

**Interactivity in political representation –
A conceptual discussion and some empirical insights**

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Introduction

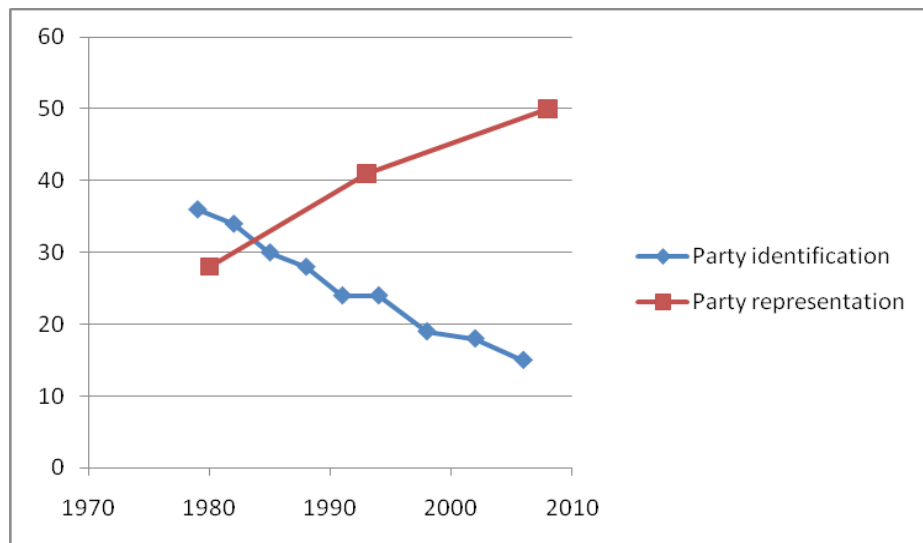
In recent years, a reoccurring theme in political science has been the condition of institutions of representative democracy in light of what has been called a crisis of political parties. The central role of political parties to create an institutional linkage between citizens and governmental institutions is, says some scholars, losing legitimacy as citizens decreasingly express trust towards, identify with, and join as members of political parties (Hayward 1995, Shields 2005, Mainwaring 2006, Katz & Cotty 2006).

These developments pose some critical questions for the legitimacy of systems of representative democracy relying heavily on the functioning of political parties. However, the problem is not one of party decline per se, as is often imputed to be the case; rather it is argued that *“the parties are at once stronger, but also more remote; at once more in control, but also less powerful; at once more privileged, but also less legitimate”* (Katz & Mair 1994:19). It is this particular combination of developments that has

provided the basis for the increasingly widespread antiparty sentiment, which implies a more problematic role of parties in representative democracy.

This picture can be said to be pertinent for political representation in Swedish local democracy. As the party identification among Swedish citizens have gradually declined over the last thirty years, the percentage of local political representatives identifying themselves as party representatives (foremost representing and adhering to the party view) has increased greatly. The contemporary situation is such that 50% of the representatives express that, in the situation of a conflict between the (known) view of the voters, their own view, and the view of their party, they would chose to adhere to the party view—parties that only 15% of voters can say they identify with. This paints a picture of the lacking legitimacy of the local Swedish democracy, which heavily relies on political parties that are somewhat alien to most citizens.

Figure 1: Party identification among citizens and party representation among local political representatives between 1979 and 2008



Comments: The statistics for party identification were collected from Statistics Sweden.¹ Figures for party representation in 1980 and 1993 were cited from Bäck 2006. These figures are regarded as a representative sample of local political representatives in Sweden. Figures for party representation in 2008 were taken from Karlsson 2008 and only contain data regarding representatives in six swedish municipalities, the results indicating an increase for the party representative role to about 50% is, however, supported by two larger studies of political representatives in the Västra Götaland region in Sweden from the years 2000 and 2002 (See Bäck 2006:65).

¹ http://www.scb.se/Pages/TableAndChart____272978.aspx (retrieved 2010-03-02)

When discussing the possibilities for the future development of political parties and representative institutions, which can help tackle issues of deficient legitimacy for political parties, some scholars point to a potential evolution of political representation towards a more communicative and interactive practice (Koopman 2004, Åström 2004, Coleman 2005a, 2005b, & 2005c, Montin 2006, Williamson 2009:309, Coleman & Blumler 2009). Lacking the use of party position as a reliable indication of the constituents' will² and the party organization for administering the linkage to the voters, representatives are thought to become more communicative and interactive with their voters in order to secure the legitimacy of their representation. This paper aims to contribute to the understanding of interactive practices in political representation by way of a discussion about how this phenomenon could be addressed theoretically and empirically, as well as some empirical investigations about interactivity among local political representatives in Sweden.

The rest of the paper will be disposed as follows; first a review will be made of the contemporary developments that point towards a possible emergence of more interactive practices in political representation. Thereafter a conceptual and operational definition of interactivity in political representation is approached. These parts of the text involves identifying prior works connecting to the topic, and relating interactivity to neighboring concepts, as well as roles of representation. In the following section empirical investigations of interactivity in political representation among local political representatives in Sweden are presented, addressing the diffusion of positive attitudes towards interactivity as well as the relationship between interactivity and traditional roles of representation. The main points of the paper are summarized and discussed in a concluding section ending with possible topics for future research.

Towards more interactivity in political representation?

The proposition that political representation might develop in a more interactive direction is supported by the widespread claim that information and communication technology (ICT) and especially the Internet have supplied new and more effective channels for political communication, helping parties and political representatives to target and communicate with their voters (Ward et al. 2006, Coleman 2005, Zittel 2009a, Stromer-Galley 2000:113). In recent years it has also become more evident that the Internet is developing in a new direction towards a phase (often called Web 2.0) characterized by social networking activities, user-generated content and interaction between users (Carlson & Strandberg 2007). The Internet

² Although also decreasing the level of perceived issue congruence between voters and political parties is not in any way near the low level of party identification, see, for example, Holmberg 2003.

has also proved in recent years to be an important space for political debate, especially during election campaigns (Chadwick 2007, Hindman 2005).

Although such studies so far rely heavily on what McNeil, Hale & Dotterweich (2008:226) call “anecdotal evidence”, indications have been made of recent election campaigns, reinforced by social networking technologies and online campaign strategies, have more involved interactivity between candidates and constituents than before. The most widely discussed example of interactive online campaigning is, of course, the presidential campaign of Barack Obama (Borins 2009, Wagner & Gainous 2009, Davis et al. 2009). The 2008 presidential campaign of Barack Obama was viewed almost as revolutionary as it, more than any prior campaign, invited supporters to join in and contribute not only to the budget, but also to the message of the campaign through interactive web-based channels.

Another development that may support the proposition that representation is moving in an interactive direction is the increasing emergence of participatory engineering projects (Zittel & Fuchs 2007); various forms of citizen consultations, citizen panels, user boards; and top initiated platforms for stimulating vertical communication in democratic systems outside of the political parties (Smith 2009, Copus 2003, Fung 2004, Zittel & Fuchs 2007). Taken into account that these forms of participatory engineering are experimental (Montin 1998) and might have little if any impact on the big picture of contemporary democracy (Gilljam 2003, Gilljam & Jodal 2006), they constitute a widespread phenomena or perhaps even a trend, which implies that interactivity and communication between voters and the elected are of some priority.

The development of the Internet as an important sphere for political communication and the emergence of participatory engineering as an instrument for fostering communication between representatives and represented both point towards the possibility for an endorsement of interactivity in political representation. As the representative’s adherence to the party line to a lesser extent can assure the representation of their voters, at the same time as the opportunities for effective communication with citizens’ increases through both ICT channels as well as participatory engineering, the opportunities for such development seem possible. The perspectives developed and used by political scientists trying to understand and empirically such development can roughly be divided into two groups, when addressing emerging roles among political representatives;

- 1) New concepts breaking away from prior frameworks for discussing and studying political representation suggesting a qualitatively different form of representation emerging in contemporary democracies. Examples of concepts used are, *direct representation* (Coleman 2005b, 2005c and Coleman & Blumler 2009), *the tribune model of representation* (Norton 2007), and *the technological model of representation* (Zittel 2003). These are examples of concepts describing a mode of political

representation that is greatly centered on interactive communication between representatives and constituents.

- 2) Concepts suggesting that political representation is and will be untouched by trends of interactivity and that continuity in political representation will be apparent are, *indirect representation* (Coleman 2005a), *Incumbent democracy* (Blaug 2002), *the constitutional model of representation* (Zittel 2003), and *the conservative model of representation* (Norton 2007).

Hence, the line of conflict has so far run between continuity and change in political representation. There is, however, some research indicating something of a middle ground as representatives adapt some new behaviors and attitudes connected to the developments discussed above (other channels for information provision, more direct contact with citizens), but the more immovable ideas about political representation and decision-making (roles of representation) are left unchanged (Stromer-Galley 2000, Zittel 2003 & 2009a, Ward et al 2007, Karlsson 2009). Jennifer Stromer-Galley describes her findings as indicating that “[r]epresentation³ is still the foundation, but channels of direct communication between citizens and political leaders increase to allow greater voice in the agenda, debate, and decisions made by representatives” (2000:113).

The conceptualization of interactivity in political representation presented in this paper breaks with prior concepts, as interactivity is not regarded as grounds for a role of representation in itself, but rather as a practice for carrying out different roles of representation. Therefore, we will discuss interactivity as a strategy for representation and relate the concept of interactivity to the traditional roles of representation. This conceptualization might be more adequate for understanding the development in contemporary democracy indicated by the studies discussed above, that suggests a middle way between continuity and change.

Defining interactivity in political representation

All models of representative democracy are dependent upon some form of transfer between citizens and political representatives through which views, promises, wishes, and mandates are communicated. While some models incorporate a restriction of the communication in the constituency-representative relationship (Schumpeter 1942:295, Gilljam & Hermansson 2003:15ff), others involve a vast array of communicative situations and functions (Lewin 1970, Barber 1984, Coleman 2005, Coleman & Blumler 2009). Communication can therefore be described as an obvious and at the same time conflicted feature in

³ Understood as a trustee role of representation where the representative allows him/herself to let his/her judgment rule despite the knowledge of an opposing public opinion.

political representation. Interactivity is a concept that essentially isolates the forms of communication that contain responsiveness between the communicating parties. In political representation, interactivity regards interaction between citizens and representatives. This form of communication can be said to depart from the most obvious and uncontested forms of communication in political representation.

This exposé towards a definition of interactivity in political representation will take its starting point from the thinking of one advocate of interactivity in political representation as a normatively desirable ideal, Leif Lewin, and review the central themes in his usage of the concept in democratic theory in the model of interactive democracy (Lewin 1970, Boström 1988, Lewin 2003, Åström 2004). In short, interactive democracy can be described as a model for democracy intervening between direct and indirect democracy. Leif Lewin summarizes this model as follows, “[*interactive*] Democracy is a form of government that is achieved to the same degree as the emergence of elite-mass interaction in the political decision-making process” (Lewin 1970:228, my translation). With interactive democracy Lewin proposes a democratic system where political elites aim at maximizing the participation of citizens as well as the interaction between citizens and political representatives. Lewin rejects instruments of direct democracy and underlines the importance of excluding other actors than elected representatives from decision-making in democratic institutions. While elected representatives should be free to choose their positions they should, according to interactive democracy, act to promote as much interaction as possible with as many citizens as possible (Lewin 1970:224).

The normative gains of interactivity in this model are twofold. Interactivity primarily is a way to create more informed decision-making, but is also put forward as an instrument to enhance the quality of political representation. Lewin argues that as representatives “[...]go out and encourage mass participation [...] they]thus increase their representativeness” (Lewin 1970:225, my translation). The more interaction representatives expose themselves to, the greater their knowledge of the public opinion will be. Hence, the functions of interactivity are reflected both in relation to the quality of the decisions as well as the quality of the political representation.

In sum, what Lewin put forward is essentially a model for political representation. It describes how representatives and political parties should relate to their constituencies or, in Lewin’s somewhat outdated language, how the elites should relate to the masses. Building on the model of interactive democracy, a definition of interactivity in political representation can be constructed. Interactivity in political representation is in this paper defined as *the practice among political representatives to interact in a responsive fashion with their voters, potential voters, or constituents regarding issues related to the relationship of representation.* Such issues could regard current policy issues and past decisions by the representative, as well as ideas for future policies. Like Lewin, we restrict interactivity to regard only

communication, and not, for example, the sharing of decision competences with citizens. We aim here simply to address the practice among representatives of communicating, not to, but with citizens.

Interactivity in relation to neighboring concepts

The concept of interactivity in political representation has obvious similarities with the established research field focusing on constituency communication in relation to political representation (Lawrenberg & Kim 1978, Sinclair 2006, Zittel 2009a, Williamson 2009). What is conceptualized in this paper as interactivity in political representation can likely be included in the broader term of constituency communication, which includes all communication between a representative and his/her constituents.

Differences between what this paper terms interactivity in political representation and the concept of constituency communication are clear. Unlike communication, interactivity demands responsiveness or feedback (Kioussis 2002). The announcement of one's ideas to the constituents is indeed communication, but not interactivity. For interactivity to occur the representative must also take accounts from the constituents regarding, e.g., their feelings and views on the announced ideas. Neither is the act of collecting views from citizens to be understood as interactivity, unless a form of response is made towards those who have voiced their views to the representative. In short, it is the demand of responsive communication that demarcates interactivity from the broader term of constituency communication.

Centering around communicative practices in democracy, the concept of interactivity must be more or less related to the vast body of literature on democratic deliberation. Unlike the concept of deliberation, interactivity does not entail any requirements besides the actual condition of responsiveness stated above. Hence, interactivity rejects what Parkinson portray as the "*procedural features [that] make deliberation much more than mere talk*" (Parkinson 2003:181), rendering it best described as just that, mere talk. To be more precise, unlike deliberation, interactivity does not entail any of the following conditions often associated with the concept of democratic deliberation: the participants' willingness to set aside their own preferences in the face of a better argument (Habermas 1975, Dryzek 2000); the inclusion of all relevant preferences in discussions (Gutmann & Thompson 1996, Sunstein 2001); or the communicative competences of the participants (Cohen 1989).

These immense requirements are not always associated with the concept of deliberation. In practice, deliberation is a term being used for a spectrum of political communication from political discussions in general (or just talk) to a very distinct form of communication following the above-mentioned or similar sets of requirements. As such, deliberative theory has been diagnosed as plagued by concept stretching (Steiner 2008). Michel A. Neblo equips us with a good reason for separating interactivity as a concept

from deliberative theory, concluding that "[i]f deliberation and deliberative theory are to have any cutting power they must be contrasted with other forms of political interaction" (Neble 2007:529).

Even though the concept of interactivity is intended to be separated from the procedural constraints as well as the conceptual debate of deliberation, it has to be acknowledged that the expected effects following interactive practices in political representation are closely related to the normative goods discussed in deliberative democratic theory. As will be shown in the following sections, interactivity in political representation is expected to assist representatives both in the decision-making process and in legitimizing their representation by giving accounts to constituents. These two functions have clear connections to the two primary hopes of theorists of deliberative democracy: that deliberative practices can boost the level of rationality in decision-making by way of voicing relevant perspectives on each issue, and the legitimizing force of the deliberation stemming from engaging in a more and more diverse set of actors in democratic decision-making (Habermas 1996, Bohman 1998, Chambers 2003). Other scholars of deliberative democracy have argued that interaction should be viewed as a prerequisite for deliberation: "*Although human interaction in and of itself is not public deliberation, it is the foundation for it. If people cannot talk with each other or with elites and politicians, then public deliberation cannot occur*" (Stromer-Galley 2000:128). All in all, interactivity must be viewed as a concept, separate from but related to both constituency communication and deliberation.

Representation and ideology

Political representation is often studied and understood in terms of roles and role-taking. In her study of local Swedish politicians' understanding of their "*democratic assignment*", Marika Sanne's (2001) argues that the identification with roles and descriptions of role-taking among political representatives must be understood as normative statements. Sanne concludes that there are no objective self-descriptions of the roles and activities of politicians available for empirical investigation. All notions of the own role are inseparable from the act of legitimizing the right to exercise political power and the will to better society (25). She therefore defines the lingual expressions of the roles of politicians as expressions of an ideology. The inherently normative functions of expressions about the own role must henceforth be recognized also in the measurements and frames of references used in the study of political role orientation.

Drawing on Sanne's reasoning, we find it necessary to relate interactivity in political representation to the normative or ideological nature of the role perception of political representatives. One reasonable assumption is that accounts given from political representatives regarding interactivity in their roles as representatives will have normative meaning. Like Sanne, we therefore propose an understanding of

interactivity accepting and exploring the normative, or even ideological, nature of the subject. One option when empirically addressing interactivity is attempting to measure attitudes connected to interactivity in political representation, and to regard them as just that, attitudes, which may or may not reflect actual behavior, but still carry information that is useful when studying representation as an ideological concept. Such attitudes could regard the necessity, function, and desirability of interactivity in their role as political representatives. With this orientation, the measurement takes into account, and relates to, the normative nature of the object of study and disregards the unattainable objective of capturing non-subjective evaluations of the representatives' roles.

The strategic functions of interactivity in political representation

The choice of the representative to adopt interactivity in his/her political representation can be viewed as a strategic action. Thomas Zittel has similarly depicted political representatives' communication with constituents as best understood as "*a strategic choice in the light of the dominant goal of re-election*" (Zittel 2009a:8, with reference to Mayhew 1974). In the approached definition of interactivity in representation we would like to broaden the notion of a strategic function of interactivity from the re-election-centered notion described above. In connection to Marika Sanne's understanding of representational roles as ideological constructions connected to the right to exercise political power and the will to better the society, we propose that interactivity can have a strategic function among political representatives directed at fulfilling such roles. By way of interacting with citizens, representatives can, in accordance with this line of argumentation, lessen the inconsistencies between their ideological understanding of their own roles as representatives and the practical activities of political representation.

In this paper we focus on this relationship between interactivity in political representation and the ideological notion of the roles of representation, and focus less directly on the function of interactivity in relation to re-election. This distinction is made on the basis of the understanding that strategic actions aimed at re-election are best understood in relation to a broader ideological view among representatives. Politicians are proposed to aim for re-election because they have a will to and believe that they can better society; they do not aim for re-election for the sake of re-election in and of itself. The actions of political representatives and parties are not best understood in relation to election strategies rather than ideology, but the two notions are often interconnected. Another reason for focusing on the ideological function of interactivity in the study is the lessons from Sanne telling us that purely rationalistic argumentation might not be truthfully expressed in studies, but rather dressed in a normative or ideological language. With a measurement more directly focused on such expressions this problem is, if not handled, at least taken into account.

Interactivity in political representation is, in sum, not to be viewed as a model of political representation in its own right, but rather as a possible *strategy for representation*. Interactivity is understood as a way for representatives to fulfill their role as representatives and, as shall be argued below, function in relation to the different roles of political representation. In order to qualify as a strategic practice, interactivity must have clear functions in relation to fulfilling different models of representation. Otherwise, representatives have no use for interactivity in representing their constituents. In the following section two such a function of interactivity between representatives and citizens for political representation are identified and discussed.

Accountability

Hanna Fenichel Pitkin famously stated that the representative “[...] *must not be found persistently at odds with the wishes of the represented without good reason in terms of their interest, without a good explanation of why their wishes are not in accord with their interest.*” (Pitkin 1967:209f.). In connection to this view on the grounds for the legitimacy of representation, interactivity can have a clear function for the mediation of these “explanations” and “good reasons” from the representatives as well as the accounts from the represented stating that their interests are not being represented. This can be summarized in terms like “*deliberative accountability*” (Mansbridge 2009) or the practice of “*giving accounts*”, an expression used by Stephen Coleman. Coleman underlines the gains of an interactive form of accountability:

“A fuller and more positive notion of accountability entails giving accounts which, in an inclusive democracy, should not be confined to representatives. Account-giving involves much more than transparency: it calls for views, policies and actions to be explained, contextualized and related to social experience. Giving an account is to enter into a relationship with the account’s recipient.”(Coleman 2005:190)

Coleman withholds that accountability has a negative tone among many political representatives and usually is associated with scenarios where politicians are held accountable for wrongdoing in the media. What he proposes as a “*more positive notion of accountability*” is a view of giving accounts as a strategic action of the representative. Coleman states the necessity of giving accounts for the possibility of re-election in democratic societies that, more than before, are directed towards anticipatory then promissory representation⁴ (Coleman 2005:191, with reference to Mansbridge 1998, see also Mansbridge 2003). By

⁴ Promissory representation describes a relationship between voter and elected centered around the making and fulfillment of electoral promises. Anticipatory representation instead describes a relationship where the representative focuses on satisfying the anticipated will of the electorate at the time of the next election, See Mansbridge 2003:516-520

giving accounts representatives are able to ensure their appropriateness for re-election among voters, and the best outlook for re-election should accordingly belong to the representative that has been most in-line with his or her constituents throughout the whole of the term. Therefore giving accounts should not be an activity that is rational for representatives just around election time.

Herein lies the first opportunity of interactivity in political representation as way for representatives to legitimize their political actions by giving accounts to and hearing accounts from their constituents. Hence, interactivity may function as an instrument for the representative to aligning his or her policy standpoints with the views of the represented or, in the case that such alignment is found unfit, to give accounts to the represented.

Inquiry

Stephen Coleman stresses that political representation must evolve towards what he calls connectivity. He explains the core of this concept: *“Being connected, in a democratic sense, requires communicative collaboration between representatives and the represented, and a prospect of mutual gain for both. This entails representatives not just being in touch with the public but also being touched by them, in the sense of an intimate and mutually communicative relationship”* (Coleman 2005:189). What Coleman touches upon here is what is proposed in this paper as the second possible function of interactivity in political representation, namely, the addition of new perspectives and ideas for policy positions for the political representative. In interactions between representatives and constituents, such ideas can not only be aggregated, but also developed in discussions. Not only may the wishes of the citizens, but also their knowledge and feelings about specific issues, be voiced through such inquiries (Fung 2006). Interactive processes also, in contrast to one-way communication, demand responsiveness from representatives towards these accounts.

In sum, interactive processes in political representation may create opportunities for account giving when explanations are called for from either part of the relationship, but may also expand the scope of issues for representation with new ideas and perspectives voiced by the citizens. In order to further develop the argumentation about possible strategic functions of interactivity in political representation, the two proposed functions of interactivity in the next section are related to different roles of political representation.

Relating interactivity to models of political representation

A set of roles of representation are listed and characterized in the two columns on the left of Table 1. The two columns on the right list the potential functions of interactivity in political representations discussed above, as accountability and inquiry are related to each of the models. The table illustrates how the functions of interactive processes are possible to relate to all three models of representation listed, and hence, how interactivity might be a useful strategy for political representatives adopting different roles of representation.

Table 1: Interactivity as a strategy in different models of representation

Representative role	Characteristic	Function of interactivity for accountability	Function of interactivity for inquiry
<i>Delegate</i>	Mandate bound to the expressed will of the represented	Make accounts of the correspondence between prior decisions and the will of the represented	To acquire information on the current will of the electorate
<i>Party representative</i>	Mandate bound to the pronounced strategy of the political party	Make accounts of the correspondence of prior decisions to the party line	To acquire accounts in order to contribute to forming the future party strategy
<i>Trustee</i>	Acting in accordance with one's own conviction	Make accounts of the correspondence of prior decisions and announcements of one's own conviction	To acquire ideas and information from the electorate (possibly altering one's own view)

Only three of many possible roles of representations are featured in this table, which therefore should not be viewed as anything resembling a comprehensive list of roles of representation. This table instead offers only as an illustration of the flexibility of the strategic functions of interactivity in political representation, rendering interactivity compatible with different understandings of the role of political representatives. The evaluation presented in the table suggests the usability of interactivity in all three roles of representation, and also illustrates how the goal of interaction might vary according to the understanding of the role as a political representative. In light of this analysis interactivity can be expected to form a separate dimension in political representation to the division between the roles of representation. This separation is logical when taking into account that the roles of representation are differentiated on the basis of different views of the grounds for political decision-making, while interactivity regards instead the communicative practice of the representatives that possibly, but not necessarily, forms a background

for decision-making. Hence, interactivity regards the question of “how?” related to political representation instead of the questions of “what?” and “who?” answered by the traditional roles of representation.⁵

Empirical investigation: Interactivity as a strategy for political representation?

So far we have proposed an understanding of interactivity in political representation as a strategic activity with the possible capacity to help representatives fulfill their normative conception of legitimate political representation. In this section it will be investigated whether we can attach any meaning to this conceptualization of interactivity when viewing practices of political representation in Swedish local democracy. As has already been mentioned this paper is unable to empirically address the question of whether interactive strategies for political representation are becoming more common among political representatives due to the lack of longitudinal data. Instead this empirical section will be focused on investigating the diffusion of positive attitudes towards interactivity in political representation among local political representatives in Sweden. Two questions will be addressed. First, *what patterns are visible in the diffusion of positive attitudes towards interactivity among local political representatives?*, and second, *is it correct to expect, as in this paper, that interactivity is a strategy separate from and unrelated to the division between different roles of representation?*

Methodological considerations

Before presenting the empirical analyses some notes on the methodology and operational definitions of the attitudinal measurements of interactivity in political representation will be presented. The operational definition of interactivity in political representation for this empirical study of the phenomenon is based on the discussions of the concept presented above. We have so far concluded that interactivity in political representation should be viewed as a possible strategy for fulfilling different models of representation. We have confirmed that interactivity can and must be distinguished from the broader spectrum of political communication between constituents and representatives as well as the narrower concept of deliberation. The necessity of understanding the inherently normative nature of such roles has also been underlined, rendering a measurement of interactivity focusing on attitudes appropriate. Two strategic functions of interactivity in political representation have been discussed and related to various models of representation. These functions, regarding accountability and inquiry, will form the basis for our

⁵ The term *roles of representation* relate to both of these questions only in a Burkean tradition where both the style and focus of representation to is connected to unitary the roles, see, for example, Zittel 2009b. The most common practice in research on political representation follows Eulau et al. 1959, where the style (answering the what question of representation) and the focus (corresponding to the who question). For a in depth discussion of these issues see Rehfeld 2009.

operational definition. Following the discussions summarized above a measurement is here proposed that could be used in a survey of political representatives. This measurement is based on two survey questions. The measurement aims to identify attitudes among political representatives regarding interactivity in political representation as a strategic practice for fulfilling their adopted role of representation.

Table 2: Operational definition of attitudes towards interactivity in political representation

Concept	Question	Range	Variable
<i>Accountability</i>	A political representative must initiate discussion of important issues with voters in order to justify his/her choices and political positions	1: Fully disagree – 10: Fully agree	Dummy variable, if a respondent displays the value 6 or higher in his/her answer to the question regarding accountability, the respondent is defined as positive towards interactivity as a strategy for ensuring accountability
<i>Inquiry</i>	A political representative must initiate discussion of important issues with voters in order to make good decisions	1: Fully disagree – 10: Fully agree	Dummy variable, if a respondent displays the value 6 or higher in his/her answer to the question regarding inquiry, the respondent is defined as positive towards interactivity as a strategy for inquiry
<i>Interactivity</i>	-	-	Dummy variable, if a respondent reports positive attitudes towards both <i>Accountability</i> and <i>Inquiry</i> he/she is defined as displaying positive attitudes towards interactivity

Both questions ask whether the respondent thinks that a political representative should *initiate* discussions with voters, in order to investigate possibilities of interactivity not as a circumstance in the surrounding context of the representative, but instead as a strategic action in which the representative identifies and initiate contact with the voters he/she finds it important to interact with. Hence, we are not investigating whether the respondents think that interaction should occur, but rather if they think that a political representative should initiate interactions as a strategic action in his/her political representation. This is not saying that context does not matter; interaction may well be more common in contexts where citizens are more active and better opportunities for interaction are offered. However, in order to empirically address the attitudes we are after, we need to create a scenario where the representative is the initiator.

The empirical data used in this study were collected through a questionnaire distributed to all members of the city council in six Swedish municipalities. The primary objective of the survey was not to investigate interactivity among political representatives, but to examine the relation between the local culture of representation among political representatives and the diffusion of participatory engineering projects. The

aim was to identify and analyze differences regarding culture of representation in municipalities where many participatory engineering projects (called pioneer municipalities) had been carried out and municipalities where few or no projects had been implemented (called hesitator municipalities). The hypothesis under investigation was that a more interactive culture of representation would be emergent in municipalities where citizens were more often invited to discuss and interact with political representatives, than in other municipalities. In order to be able to address this hypothesis, the selection of cases was made to include three of the municipalities that had implemented the most participatory engineering projects in the country and three of the municipalities that had implemented the fewest of such projects. As such, the case selection is biased as well as small and therefore not representative of Swedish municipalities in general. The empirical analysis of this appendix should therefore be interpreted with the knowledge that the results may be influenced by the strategic case selection that here is taken out of context.

The response rate of the survey varied between 54 and 77% in the different municipalities and reached an (acceptable) average of 60,5% involving a total of 190 respondents. The sample of respondents is representative of all members of the local parliaments in Sweden regarding gender and age. The sample does, on the other hand, show a considerable under-representation of politicians with a high school degree as their highest level of education (-9,5%). Except for a significant under-representation of members of the Swedish moderate party (-7,6%), the party representation of the sample is satisfactory. These asymmetries of the data call for a careful interpretation of the results.

Results

In this section some descriptive data will first be presented offering an overview of the diffusion of positive attitudes towards interactivity in political representation among the respondents in the study and some indications of patterns in the distribution between different groups of respondents.

When investigating how the attitudes towards interactive practices in political representation vary between different groups of local political representatives, we must first acknowledge the lack of any major asymmetries between the investigated groups. Simultaneous positive attitudes towards both of the functions of interactivity in political representation are visible among about half of the respondents (50,3%), and positive attitudes to the single functions among about sixty percent (inquiry: 62,2%, accountability 63,8%). Hence, these attitudes are a common but not an all-consuming view among local political representatives in Sweden. The results are displayed in Table 3 below.

By focusing on the apparent differences between groups and analysing variations larger than 10%, three groups of representatives stick out as more positive to one or both functions of interactivity in political

representation investigated in this paper. First, age seemed to be a factor as positive attitudes towards interactivity are more common among younger than among older political representatives. The pattern regards all three variables but is more apparent regarding positive attitudes towards interactivity for inquiring with citizens (+14,4%) and simultaneously displaying positive attitudes towards both functions of interactivity (+14,2%).

Second, more respondents from municipalities where many participatory engineering projects had been implemented (pioneer municipalities) simultaneously held positive attitudes towards both functions of interactivity (+11,4%). This could possibly indicate that a political culture that is more welcoming to interactivity between citizens and political representatives is emergent in these municipalities, either created by the participatory engineering projects or in itself creating greater opportunities for such projects.⁶

⁶ For a more thorough investigation of this hypothesis see Karlsson 2009.

Table 3: Attitudes towards interactivity in political representation, descriptive statistics. Figures are displayed in %

	Inquiry	Accountability	Interactivity	N
<i>Male</i>	59,6	60,5	50	(114)
<i>Female</i>	66,2	69	50,7	(71)
<i>Dif</i>	-6,6	-8,5	-0,7	
<i><50 years</i>	71,2	68,2	59,1	(66)
<i>>50 years</i>	56,8	61	44,9	(118)
<i>Dif</i>	14,4	7,2	14,2	
<i>Pioneer municipality⁷</i>	61,6	70,7	55,6	(99)
<i>Hesitator municipality⁸</i>	55,8	62,8	44,2	(86)
<i>Dif</i>	5,8	7,9	11,4	
<i>ICT user</i>	64,1	69,2	56,4	(78)
<i>non user</i>	64,6	62,6	49,5	(99)
<i>Dif</i>	-0,5	6,6	6,9	
<i>Politically left-oriented</i>	67,9	67,9	54,3	(81)
<i>Right-oriented</i>	57,7	60,6	47,1	(104)
<i>Dif</i>	10,2	7,3	7,2	
<i>All</i>	62,2	63,8	50,3	(185)

Comments: Differences between sub-groups are bold, differences >10% are underlined. The variable for ICT usage is based on an index including variables about the usage of e-mail, online discussion forums and a personal website connected to the political mission of the respondents.

Lastly, the political orientation of the respondents also seems to have some importance in relation to their attitudes towards interactivity in political representation. Positive attitudes towards interactivity with citizens were more common among representatives for the parties on the left side of the ideological scale

⁷ The municipality is among the top ten Swedish municipalities when it comes to the number of participatory engineering projects that had been implemented 2003. The figures comes from a study presented in Gilljam, Jodal & Cliffordson 2003

⁸ The municipality is among the bottom ten Swedish municipalities when it comes to the number of participatory engineering projects that had been implemented 2003, (Gilljam, Jodal & Cliffordson 2003)

(+10,2%). All in all, the distribution of positive attitudes towards interactivity in political representation must, beside these divergences, be said to be evenly distributed among different groups of representatives. One rather surprising result is that the representatives' usage of information and communication technology in their political missions had no major connection to attitudes towards interactivity in political representation. This result goes against previous findings about local political representatives in Sweden (Åström 2005).

The second empirical question addressed in this section of the paper concerns the relationship between interactivity and the traditional roles of political representation. According to the argumentation in the paper, interactivity should be a strategy with “equal potential” for political representatives, regardless of the discussed roles of representation (delegate, trustee or, party representative) a political representative identifies with. In order to test this assumption empirically a multinomial logistic regression analysis was carried out. The regression analysis investigated the relationship between attitudes towards interactive practices of political representation related to the two functions of *inquiry* and *accountability*, and the role orientation of the respondents presented as a division between *delegates*, *trustees*, and *party representatives*. In this analysis the variables for inquiry and accountability are not dummy variables, but variables measuring the attitudes towards these functions of interactivity along a ten-point scale (see the range column in Table 3). The statement that interactivity is unrelated to traditional roles of representation and hence not restricted to any specific category of political representatives is supported if no statistically significant relationships are found between any of the two independent variables (attitudes towards *inquiry* and *accountability*) and any of the three investigated roles of representation (*delegate*, *trustee*, or *party representative*).

Table 4: Multinomial logistic regression predicting representational role-taking from attitudes towards interactivity in political representation

	Trustee			Delegate		
	S.E	OR	Sig.	S.E	OR	Sig.
<i>Inquiry</i>	(,075)	,910	,209	(,145)	,996	,980
<i>Accountability</i>	(,073)	1,077	,310	(,169)	1,345	,080

Comments: Party representative was the reference group for the analysis, Nagelkerke = ,04, N= 176, OR = Odds ratio, displayed in Exp (B) values.

The multinomial regression model displayed in Table 4 predicts the likelihood of a shift from the reference group, made up of respondents identifying themselves as *party representatives*, to each of the other two roles of representation: *trustee* or *delegate*. The predictions were made based on the values of

the two independent variables, attitudes towards interactivity in political representation for the function of *inquiry* and *accountability*. With this analysis we can perceive whether or not the odds for a local political representative taking a specific role of representation are dependent on his/her attitude towards interactivity in political representation. The results from this analysis must be interpreted with some caution as the absence of a statistically significant relationship could result from a low number of studied cases (176 respondents).

The predictions made by the model display only small odds variations when it comes to different roles in relation to attitudes towards interactivity (OR = ,910 to -1,345). None of the predictions in the model are statistically significant (on the 95% level of significance), indicating the absence of a connection between attitudes towards interactive practices in political representation and representational role-taking.⁹ The prediction regarding attitudes about interactivity as a strategy for accountability for representatives with delegate roles displays close to a significant relationship ($p=,080$). Even though we can't comment on this relationship with a satisfying level of certainty, the analysis gives us an indication that positive attitudes towards citizen interaction with the goal of making accounts about prior decisions may be more common among delegate representatives. On top of the lack of statistic significance, the model as a whole is explaining only as much as 4% of the variation among the respondents different representational roles (Nagelkerke = ,04). Consequently, these results give us a strong indication of the absence of a clear connection between interactivity and traditional roles of representation among local political representatives in Sweden. However, the results should be interpreted with caution as the relatively small number of respondents could contribute to the absence of significant relationships.

The results from this analysis can be said to support the assumption made in this paper that interactivity in political representation should be regarded and investigated neither as an alternative role of representation nor as a phenomenon related to any of the traditional roles of representation. Instead, the results showing the lack of a connection between traditional roles of representation and positive attitudes towards interactive practices align with a view of interactivity as a possible strategy for representation, relatable to several ideological positions of political representation. This view of the phenomenon of interactive representatives also sides with the results of prior studies investigating the emergence of more interactive representatives related to the increasing importance of ICTs in democracy and the increased emergence of participatory engineering projects. These studies identify continuity in the central ideological notions of political representation while showing some changes in behavior or attitudes related to communication (Stromer-Galley 2000, Norton 2007, Ward et al. 2007, Zittel 2003 & 2009a, Karlsson 2009). In line with

⁹ Even if the independent variables are changed to the dummy variables presented in Table 2, no significant relationships emerge. Neither does the dummy variable for interactivity (including simultaneous positive attitudes tow interactivity for inquiry and accountability, see Table 2) give any significant coefficients.

these results, this analysis underlines the fruitfulness of not collapsing the dimensions of representation, defined as the style of representation, or even more narrowly, as what view to act upon as a political representative in situations of political decision-making within the dimension of political communication. The obvious questions to ask in relation to this conclusion are: what are these attitudes towards interactivity worth if they do not affect the dimension of decision-making? Are they only smoke-screens or are these interactions affecting the representation in any way? These are clearly empirical questions that this study is unable to address, but that may well be an important issue for future research on interactivity between citizens and political representatives.

Conclusion

This paper has discussed interactivity in political representation with contemporary trends pointing towards the possibility of the development of political representation in the direction of increased interactivity between citizens and representatives as a starting point. Indications of a possible decline of the mediating function of political parties in representation, the emergence and evolution of ICTs as instruments for political communication, and the trend of government-initiated participatory engineering, are all developments that support the expectation of more interactivity in political representation. In this paper an attempt has been made to define interactivity in political representation as a possible concept for studying this development.

Based on the model of interactive democracy a conceptualization of interactivity in political representation has been proposed, viewing interactivity as a possible strategic practice of representatives preformed to fulfill their adapted role as representatives. Interactivity is simply being defined as the practice of political representatives interacting in a responsive fashion with their voters, potential voters, or constituents regarding issues related to the relationship of representation. This concept is isolated from the wider concept of constituency communication, as it includes a requirement of responsiveness and from the narrower concept of deliberation, as it excludes other requirements than of responsiveness.

An operational definition of interactivity in political representation is proposed focusing on attitudes among political representatives regarding two functions of interactivity in political representation. The two functions addressed are interactivity as (1) a way to create accountability and legitimate political decisions affecting constituents by way of “giving accounts”, and (2) a way to create a knowledge basis for political decisions by way of inquiring with constituents about political issues. These functions of interactive practices are related to the three most commonly referenced and studied roles of political representation suggesting a possible congruence with each of the roles of representation. An empirical investigation of

attitudes towards interactivity among local political representatives in Sweden suggests that the separation of attitudes towards interactivity and roles of representation is correct. No patterns emerge indicating that representatives displaying positive attitudes towards interactivity are more likely to adopt any specific role of political representation.

Some pressing issues are left untouched by the presentation above. First, this paper does not address whether or not the absence of a connection between the roles of representation and attitudes towards interactivity imply the absence of the importance of interactivity in political representation. Second, the paper leaves out the normative implications, the question of whether a development towards more extensive interactivity strengthens or threatens political representation and democracy. Both standpoints can and have been argued for (Lewin 1970, Warren 2006:6, Wohlgemuth 2006:160, Coleman & Blumler 2009:71, Stasavage 2004, Gaber 2007). All in all, we are left with many new questions; interactivity may or may not be an increasingly applied practice among political representatives, may or may not be affecting the functioning of political representation, and may or may not be normatively desirable in representative democracy. While standing helpless before these immense issues, this paper may have contributed some insights about how a conceptual apparatus for addressing the topic of interactivity in political representation should be designed.

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