Citizen participation and democracy
in the Netherlands

Ank Michels

Dr. Ank M.B. Michels
Universiteit Utrecht
Utrecht School of Governance
Bijlhouwerstraat 6
3511 ZC Utrecht
The Netherlands
E-mail: a.michels@usg.uu.nl

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Introduction
One of the main issues in democratic thought is the debate about the role citizen participation should play in a democracy. Citizen participation may be seen as vital to democracy, but may also be regarded as rather undesirable when democracy is equated with representative democracy. National perspectives on citizen participation may influence the current debate on opportunities for participation in further efforts at democratizing the European Union.

In this paper I'll study the issue of citizen participation in Dutch democratic thought. The paper focuses on the question what role Dutch thinking on democracy has attributed to citizen participation. What is the meaning of participation with respect to the quality of democracy? In the first section, two different views on participation and democracy will be presented. On the one hand, citizen participation is seen as only of limited importance to democracy. On the other hand, citizen participation is claimed to be an essential feature of democracy. The sections 2, 3 and 4 investigate the Dutch perspective on the meaning of citizen participation for democracy. Section 2 gives a global overview of the actual role of citizen participation in the Netherlands in the past few decades. Sections 3 and 4 examine the contemporary political, administrative, and academic discourse on this issue. The paper concludes with a summary of the main characteristics of the Dutch view on citizen participation and democracy, and describes some implications for the debate on democracy and participation within the European Union.

1. Views on participation
In his book *Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy* (1942) Joseph Schumpeter defended the view that citizen participation is not essential to democracy and should be limited to voting for leaders. This view is in sharp contrast with the ideas of Jean-Jacques Rousseau. In *Du contrat social* (1762) Rousseau argued that the individual participation of each citizen in political decision making is essential. In his view, citizens become public citizens through participation. Schumpeter and Rousseau represent two very different strains of thought on the role of participation in democracy. In the first view, participation plays only a limited role. In the second view, citizen participation constitutes an essential element of democracy.

Schumpeter is the main representative of the first view on participation. In answer to the, in his view, unrealistic classical doctrine of democracy, he formulated his own, more realistic, definition of democracy. Schumpeter states: "The democratic method is that institutional arrangement for arriving at political decisions in which individuals acquire the power to decide by means of a competitive struggle for the people's vote." (1976, p.269). In this definition, the most essential feature of democracy is the

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competition for leadership. The leaders must take the lead in the political and decision making process. Hence, democracy is first and foremost a process that takes place among leaders.

In Schumpeter's opinion, citizens play a very limited role in the political process. The only way in which citizens participate in the political process is by voting for their leaders. Other means of participation are not important in Schumpeter's view on democracy. A similar view on the central role of elections to the democratic method can be found in Dahl's writings. In *A preface to democratic theory* (1956), he presents his theory of democracy as a polyarchy. This theory is meant to be a more realistic theory of democracy than the theory of populistic democracy, which, according to Dahl, tells us nothing about the real world. (1956, p.51). Dahl searched for the conditions that would be necessary and sufficient for maximizing democracy in the real world (1956, p.64). A political system in which these conditions exist to a relatively high degree he called a polyarchy. By maximizing democracy he meant maximizing both popular sovereignty and political equality. In Dahl's theory, elections play a central role in maximizing democracy. Through elections voters can make their choice for alternatives (leaders or policies) heard. The alternative with the greatest number of votes is declared the winning choice, and will displace the alternatives with fewer votes. The orders of elected officials will be executed (1956, p.84).

In these views, political participation has an instrumental function in the official political process; it may lead to a change of political leadership and policy programmes. In Schumpeter's words, the role of the people is to produce a government (1976, p.269). Voters must understand that, once they have elected their leader, political action is his business and not theirs (Schumpeter 1976, p.295).

Massive political participation is regarded as undesirable and even dangerous in this view. Schumpeter thought that the electoral masses were incapable of political participation other than voting for their leaders. Most political issues were so remote from the daily lives of ordinary people, that they could not make sound judgements about opinions, policies and ideologies. Dahl even argued that a large increase in the participation of ordinary men could be dangerous, because it would lead to an increase in political activity among the lower socioeconomic classes, which adhere in general to more authoritarian ideas. Participation of these people in politics could lead to a decline in consensus about the basic norms of democracy (Dahl 1956, p.89). Sartori took this argument one step further. He feared that massive participation of the (common) people in the political process would lead to totalitarianism. Hence, political activity of the people should be minimized. The people should react, not act (1962, p.77).

The theories on democracy that have been presented so far grant only a very limited role to the participation of ordinary citizens in the political process. Critical to this view on democracy is the electoral competition for votes. Various other theories, however, state that political participation is more than casting a vote in elections and has a much wider meaning than simply producing a government.

The most important thinker defending the importance of participation is Rousseau. Although Rousseau's idea of an ideal society is a

society of small peasants characterized by a large extent of economic equality and economic independence, his ideas laid the foundation for theories on the role of participation in modern democracies. Rousseau regarded the participation of each citizen in political decision making as of vital importance to the functioning of the state. In his book *Du contrat social*, he sketched a political system in which the citizens decide to be free by making the laws that rule them (Rousseau, book 2, ch.6). The social contract constitutes the basis of this political system. In this contract, individual people abstain from their individual desires and decide to work together to give shape to policies and rules (Rousseau, book 1, ch.6). As a consequence, people are ruled by the rules they have made themselves. Thus, participation in the political process ensures freedom for everyone. Rousseau saw the rules and policies that were created by cooperating citizens as an expression of the general will, which differed from the will of all. The general will is always right, because it expresses a policy that is acceptable to all.

The behaviour of individual citizens is also affected by the social contract. It forces citizens to act in a fair way and to be public citizens. They learn to be public as well as private citizens. They learn that they have to take more into account than just their own private interests (Rousseau 1988, pp.14-15).

For Rousseau, as well as for other theorists on participatory democracy, participation is more than voting in elections. It covers every aspect of participation in political decision making. Theorists like Pateman stress that participation should not be limited to the political arena. It should also encompass areas like the working place (Pateman 1970). Thus, the participatory theory of democracy views democracy first and foremost as the people's business; citizens are the central agents, not the political leaders.

In this latter view on democracy, participation plays much more of an expressive role than in the first view. Participation is regarded as a value in itself and is not merely aimed at producing a government. Massive participation is therefore desirable (although Mill does not agree). It is for individual citizens a way to express that they consider themselves to be a part of the political system. The focus is not on individual interests but on the collective interest (the general will in Rousseau's terms).

From these theories on participatory democracy three functions of participation can be distinguished. The first is the educative function. Participation contributes to personal growth in making citizens public citizens. In *Representative Government* (1861) Mill, like Rousseau, stresses the role of participation in making people public-oriented citizens. The best place to learn democracy, in Mill's view, is through participation at the local level.

Another important function of participatory democracy is the integrative function. Participation contributes to people's feeling that they belong to their community.

And, last but not least, participatory democracy ensures good government. As was mentioned before, participation in Rousseau's theory plays an important role in producing and ensuring laws and rules that are acceptable to all. Participation in politics forces citizens to behave as public

citizens and to create good rules and good government. In addition, participation in different areas makes citizens better able to make political decisions and understand them at the national level (Pateman 1970, p.110)

Table 1 summarizes the main elements of the two different views on participation and democracy.

Table 1: Two different types of views on political participation and democracy

Participation plays only a marginal role	Participation is an essential feature of democracy
➢ representative democracy	➢ participatory democracy
➢ the focus is on political leaders	➢ the focus is on citizens
➢ participation is instrumental	➢ participation is expressive
➢ participation has no educative or social functions	➢ participation has both educative and social functions
➢ no relation between participation and good government	➢ participation is a way of ensuring good government
➢ massive participation is not desirable	➢ massive participation is desirable
➢ Schumpeter, Dahl, Sartori	➢ Rousseau, J.S. Mill, Pateman

2. Citizen participation in recent Dutch political history - an overview

This section presents an overview of the role citizen participation has played in the Netherlands in the past few decades. Attention will be paid to the views on citizen participation that were held by the political elites, to the role ordinary citizens played in the political process, and to the interaction between politicians and ordinary citizens.

Recent Dutch political history can be divided into three eras. The first era comprises the two decades following the Second World War (1945 to 1965). Dutch society in these years can be characterized by pillarization. The second era starts around 1965 and ends around 1985. Dutch society in these decades can be characterized by depillarization and a strong belief in governmental policies being able to bring about societal change. Finally, the third era starts in 1985 and continues until the present day. This recent period of time can be characterized by increasing citizen demands on the government and efforts to close the gap between political authorities and the public.

The era of pillarization: 1945-1965

Dutch society in these years was a society of tightly organized subcultures of minorities, also called pillars. These subcultures were organized along a religious and a socio-economic dimension. The religious dimension was at the heart of the divisions into a Catholic pillar, a Protestant pillar and a secular pillar (called the *'algemene zuil'*, or general pillar). Of these groups, the Catholics constituted the largest subculture, absorbing approximately 40 per cent of the population. The secular pillar comprised both non-religious

people and Christians who did not actively practise their religion. Besides the religious dimension, the socio-economic dimension played a crucial part, and divided the secular pillar into two sub-pillars: a liberal pillar and a socialist pillar.

Pillarization structured political parties, but also trade unions, hospitals, schools, and leisure activities. Nearly every aspect of social life took place within these pillars. Of all pillars, the Catholic pillar was the most tightly organized. A Catholic couple, for example, would vote for the Catholic People's Party (KVP), read a Catholic newspaper, watch television programmes broadcasted by the Catholic Broadcasting Organization. And their children would attend Catholic schools and play in Catholic sports teams. There was hardly any social interaction between the people belonging to the different pillars.

An interesting question that intrigued many scholars is why, despite social heterogeneity, Dutch democracy remained so stable. According to Lijphart, the stability of the Dutch political system during the era of pillarization can be explained by the so-called *politics of accommodation* at the elite level (Lijphart 1979, p.99). Whereas Dutch society was strongly segmented and organized in separate pillars at the mass level, the elites of the pillars were permanently looking for ways to cooperate. To make cooperation possible, the elites agreed on a number of 'rules of the game' (Lijphart 1979, pp.116-130). These rules included the agreement to disagree, the rule of proportionality (for example, proportional distribution of the seats in Parliament, of subsidies to schools and housing associations, and of broadcasting time), and depolitization in decision making (technical arguments were preferred to political dispute). Above all, they agreed on the rule to consider politics not as a game, but as serious business. 'The attitude that doctrinal disputes should not stand in the way of getting the work done' (Robinson 1961, p.37, quoted in Lijphart 1979, p.117) contributed to the stability of Dutch politics.

In this era, Dutch citizens' political attitudes could be characterized by passivity. They accepted the authority of the elites. This passivity and allegiance to the pillars' elites can partly be explained by the dominance of the elites and the pillarized organizations at the time, but was also due to the political attitude of the Dutch in general. According to Daalder, the Dutch attitude towards authority can be characterized as a mixture of deference and indifference (Daalder 1966, p.197).

Thus, political participation was mainly the privilege of the elites and took place in the pillarized social organizations in business, education, health care and housing.

Depillarization and government planning: 1965-1985
The era of pillarization came to an end in the second half of the 1960s. In the 1967 elections the religious parties lost a substantial part of their votes. In the years that followed, the pillars began to disintegrate, and the dividing lines between the pillars also became less clear. The proportion of people who still felt a strong loyalty to the pillar they had been raised in was declining rapidly. For example, the fact that you were a Catholic no longer predicted your voting behaviour or the newspaper you read. Also, since the beginning of the seventies organizations that once were the strongholds of

the different subcultures began to merge. Examples are the Catholic and socialist trade unions that merged into FNV (Federation of Dutch Trade Unions) and the Catholic and Protestant parties that merged into one political party, CDA (Christian Democratic Appeal). Moreover, new political parties, like D'66, entered the political scene.

Depillarization put a provisional end to the politics of accommodation. This development took place against the backdrop of a broader movement for democratization, anti-traditionalism and resistance to authority that originated from the youth cultures of Western-European cities. The increase in the level of education and the role of television are often mentioned as relevant factors explaining the movement for democratization.

In addition to traditional forms of political participation, such as voting, new forms of participation arose outside the official political arena. Single issue action groups organized mass demonstrations or occupied public buildings in an attempt to influence politics. New social movements like the women's movement, the squatters, the environmentalists, and the anti-nuclear movement, made their views heard through extra-parliamentary actions. But although the number of citizens that took part in these non-traditional forms of political participation was increasing steadily in the seventies and eighties, participation was to a large extent still the privilege of highly educated men between 30 to 49 years of age (Van Deth & Vis 2000, pp.148-150).

The political elites were reluctant to too much citizen participation. At the time, the belief was commonly held within all political parties and in society at large that social change could be brought about by government intervention. Many people were convinced that government could solve issues of welfare and social justice, and could even plan each individual's personal growth. Partly as a result of this dominant ideology, government intervention through law making and government expenditure increased substantially. Similarly, government interference with the individual lives of citizens attained a higher level. The government's paternalistic attitude towards its citizens conflicted to a certain extent with the wish of many citizens to create the rules that would rule them.

While ever more citizens turned out on the streets and made their voices heard through non-traditional forms of participation, the political elites still favoured political participation only by verbal action. In practice, the opportunities for citizens to influence politics and policies remained limited to participation after the government had taken its own decisions.

1985-2004: A closing gap between political authorities and citizens?
Since the second half of the eighties, concern has been growing among politicians about the relationship with the public. There has been a slight decrease in voter turnout and a substantial decline in the membership of political parties. Other factors worrying the political elite have been, first, the increasing support for political parties with strongly negative opinions on ethnic minorities and asylum seekers (the Centre Party, later Centre Democrats, in the eighties and nineties, and the List Pim Fortuyn since 2000), especially in the larger cities. And, second, the increasing number of local political parties that take part in the elections for the local councils.

These developments can partly be explained by sentiments directed against the political elites and politics in general. However, not all criticism is directed against politics itself and is voiced in anti-establishment votes. There are also people who criticize specific elements of the political system. They claim that citizens have too little power to influence the political and policy-making processes. As a solution to this problem, they advocate reforms of the political system.

In the past few years, a number of constitutional reforms were proposed and have already been partly introduced. All proposals were meant to decrease the gap between politicians and citizens. Constitutional reforms had already been proposed in the 1960s and the 1970s, but they did not get ample political support at the time. The so-called *consultative referendum* was introduced a few years ago. However, the introduction of a type of referendum that would give citizens more influence on the decision-making process did not get enough support. Two more constitutional reforms, the direct election of mayors and the reform of the electoral system (by introducing an element of geographical representation) will be implemented within a few years.

Changes have also taken place in the policy-making process. Whereas in the 1970s and 1980s top-down policy-making and implementation were dominant, this began to change in the course of the 1980s. First, citizens, social organizations and companies were getting increasingly more involved in defining policy problems, in seeking for policy solutions and in policy implementation. Interactive policy-making, cooperation, public-private partnerships, networks, and horizontal governance are concepts that are often used in this context. Second, towns, hospitals, schools and housing organizations were granted more authority to determine their own policies. Apart from ideological reasons, the wish to cut government expenditure was also responsible for these developments. And third, government organizations paid increasingly more attention to their transparency and to their accountability towards citizens and organizations regarding their policies and outputs.

It is obvious that the opportunities for citizen participation in political and policy processes have substantially increased in the past few decades. However, this does not mean that the gap between the political authorities and the people has been closed. Citizens increasingly expect government to solve their problems and sometimes even seem to be less satisfied with government efforts than ever before.

3. The political and administrative discourse

Thus far, this paper has presented a global overview of the role citizen participation played in the past six decades. In this section and the next the contemporary political-administrative and academic discourse on this subject is analysed. The central question focuses on how important citizen participation is deemed to be for democracy. And, secondly, an answer is sought to the question how the various forms of participation that play a role in the discussion could contribute to democracy.

We'll start with an overview of the political and administrative discourse on the meaning of participation for the quality of democracy. To determine

the mainstream of thought among the Dutch political and administrative elites, I studied recent election manifestoes, ministerial reports and reports by governmental advisory bodies. An analysis of these documents made clear that citizen participation is an issue that is discussed rather often. However, the political and administrative discourse on the issue of citizen participation and democracy focuses mainly on one subject: the issue of constitutional reform. Three more subjects, however, are interesting to mention here, although they receive less attention. These three subjects are interactive policy-making, ICTs (information and communication technologies), and civil society. I will present an overview of the discussion on each of these subjects in the following sections.

- *Constitutional reform*

By far the most important theme in the political and administrative debate on citizen participation and democracy is constitutional reform. The dominant idea underlying the discussion is that the way democracy is currently functioning in the Netherlands shows a few shortcomings. Citizens should be more directly involved in political decision-making. To attain this goal, several proposals for constitutional reform have been made in recent times.

The debate focuses on the direct election of mayors, the reform of the electoral system, and the referendum. Recently, the government has submitted some elaborated proposals on the direct election of the mayor by voters in local elections (Ministerie van Binnenlandse Zaken en Koninkrijkrelaties 2003a and 2003b). The main issue under debate is how much power should be granted to the directly elected mayor. In addition, the government has developed plans for a reform of the electoral system into a system that is in many respects similar to the German electoral system (Ministerie van Binnenlandse Zaken en Koninkrijkrelaties 1999). Although there is a lot of criticism on the details of the plans, the main lines of the proposals are getting broad, and ever growing, support among politicians.

Another issue is the referendum. The consultative referendum was introduced a few years ago. Since its introduction, the debate centres on the question whether other forms of referenda should be introduced that give citizens more influence on the policy-making process. Ideas have been developed about the introduction of decisive referenda and of granting the power of initiative to the people. These proposals, however, have not received wide support and are favoured by D66 (democratic liberals) and left wing parties only.

- *Interactive policy-making*

A second theme in the political and administrative debate on participation and democracy is the issue of interactive policy-making. In an interactive policy-making process, citizens and social organizations take up an active role in the policy process at an early stage in order to reach a joint decision. In the past few decades, a large number of experiments with interactive policy-making were introduced - mainly at the local level but also at the national level - that focus on the development of city centres, the revitalization of old neighbourhoods, and the construction of public works. There is, however, much variation in what interactive policy-making

processes may actually mean. In some cases, citizens and organizations are asked to contribute to the formulation and solution of the policy-problem from the first stages of the process onwards. Their ideas form the basis of the formal decision-making process that rests ultimately in the hands of the politicians. In other cases, however, citizen's influence remains rather marginal. For instance, they are only allowed to make a choice between a set of clear cut policy proposals. Whatever the design of the interactive policy-making process, in all cases it is the (local) government that takes the initiative and leads the process. The actual process is usually carried out under the supervision of civil servants.

Although a large number of experiments with interactive policy-making have been staged and a regular exchange of ideas and experiences has taken place (IMI, X-pin 2003; Ministerie van Binnenlandse Zaken en Koninkrijkrelaties 2002), politicians show very little interest in interactive policy-making as an instrument for improving democracy[2]. Most politicians are even sceptical about interactive policy-making. They fear that it will lead to the erosion of the primacy of representative democratic institutions. The tension between citizen participation through interactive policy-making processes and representative democracy was also the central topic of a report the government asked from one of its advisory bodies in 2002. The governmental advisory organization concerned argued that under certain conditions interactive policy-making could contribute to a stronger democracy, but also emphasized that government and political representatives should play a guiding role in the process (Raad voor het openbaar bestuur 2002).

- *ICTs*

In recent years, both organizations and individual citizens have used information and communication technology on an unprecedented level. The possible applications of ICTs have also increased dramatically. These developments have raised the question whether ICTs could contribute to a more vital democracy.

The government asked various advisory bodies and boards for advice. The overall conclusion, supported by the government, is that ICT applications offers many opportunities for improving democracy (Commissie ICT en de stad 2000; Commissie ICT en overheid 2001; Commissie Toekomst overheidscommunicatie 2001; Raad voor het openbaar bestuur 1998; Ministerie van Binnenlandse Zaken en Koninkrijkrelaties 2000). First of all, ICTs could improve the policy-making process and its quality. Through public forums on the internet citizens could be asked to participate in discussions of policy problems and to come up with solutions. This kind of participation might contribute to an increase in citizen involvement with the problem at hand and with the final decision on how to solve it. Second, ICT applications make it technically possible to introduce electronic voting. This might increase voter turnout. And third, ICT could make it easier for citizens to have a direct say in the improvement of their environment. Through meeting points on the internet citizens,

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[2] This issue was mentioned only in the 2003 election manifestoes of LPF (List Pim Fortuyn) and PvdA (Labour Party).

organizations and local governments could exchange information, ideas and services. Whereas the first two possibilities emphasize the contribution ICT might make to supporting the existing representative democratic processes, this third possibility represents a stronger bottom-up perspective.

However, most of the advisory boards and bodies mentioned above also warn against unreasonably high expectations in this respect. They claim that the use of ICTs will not lead to a fundamental change in the way representative democracy is working. In addition, the committee on ICT and government (*Commissie ICT en overheid*) (2001) emphasized that the changing relationship between government and citizens in the information society poses high demands on the government. Information should be accessible to everyone and citizens should get a right to know, that is, they should get more information about the way decisions are made and the availability of services and provisions.

- *Civil society*

In the Netherlands private organizations that perform public functions, such as schools and hospitals, have always enjoyed a large extent of autonomy. During the era of pillarization these organizations found their base in one of the pillars. As was mentioned before, pillarization not only structured political parties and trade unions, but also hospitals, schools, and leisure activities. Participation took place through the pillarized social organizations in, for example, education, health care and housing. Since the erosion of the pillars, many schools, hospitals, and other organizations have merged.

One of the central themes in the political and administrative debate on participation and democracy is the role that civil society ought to play in this context. In fact, the debate centres on two types of issues. The first is the issue of autonomy. The mainstream position held by politicians and public officials is that government interference in schools, hospitals and other private organizations with public functions should be limited to the minimum. This idea has always been predominant within the Christian political ideology, but also finds broad support among representatives of other political movements. In this view, the ability of society to organize itself should be encouraged. Professional workers and the social and public organizations they work for should have more opportunities to take the responsibility for their work and should have a greater say in determining the policy of their respective organizations (see various election manifestoes 2003). The recent cabinet position on (a different) public service (Kabinetsvisie 'andere overheid' 2003) and various reports from governmental advisory bodies also echo this view (Raad voor Maatschappelijke Ontwikkeling, 2000a; 2000b; 2002). In addition, the government stipulates that citizens and their organizations should play an important role in supervising the implementation of policies by public bodies (Kabinetsvisie 'andere overheid' 2003, p.14).

In certain, mainly left-libertarian, circles the emphasis is not so much on autonomy and restrictions to government interference, as on opportunities for citizens to wield power from below. Opportunities for more political power would include increased employee, pupil, and student participation, a greater say in business affairs for shareholders, more power to patients' councils, and more citizen involvement through participation in

voluntary organizations and non-profit organizations. The idea that citizens should get more opportunities to wield power from below was also one of the points of departure of the government's policy on the large cities (Instituut voor Publiek en Politiek 2002). In the 1998 coalition agreement citizen participation at the local level was called one of the key policy issues. Citizen initiatives, in particular those that at the level of the neighbourhood, should be encouraged from below.

To conclude, Dutch political and administrative elites adhere to the view that citizen participation is important for the quality of democracy. However, their interpretation of the concept of citizen participation is rather narrow. The political and administrative discourse focuses mainly on constitutional reform. That is, small reforms of the existing representative system are proposed. In as far as citizen participation is deemed important, it is not meant to lead to some form of direct democracy, but mainly to strengthen the way representative democracy is working now. Attempts to encourage initiatives from below remain rather limited. The role of participation remains mainly an instrumental one, in the sense that the key objective is to influence the political process. Furthermore, the dominant position is that, whatever form citizen participation might take, it is the government that should take and keep the initiative in policy-making.

4. <u>The academic discourse</u>
In this section I will examine the academic discourse on participation and democracy in the Netherlands. Again, the main question is how important citizen participation is deemed to be for democracy. And, secondly, how the various forms of participation could contribute to the quality of democracy.

To determine the mainstream of Dutch academic thought on this subject I went through recent books and articles in journals on public administration and political and social science. A global analysis shows that the academic debate on citizen participation and democracy focuses on a number of issues that can be categorized as follows: Participation as a form of individual behaviour, interactive policy-making, the value of information and communication technology, citizenship and deliberation, and constitutional reform. Each of these subjects will be discussed below.

- *Participation as individual behaviour*
Quite a number of political and social scientists have been studying the participation of individual citizens in politics. The political participation of individuals is considered to be important for democracy. However, different views are taken on the question in what way individual participation could contribute to democracy. In addition, there is considerable variation in the themes that have been studied and in the research methods that have been used.

A large group of authors is particularly interested in voting behaviour and citizens' political involvement (Thomassen et al. 2000; Van der Kolk et al. 2001; Dekker 2000 & 2002; Castenmiller 2001). Quantitative analyses are used to describe and explain changes in individual voting behaviour. For most of these authors, elections are the central element of the

democratic method. In this view, the most important function of political participation is an instrumental one. Citizens are first of all considered to be voters. Nevertheless, other aspects of individual behaviour are also regarded as important for democracy. Several authors stress the importance of citizens' political involvement for democracy (Castenmiller 2001; Van Deth & Vis 2000). They emphasize that it is important that citizens know about politics, are interested in politics, and discuss political issues. However, they do not claim that citizens should actively participate in political affairs. Active participation is not a necessary condition for democracy. According to these authors, large scale participation outside the official representative political institutions is not desirable at all and could even lead to a weakening of the traditional political institutions and eventually undermine representative democracy (see also Dekker 2002; Van der Kolk et al. 2001).

Other authors focus their attention on participation in social organizations and local neighbourhoods. Empirical research in this field points at the positive effects participation in social organizations may have on participation in the political system (Lelieveldt 1999). In these studies, the focus is again on the instrumental role of participation. A different view on the meaning of participation can be found in research on social renewal in neighbourhoods. Here, citizen participation and deliberation are deemed important because it encourages ordinary citizens to formulate and find solutions to their own problems (Kensen 1999).

- *Interactive policy-making*

An important theme in the academic debate on citizen participation and democracy is the topic of interactive policy-making. In recent years interactive policy-making has been a rather popular theme among scholars in public administration.

A substantial part of the literature on interactive policy-making does not, however, focus on improving the quality of democracy but takes up the managerial issue of how to organize an interactive policy-making process (De Bruijn et al. 1998; Driessen et al. 2001; Koppenjan 2001; Termeer & Van Twist 2003). Interactive policy-making processes are characterized by a high degree of uncertainty; the policy goals and policy instruments often remain vague for a considerable part of the process. According to these authors, uncertainty could be reduced and the chances of success in interactive policy-making could be improved by paying attention to process architecture and process management.

Other contributions do focus explicitly on the impact interactive policy-making could have on democracy (Hendriks & Tops 2001a; Hendriks & Tops 2001b; Edelenbos & Monnikhof 2001; Edelenbos et al. 2001)[3]. Some of the issues being discussed are the impact interactive policy-making has on the level of representation of those participating, the way the institutions of representative democracy are actually functioning, and the quality of the policy-making process. One of the central questions that is raised by several authors is how citizen participation in interactive policy-

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[3] For a more detailed analysis of the relation between interactive policy-making and democracy, see also Michels 2003.

making relates to the primacy and political responsibility of the elected democratic institutions. Most authors consider interactive policy-making as a valuable contribution to democracy, because it helps to close the gap between political authorities and the citizenry and it broadens public support for policy decisions. Though not always stated explicitly, the underlying assumption seems to be that cooperation between citizens and the government in interactive policy making is valuable as long as politicians can continue to do their work and make the final decisions.

Only one or two authors stress the aspect of dialogue and interaction between government officials and citizens. Interactive policy-making might contribute to a strong participatory democracy, in the sense that a face-to-face dialogue between government officials and citizens fosters citizenship and educates citizens in the affairs of the state. It could lead to more mutual understanding between citizens and politicians and to better decisions (Wille 2001).

- *Information and communication technology*

Because of the substantial increase in the use of information and communication technology, many academics in public administration and political science have explicitly posed the question what contribution ICTs could make to democracy. In the answers to this question, a distinction can be made between techno-pessimists and techno-optimists (Zuurmond 1996; Bovens 2003).

The techno-pessimists stress that ICTs will make the top of the public administration more powerful at the cost of the political institutions and the citizens (Zuurmond 1996). Expert knowledge and expert systems will be the domain of civil servants and politicians; citizens do not have access to these fields. Finally, this will lead to an Orwellian society in which Big Brother will be controlling all aspects of human life. The techno-optimists, on the other hand, view the spread of ICTs as a massive opportunity for the further emancipation of individual citizens and for the development of citizenship for all (Frissen 1996; Bekkers 2001). Public debates on the internet, citizen platforms and virtual communities offer opportunities for active citizenship and for a more responsive democracy. Increased opportunities for citizens to participate and a greater variety of types of participation will bring direct democracy one step nearer.

Empirical studies on the use and effects of ICTs cast serious doubt on the question whether the predictions of the techno-optimists will come true. First, ICTs do not seem to attract different kinds of participants (Van Praag 2002; Van Kempen & Brants 2002). Just like the participants in traditional forms of public debate, those participating in debates on the internet are predominantly male, young, and highly educated. Also, citizens who are hardly interested in politics are not induced to participate. Second, the quality of the debate does not increase. The use of ICTs tends to result in a superficial expression of opinions, rather than in a dialogue in which participants try to convince each other by the force of their arguments (Ragetlie 2002). So far, the conclusion seems to be justified that ICTs tend to reinforce existing patterns in participation: the gap between professional politicians and the politically active citizenry will narrow, whereas the gap between professional politicians and passive citizens who are not politically

interested will increase. Another emerging trend is the development of a so-called *enclave-democracy* (Bovens 2003) where people with identical opinions argue with each other and do not try to argue with or convince people with different opinions.

- *Citizenship and deliberation*

Two other, related, themes underlying the academic debate on citizen participation and democracy are citizenship and deliberation. Both themes belong to the academic domain of political theory. In contrast to the issues discussed above, citizenship and deliberation are abstract normative concepts that can be used to value the possible contributions interactive policy-making or ICT can make to democracy.

For neo-republican authors citizenship is a central concept (Van Gunsteren 1998; Witteveen 2000). These authors claim that citizenship forms the essence of democracy. People become citizens when they govern themselves from time to time. By participating in public affairs citizens become public citizens who create a public domain in which they can govern themselves. Only if citizens participate in the public domain, a strong democracy can exist. This does not mean that every citizen must participate; it suffices that citizens are given the opportunity to participate (Van Gunsteren 1998). Therefore, public debate should be held at different places and should not be confined to traditional forums.

A somewhat related concept to citizenship is the concept of deliberation (Hajer 2000; Hajer 2002). Again, citizen participation is deemed important for the quality of democracy. But here the focus is more on the question of how to build new forms of political and governmental institutions where there is room for deliberation (that is free public reasoning among equals in an atmosphere of mutual respect) between actors with different backgrounds (Hajer 2000). These ideas remain all rather abstract. But to a certain extent these new institutions already exist. For example, in interactive policy-making processes, citizens and their associations have been given opportunities to argue and exchange ideas with each other at different forums and in different institutional arrangements that are not linked to the traditional political institutions.

- *Constitutional reform*

A final theme in the academic debate on citizen participation and democracy is that of constitutional reform. This subject matter is predominantly the domain of jurists, although some issues have also attracted the attention of academics in public administration.

In the literature on constitutional reform several issues have been discussed, including the referendum, the direct election of mayors and the reform of the electoral system (Elzinga et al.1996; Elzinga & Hoogers 1999; Schagen & Kummeling 1999; Schagen 2001; Burkens et al. 2001; Dölle 2001; Boogers & Tops 2002). In general, the tone of the discussion is positive but critical. The dominant view is that constitutional reforms are inevitable and could contribute to the improvement of the quality of democracy. One should keep in mind, however, that some of the same jurists participated in the committees that advised the government on

constitutional reform. Most of the criticism focuses on the details of the proposals for constitutional reforms.

The issue most frequently discussed is the referendum. Several positive effects of the referendum are distinguished. Referenda might improve the legitimacy of policy choices and the support for them. They might broaden the public debate on policy. And they make it possible to correct for mistakes in the decision-making process. Most authors consider the referendum to be a valuable tool in determining the general will, as a complement to representation through the institutions of representative democracy (Elzinga & Hoogers 1999). Other authors, however, are not so optimistic and have serious objections to the referendum. One of the most fundamental criticisms is that parliament and government are better able to weigh the different interests of various stakeholders than the electorate can do in a referendum (Dölle 2001). Furthermore, the high thresholds for organizing a referendum or accepting its outcome might favour strong social organizations.

To conclude, the academic debate on participation and democracy covers a wide variety of themes such as interactive policy-making, participation through ICTs, and constitutional reform.

Most authors agree that participation is important for democracy. The dominant view is that the primary function of participation should be an instrumental one. The main objective is to give citizens a greater say in the political process. The goal is not to introduce direct democracy, but to strengthen the way representative democracy is working.

Only a few authors emphasize the expressive function participation may fulfil. In their view, participation is regarded as a value in itself and is of crucial importance in becoming a public citizen. Citizenship, dialogue, and deliberation are considered to be the essential elements of democracy.

5. Conclusion
This paper focuses on the issue of citizen participation and democracy in Dutch democratic thought. The analysis of both the political and administrative discourse shows that the main elements characterizing the Dutch view on the meaning of citizen participation for democracy can be summarized as follows:
- The issue of citizen participation has gradually gained importance since the end of the 1960s.
- Various forms of participation that might improve the quality of democracy have been discussed in recent years. These include participation through constitutional reforms, the use of ICTs in politics and policy-making, and interactive policy-making. In general, the existing political institutions and the traditional hierarchical way of policy-making are not criticized.
- Citizen participation is mainly seen as an instrument to strengthen and support the way representative democracy is functioning now.
- The local or national government should take and keep the initiative in policy-making. Initiatives ought to be taken from above. The process of involving citizens in politics and policy-making should not lead to the

erosion of the primacy of the representative institutions. The central focus of thought is not on citizens, but on the government.

- The role of participation is mainly an instrumental one. That is, its main objective is to give citizens and their organizations a say in the official political process. Participation is not regarded as a value in itself, but is merely aimed at producing a government.
- Participation has no other functions.
- Massive participation is undesirable and could even be dangerous.

Though this is the dominant view, some authors (academics in particular), point to different, more expressive elements of participation and consider citizen participation as essential to democracy.

In section 1, I presented two different views on participation and democracy. The first view maintains that citizen participation is only of limited importance to democracy. The second view considers citizen participation as an essential feature of democracy. From the above analysis it has become clear that the Dutch view on citizen participation is closer to the first view than to the second. Though citizen participation is thought to encompass more than voting in elections alone, participation is not seen as an essential feature of democracy but, at its best, as an instrument to improve the current working of representative democracy.

This interpretation of the role of citizen participation might also have some implications for the Dutch position on citizen participation within the European Union. It may be expected that the Netherlands will have serious doubts about introducing far-reaching forms of citizen participation. This expectation is confirmed by a recent report of the Dutch government that precedes the Dutch chairmanship of the European Union in the second half of 2004 (Ministerie van Binnenlandse Zaken en Koninkrijkrelaties 2003c). The point of departure is that the European member states should involve their citizens in policy-making and policy implementation at the European level. In this context, the report states that the governments should try to find ways to consult citizens in order to determine their wishes and interests. The main goal is to create support and consensus for policy decisions. Again, participation is not seen as an essential feature of democracy but, at its best, as an instrument to improve the way representative democracy is currently working.

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