representation. Any individual or organization can make representative claims and create new constituencies on different grounds (see Van de Bovenkamp & Vollaard, 2018). Which factors affect the democratic quality of this wide variety of non-electoral representation? At this exploratory stage, we can only provide a tentative list of potential factors. We hope that by starting to theorize explanations of the democratic quality of non-electoral representation, we can contribute to dialogue among scholars and practitioners. Following the usual categorization of potential explanatory factors (Klijn et al., 2013), we distinguish the following three levels of contextual variables: macro (the society at large in which non-elected representatives operate), meso (the network in which non-elected representatives operate), and micro (features of individual non-elected representatives). We explain these levels in more detail below.

### *Potential Factors at the Macro Level*

The macro level refers to the characteristics of the society in which non-elected representatives operate when making claims and being authorized, directed, and held accountable by their constituents. Socio-political institutions in the broadest sense, including cultural norms, can both enhance and constrain certain claim-making practices and non-electoral authorization and accountability mechanisms.

As non-electoral representation by non-elected representatives is a creative and dynamic process outside formal electoral arrangements, the proclaimed constituents have to mobilize and organize themselves to respond to claims made by non-elected representatives (Saward, 2010). Our basic

argument is that societies with higher levels of generalized trust or consensual inclinations facilitate cooperation between individuals. The basic assumption of others' goodwill is expected to lower association costs, as tight enforcement arrangements are perceived as less necessary (see Warren, 2018), while an egalitarian and inclusive mentality is expected to increase the number of citizens, even from tiny minorities, engaging with representative politics as citizens feel their voice will be heard (see Lijphart, 1999). On the contrary, in low-trust, ego-oriented societies, mutual suspicion constrains citizens from taking the risk of cooperation. As a result, it is easier for citizens in high-trust and consensual societies to mobilize fellow citizens to correct actors unjustly claiming to represent them (see Castiglione & Warren, 2019). In response, non-elected representatives are expected to feel a stronger need to obtain authorization from and give account to their chosen constituencies in high-trust, cooperative societies. Due to the consensus-oriented nature of such societies, we also expect non-electoral representatives to have a stronger normative incentive to justify why they speak on behalf of others. Accordingly, our first hypotheses are as follows:

Hypothesis 1a: *The higher the level of societal trust, the higher the democratic quality of non-electoral representation.*

Hypothesis 1b: *The more consensus-oriented a society, the higher the democratic quality of non-electoral representation.*

### *Potential Factors at the Meso Level*

The meso level refers to the networks in which non-elected representatives operate (Klijn et al., 2013). We expect that non-elected representatives will spend less effort to obtain authorization and give accounts of their actions when their claims, actions, and arguments made in the network are less visible to the represented. In closed and exclusive networks mandated by governments, non-elected representatives obtain their positions entirely based on their expertise and shared experiences (Chapman & Lowndes, 2014; Van de Bovenkamp & Vollaard, 2018). As a result, they are less dependent on their chosen constituencies for approval for their representative claims, and they need to provide less information on their achievements on behalf of the chosen cause or people. By contrast, in open and transparent networks, the actions of non-elected representatives are more visible to the represented, upon whom the representatives depend for

societal approval as a source of legitimization. Therefore, we expect representatives participating in transparent networks to be more dependent on seeking authorization and accountability from the constituencies they claim to represent.

The need to legitimize representative claims is also expected to be weaker for non-elected representatives in government-dependent networks. In networks that are less autonomous from local governments, the representatives might piggyback on the legitimacy of the local governments rather than securing their own legitimacy. Similarly, we expect the need to legitimize claims to be higher in more influential networks or networks of high political relevance with decision-making roles. Therefore, we expect that in less autonomous networks and networks with high political relevance, non-elected representatives seek more authorization and accountability. Therefore, we propose the following hypotheses concerning the meso level:

Hypothesis 2a: *The democratic quality of non-electoral representation is higher in open and transparent networks than in closed networks.*

Hypothesis 2b: *The less autonomous a network, the lower the democratic quality of non-electoral representation.*

Hypothesis 2c: *The more politically relevant a network, the higher the democratic quality of non-electoral representation.*

### ***Potential Factors at the Micro Level***

The background, capabilities, experiences, and resources of non-elected representatives are also expected to affect authorization and accountability practices (Castiglione & Warren, 2019; Montanaro, 2017). Individual non-elected representatives in networks may feel the need to legitimize their claims more than members who rely on civil society organizations or (local) governments, as the latter may believe that their claims are already supported (Binderkrantz, 2009; Chapman & Lowndes, 2014; Saward, 2010). The political efficacy of non-elected representatives is also expected to be an influential factor, but its effect may go both ways. On the one hand, a non-elected representative with significant participation experience in a particular network, who has been active in the public sector, and who has a high education level may have developed the capacities to obtain authorization and give account effectively. On the other hand, a higher level of political efficacy may also encourage non-elected representatives to

make confident representative claims without feeling the need to seek authorization from and give accounts to their chosen constituencies. Therefore, Hypotheses 3b, 3c, and 3d may also produce opposite results:

Hypothesis 3a: *The democratic quality of non-electoral representation is higher among private individual members than among members from organizations.*

Hypothesis 3b: *The democratic quality of non-electoral representation is higher the longer the representative has been a member of the network.*

Hypothesis 3c: *The democratic quality of non-electoral representation is higher the longer education the representative has.*

Hypothesis 3d: *The democratic quality of non-electoral representation is higher among public-sector than private-sector representatives.*

In sum, these factors constitute a partial representation of how actors behave in networks when making representative claims. These factors affect the democratic quality of the relationship between self-proclaimed representatives and their chosen constituencies. The sections below explain how we tested our proposed hypotheses.

## DATA AND METHODS

To test the hypotheses proposed above, we analyzed the responses to the questions on the democratic quality of unelected representation that were included in the survey (for more details on the survey, see Chap. 1). Other questions in the survey may have contained potential explanatory factors as well, but as a starting point we focus on those explained in the hypotheses. In our analysis, we investigated only the answers provided by non-elected actors, as we considered them the most appropriate group for examining the potential impact of the proposed explanatory factors on non-electoral representation. Even though you are not elected as a member of these networks, which suggests that every member is non-elected, we excluded elected representatives such as local councilors because they could still (implicitly) rely on their status of being elected to make representative claims (see further explanation on why we exclude elected representatives above).

The advantage of the networks involved in this study was that they represented a variety of individuals, network forms, and countries. This variety in the data allowed us to conduct comparative analyses to

thoroughly check the proposed hypotheses. Nevertheless, we should be aware that there may have been a certain selection bias, as we did not examine self-appointed representatives acting individually outside of these more or less institutionalized networks. Given that we studied network members' perceptions, the results may suffer from self-report bias. We expected the respondents to evaluate themselves favorably. Theoretically, we may also expect that network members make more efforts to obtain authorization and give accounts than those outside the network, as the former must establish their positions. The variation among network members may help determine whether this argument is correct. To take advantage of our cross-country data, in addition to providing general results, we described the variation among the members across countries.

To answer our first sub-question, we considered the non-elected representatives' authorization and accountability mechanisms. Authorization is basically about constituents' agreement with the claims made by non-elected representatives (Saward, 2010). Therefore, we asked them to evaluate the following statement: "Those whom you represent agree with or support what you say on their behalf in the local network." Accountability was measured based on the respondents' evaluations of the statement, "I have an obligation to explain and justify my position in the network to those I represent." For the statement on both authorization and accountability, the respondents indicated their assessment on a five-point scale from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5). In addition, to add more nuance to the concept of accountability and examine how the representatives explain and justify their actions, the respondents were asked to select two among several alternatives to "inform those you represent about the things you do on their behalf in the network." The alternatives were as follows: own website, general meeting, traditional media, social media, newsletter, personal contact, other, and do not inform.

For our second sub-question, which sought to explain the factors affecting the democratic quality of non-electoral representation as perceived by the non-elected representatives, we ran a regression analysis. In this analysis, we combined the assessments of authorization and accountability from the first question to construct an index measuring the dependent variable *democratic quality of non-electoral representation*. The questions on authorization and accountability were positively correlated at 0.4. The respondents who recognized the importance of authorization were also likely to recognize the importance of accountability. Cronbach's alpha of 0.59 showed an acceptable degree of internal consistency. The

democratic quality index ranged from 0 to 8, with 8 being the highest possible score for the democratic quality of non-electoral representation. A high score on this index indicates high democratic quality. The mean of this index was 5.8 (with a standard deviation of 1.5), suggesting that the non-elected representatives considered the democratic quality to be generally sufficient. Considering the number of alternatives in this index, we treated the dependent variable as a numerical variable. As our data had a hierarchical structure, we applied a hierarchical linear model with a random intercept. Our data were hierarchal in the sense that individual network members (level 1) were nested within networks (level 2), which were, in turn, nested within countries (level 3). The country and network explained 13.6% of the total variability in the democratic quality of non-electoral representation. The results of the likelihood ratio test confirmed that a multilevel model was a suitable fit.

Furthermore, in the explanatory analysis, we considered the macro-, meso-, and micro-level factors described earlier as independent variables. The first explanatory variable at the macro level, *societal trust*, was derived from the survey of local state–society networks. Answers ranged from 0 to 10, with 0 indicating that you cannot be too careful and 10 indicating that most people can be trusted. The mean values for each country regarding this assessment were used to calculate the aggregated level of trust, resulting in a variable ranging from 0 (low level of trust) to 19 (high level of trust). The second explanatory macro-level variable, *consensus-oriented society*, was derived from the masculinity versus femininity dimension in the Hofstede index.<sup>1</sup> This dimension ranged from 0 (femininity) to 100 (masculinity). The masculinity side of this dimension represented a societal preference for achievement, ego orientation, heroism, assertiveness, and material rewards for success. The femininity side stood for a preference for cooperation, modesty, caring for the weak, and quality of life. On the masculine side of the dimension, society at large was competitive, while on the feminine side, society was more consensus oriented (Hofstede Insights, 2021). Like societal trust, this variable measured the aggregate level of consensus orientation in each country.

The explanatory meso-level variable *network transparency and openness* was measured using the statement, “This network operates in an open and transparent fashion” (0 = low degree of transparency and openness; 1 = high degree of transparency and openness). The explanatory variable *network autonomy* from local government was measured using the statement, “My network has high freedom in relation to local government

authorities” (0 = low degree of autonomy; 1 = high degree of autonomy). The variable *network relevance* was measured with the question, “In your opinion, what is the role of the network in local politics?” The respondents were asked to consider the following statements (1 = not at all; 2 = to some extent; 3 = to a moderate extent; 4 = to a great extent): “The role of the network is to assure the flow of information between local authorities and the society,” “The role of the network is to provide advice on local government policies,” “The role of the network is to mediate in case of conflict,” “The role of the network is to determine decisions within specific policy areas,” and “The role of the network is to make decisions and implement the decisions taken in specific policy areas.” These variables were used to create an index of network relevance (ranging from 0 to 15), with a high score indicating a highly politically relevant network.

The explanatory micro variable *type of actor* was measured using the following question: “In what role are you a member of this network?” The variable had the following predefined roles: 1 = single individual, 2 = business representative, 3 = voluntary organization, 4 = trade union representative, and 5 = administrator or bureaucrat. The explanatory micro variable *length of membership* was measured using the responses to the following question: “For how long have you been a member of this network?” (0–57 years). The explanatory micro variable *higher education* was measured using responses to the following question: “What is your highest completed education?” The variable was coded as 0 = elementary school, secondary school, or equivalent, and 1 = university or equivalent. The explanatory micro variable *public sector of employment* was measured using the responses to the following question: “In which sector are you employed?” The alternatives were 0 = retired, student, unemployed, private sector, and self-employed, or 1 = public sector. Table 4.1 provides further details on the data obtained for all explanatory factors. We found no collinearity problems as the highest correlation was found between societal trust and consensus-oriented society at -0.60. The second highest correlation was found between public sector employment and the type of actor at 0.37.

## RESULTS

First, regarding the non-electoral authorization and accountability mechanisms, we found that most non-elected representatives perceived being authorized and relied on accountability. This finding applied to all

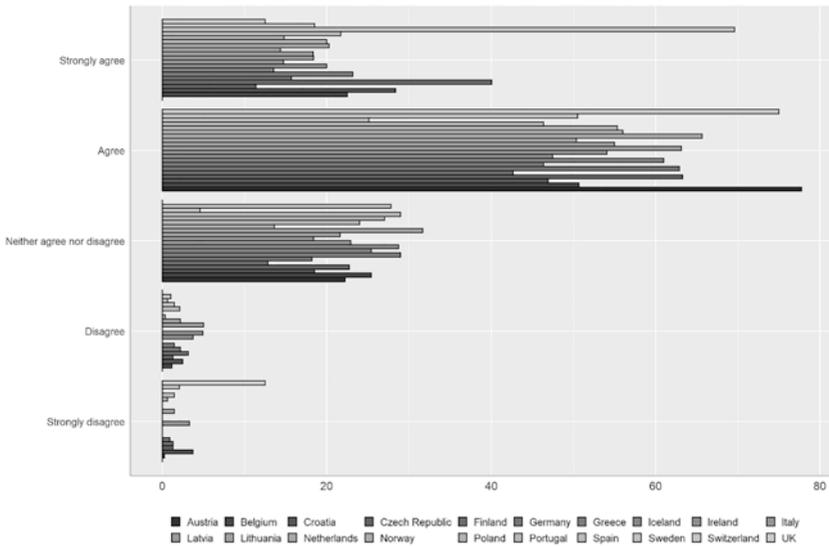
**Table 4.1** Overview of independent variables: explanatory factors at the micro-, meso- and macro-level

<i>Level</i>	<i>Variable</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>St. Dev.</i>
Macro-level	Societal trust	3232	11.0	5.0
	Consensus-oriented society	3232	35.4	22.0
Meso-level	Network transparency and openness	3232	0.8	0.4
	Network autonomy	3232	0.5	0.5
	Network relevance	3232	7.0	3.5
Micro-level	Type of non-elected actor	3232	2.9	1.4
	Length of membership	3232	5.9	5.8
	Higher education	3232	0.7	0.5
	Public sector employed	3232	0.4	0.5

countries, even though we found statistical differences (at the 0.001 level) between countries concerning the strength of non-elected representatives' perceptions of being authorized and accountable.

Figure 4.1 shows that regardless of the country, more than three-fourth of the non-elected representatives agreed that represented agreed with or supported what they said on their behalf in the local state–society networks. Hardly any non-elected representatives indicated that their constituencies (strongly) disagreed. A similar picture emerged concerning accountability. Approximately three-fourth non-elected representatives agreed that they had an obligation to explain and justify their positions to the represented, with hardly anyone (strongly) disagreeing. The non-elected representatives were slightly more positive in their perceptions of themselves being authorized than ensuring accountability. This finding was reflected in the mean scores of 4.0 and 3.8, respectively (standard deviations were 0.8 and 1.0, respectively) on a scale of 1–5. Although the representatives generally agreed on both authorization and accountability, we found that the non-elected representatives' perceptions varied significantly between European countries. For example, compared to other countries, a higher percentage of Swedish non-elected representatives indicated that they strongly agreed with being authorized and practicing accountability (Fig. 4.2).

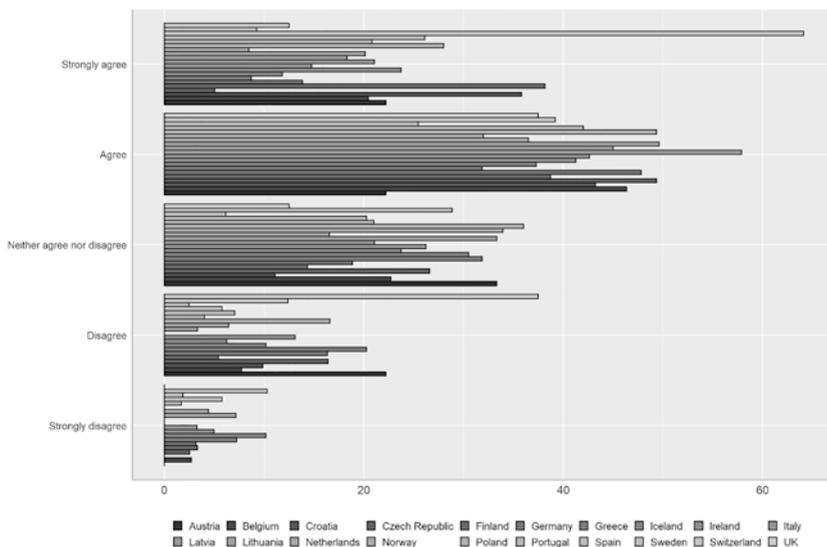
Regarding how non-elected representatives in local state–society networks give accounts of their actions, Table 4.2 shows that personal contacts and general meetings were the two most used mechanisms to explain and justify their behaviors to the represented. Similar to the questions on authorization and accountability discussed above, we also found



**Fig. 4.1** Authorization: Responses to the statement “Those you represent agree with or support what you say on their behalf in the local network” (in percent). Chi-Square test of independence: T-statistic = 583.2, P-value = 0.000

significant (at the 0.001 and 0.005 levels) differences between European countries.

Regarding the democratic quality of non-electoral representation, we found that most non-elected representatives provided information about their actions to the represented in the networks. Southern European countries had the lowest percentage of non-elected representatives not informing their constituents about their actions. The challenge with relying on personal contacts to inform constituents is that such relationships may not be accessible to all constituencies. The same difficulty emerges for attending general meetings, as participation requires specific commitments or resources from constituents. Concerning differences between European regions, we found, for example, that non-elected representatives in Eastern Europe relied more on their websites than representatives in other European regions and that non-elected representatives from Western Europe used social media significantly less than non-elected representatives in other regions.



**Fig. 4.2** Accountability: Responses to the statement “I have an obligation to explain and justify my position in the network to those I represent” (in percent). Chi-Square test of independence: T-statistic = 610.7,  $P$ -value = 0.000

**Table 4.2** Responses to the question “How do you inform those you represent about the things you do on their behalf in the network?” (in percent)

	<i>Own website</i>	<i>General meetings</i>	<i>Traditional media</i>	<i>Social media</i>	<i>Newsletter</i>	<i>Personal contact</i>	<i>Other</i>	<i>Do not inform</i>
Eastern Europe	29.7	47.3	9.2	31.4	2.1	60.4	17.3	7.1
Western Europe	14.6	46.9	10.8	12.0	8.3	66.1	26.7	14.6
Northern Europe	8.5	54.9	6.8	17.8	9.0	70.5	25.0	7.6
Southern Europe	14.3	48.1	7.4	21.8	6.5	67.5	27.7	6.6
Total	13.6	50.2	8.5	17.9	7.6	67.5	25.4	9.7

In sum, from a democratic perspective, it is a rather hopeful sign that a large share of non-elected representatives across Europe consider themselves authorized. At the same time, they also tend to inform the

represented, offering them an opportunity to respond affirmatively (giving authorization) and to hold the representatives accountable.

Second, regarding which factors determine the democratic quality of non-electoral representation as perceived by the representatives, we found that the model containing meso-level factors had a better fit than the models with macro- and micro-level factors. The model with macro-level factors exhibited the worst fit with our data. Table 4.3 provides an overview of these macro-, meso-, and micro-level effects. To identify how much variation in the level of democratic quality each group of factors explained, we included the independent variables in the regression model sequentially before estimating the full model. Except for network autonomy (in Model 4), higher education, and public sector employment, all coefficient estimates were significant at the 0.01, 0.05, and 0.1 levels. The coefficients' direction and significance level held for all variables (except autonomy) in the full model (4).

Regarding the factors at the macro level, we found that high levels of societal trust (H1a) had a negative effect on democratic quality. Lower costs for citizens to mobilize themselves to correct inaccurate claim makers did not seem to impel the latter to engage in more democratizing efforts. Contrary to our expectations, it may be that in low-trust societies, claim makers need to go to greater lengths to receive acceptance from their chosen constituents.<sup>2</sup> We also found that non-elected representatives in societies with a higher level of consensus orientation (H1b) had higher levels of democratic quality for non-electoral representation. This finding corroborates our argument that cooperative inclinations help citizens to correct actors who inaccurately claim to represent them, as claim makers feel the need to engage more in authorization and accountability activities.

Concerning the meso-level factors, as expected (H2a), non-elected representatives in transparent and open networks exhibited higher levels of democratic quality than non-elected representatives in closed networks. Therefore, it is likely that the hypothesized variation in the perceived need to legitimize non-electoral representation is essential in explaining the democratic quality of non-electoral representation. We found no effect of network autonomy (H2b) on the democratic quality of non-electoral representation in the full model (4). In line with our expectations (H2c), the results suggest that non-elected representatives in politically relevant networks with decision-making power exhibit higher levels of democratic quality than the non-elected representatives in networks that only have informative or advisory roles. This result confirmed Hypotheses 2a and 2c.

**Table 4.3** The effects of factors at the macro, meso and micro level on democratic non-electoral representation

	<i>MLM regression</i>			
	<i>Macro</i> (1)	<i>Meso</i> (2)	<i>Micro</i> (3)	<i>Full model</i> (4)
Societal trust	-0.042** (0.019)			-0.041** (0.019)
Consensus-oriented society	-0.010** (0.005)			-0.012** (0.005)
Network transparency and openness		0.194*** (0.061)		0.190*** (0.061)
Network autonomy		0.086* (0.051)		0.082 (0.051)
Network relevance		0.084*** (0.008)		0.082*** (0.008)
Private individual				
Business representative			0.316*** (0.072)	0.268*** (0.071)
Voluntary organization			-0.457*** (0.073)	-0.461*** (0.071)
Trade union representative			-0.209** (0.096)	-0.189** (0.094)
Public administrator or bureaucrat			-0.207** (0.095)	-0.199** (0.093)
Length of membership			0.010** (0.004)	0.009** (0.004)
Higher education			-0.015 (0.060)	0.017 (0.059)
Public sector employed			-0.052 (0.059)	-0.046 (0.058)
Constant	6.449*** (0.341)	4.815*** (0.140)	5.697*** (0.126)	5.760*** (0.355)
Nr. obs.	3232			
Nr. groups: network	51			
Nr. groups: country	20			
AIC	11,426	11,284	11,383	11,271
BIC	11,463	11,326	11,450	11,368
Log likelihood	-5707	-5635	-5681	-5619

Standard errors in parentheses. \* $P < 0.1$ ; \*\* $P < 0.05$ ; \*\*\* $P < 0.01$

Finally, at the micro level, we found significant differences between certain types of non-elected actors (H3a) in terms of the democratic quality of non-electoral representation. Compared to private individuals, business representatives exhibited higher levels of democratic non-electoral representation. In the opposite direction, compared to private individuals acting as non-elected representatives, voluntary organizations, trade union representatives, and public administrators and bureaucrats exhibited lower levels of democratic representation quality. Except for public administrators and bureaucrats, this result suggests that non-elected representatives without a clear membership basis feel the need to legitimize their claims more than those who can rely on civil society organizations. It may also be the case that certain civil society groups with established internal democratic processes and a mandate from their members do not feel the need to constantly interact with their members to legitimize their claims. However, constant efforts to obtain legitimation may be necessary when only a few members are involved in these legitimation processes and when representatives of certain civil society groups speak on behalf of people who are not their members. As proposed in Hypothesis 3b, membership length positively affected the democratic quality of non-electoral representation. The longer a non-elected representative has been a member of a network, the higher the representative's perceived democratic quality. According to the results, higher education (H3c) and being employed in the public sector (H3d) had no effect on the democratic quality of non-electoral representation. Therefore, we found evidence for Hypothesis 3b, while Hypothesis 3a held only for private individuals compared to voluntary organizations, trade union representatives, and public administrators and bureaucrats.

## DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Does non-electoral representation have the potential to reinvigorate (local) democracy? Answering this question was our motivation to explore how non-elected members of local state–society networks perceive the democratic quality of their roles in terms of authorization by the represented and accountability to the latter. The findings offer hopeful signs of non-electoral representation being a useful democratic innovation, as (i) a large share of non-elected representatives across Europe feel that the represented agree or support their contributions within the networks, (ii) most of the representatives inform the represented, allowing the latter to authorize the representatives and hold them accountable, and (iii) a large

majority feel that they are obliged to give accounts of their actions. Previous studies showed that (i) non-elected representatives at the local level seek authorization and give accounts of their actions, (ii) the representatives and the represented converge in their understandings of the non-electoral authorization and accountability mechanisms for ensuring democratic representation, and (iii) voters perceive non-elected actors as representatives at the local level, appreciate them more than elected local councilors, and accept the non-electoral authorization and accountability mechanisms (Fossheim, 2022; Van de Bovenkamp & Vollaard, 2019; Denters et al., 2020). Therefore, our findings further underline the democratic value of non-electoral representation. Further steps should be taken to explore the democratic quality of non-electoral representation—for example, by studying perceptions of accountability and authorization among the represented and examining the overall contribution of non-electoral representation to redress inequality in the views, needs, and interests (re)present(ed) in local decision-making processes.

This chapter captured some of the variations in non-elected members of local state–society networks across Europe in terms of democratic quality. More work is needed to explain this variation. We considered the impact of various factors at the level of society, the network, and the members. Overall, network characteristics (the perceived relevance of the network in terms of decision-making importance and perceived transparency and openness), or what we called the meso-level factors, showed a better fit in explaining the democratic quality of non-electoral representation than factors at the level of society (macro level) and network members (micro level). However, the macro- and micro-level factors are still significant in explaining democratic quality. In line with our hypotheses, societal features such as consensus orientation contribute positively to a higher level of democratic quality. Rather unexpectedly, a high level of societal trust negatively affects the level of the democratic quality of non-electoral representation. Another unexpected finding is that the autonomy of the network does not affect democratic quality when all the other contextual variables are included. Finally, individual characteristics of network members (i.e., types of non-elected actors and being a member of the network for a long time) positively affect the democratic quality of non-electoral representation. A key underlying mechanism seems to be that the more claim makers are in a situation in which they feel the need to legitimize their claims, the more they do so.

This study is a significant step in explaining the democratic quality of non-electoral representation; however, much more research is needed to fully understand democratic non-electoral representation. The next step might be to look beyond non-elected representatives in networks and examine non-elected representatives who do not operate in such formal arenas. For now, we can draw the encouraging conclusion that at least in their own eyes, non-elected members of local state–society networks are authorized and held accountable, which underlines the potential of non-electoral representation as a *democratic* addition to local government.

## NOTES

1. The masculinity side of the masculinity versus femininity dimension in the Hofstede index represents a preference in society for achievement, heroism, assertiveness, and material rewards for success. Its opposite, femininity, stands for a preference for cooperation, modesty, caring for the weak, and quality of life. At the masculine side of the dimension, the society at large is more competitive, while at the feminine side, the society is more consensus oriented.
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