

# **Re-intermediating the councillors? Towards new connections between representative and participatory democracy in local government**

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**Abstract:** This paper explores the consequences of two strands of institutional renewal in local government for the position of the councillors, namely (1) the introduction of forms of participatory democracy in combination with (2) certain reforms in the institutions of representative democracy, in particular the separation of administrative and scrutiny roles between the council and the executive, and the directly elected mayor. In two cities, Almere in the Netherlands and Lewisham in the United Kingdom, various examples of citizen involvement are examined. A strikingly different picture emerges. Whereas a clear trend towards a disintermediation of the councillors can be observed in Lewisham, the Almere Council is trying strategies that seem to further a re-intermediation of the council in the political linkage chain. Together, these cases indicate that the character of the intermediation between citizens and decision-makers in local governance is determined by the interplay between institutional conditions and actor strategies.

**First draft, comments welcome**

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### *1. Introduction*

Since the beginning of the 1990s, many European local authorities are in a process of renewing their democratic institutions. First of all, new ways of involving citizens in policy processes have been introduced with the aim to improve the responsiveness of local decision making, thereby strengthening the democratic legitimacy of local government (Daemen and Schaap, 2000). At the same time, in several countries, like the Netherlands and the United Kingdom, major reforms have been introduced in the institutions governing the relationship between the council and the executive. These reforms are intended to revitalise representative institutions, in particular by tackling problems of accountability and transparency in municipal decision-making. A key element in these reforms is the separation of administrative and scrutiny roles between the executive and the council (Goss, 2001; Elzinga, 2002).

Both strands of changes and reforms may have important consequences for the positions and roles of the elected representatives. The new forms of participatory democracy tend to challenge the political primacy of the politicians. Generally, they have found it hard to play a constructive role in the participatory processes (Klijn and Koppenjan, 2000). Furthermore, in those countries in which reforms were introduced in the relationship between council and executive, councillors have to re-invent their roles in representative politics. In this paper, I want to explore what these changes and challenges mean for the position of councillors as political intermediaries. My starting-point is the proposition that the introduction of forms of participatory democracy in combination with the current reforms in representative institutions may result in a (further) *disintermediation* of the councillors from the local decision-making arenas. An institutional context may emerge, in which citizens will be induced to bypass the councillors and to bargain with the members of the executive and public officials, and in which the executive will be stimulated to take the lead in involving citizens in policy processes, without the interference of the council. By stating the research problem in this way, I look at the *quality of the intermediation* between citizens and political decision makers, rather than on (diminishing) the 'distance' or

‘gap’ between the two, or on (increasing) the involvement of citizens in local politics. Here, I will not dwell upon these issues from a normative perspective, but embark upon an empirical exploration, focusing on the position of the councillors.

The main purpose of this paper is to examine whether these tendencies toward a disintermediation of councillors are indeed occurring and, if so, which strategies are pursued by the councillors to counter them. Following from this, we may address the question whether these strategies have the potential of establishing new, and perhaps better connections between participative and representative democracy in local government. Two local democracies will be taken as the cases for this exploration, the city of Almere in the Netherlands and Lewisham in the UK.

The following questions will be addressed:

- (1) Which reforms have been introduced in the relationship between the council and the executive in the Netherlands and the UK, and what is their significance for the position of the councillors as democratic intermediaries?
- (2) Which opportunities are offered to citizens to participate in local policy processes in these countries, and how are councillors involved in this?
- (3) Which strategies are pursued by the councillors for strengthening their roles as intermediaries between the citizenry and the executive?

These questions have to be addressed against the backdrop of societal developments in which a de-centring of political decision-making has taken place to arenas outside the direct control of elected representatives. Politics has been ‘relocated’ to interorganisational networks spanning different levels of government (Bovens et. al, 1995). Here lies another dynamics that may account for a disintermediation of the councillors. I will address this first in the next Section. A framework will be proposed that pictures a coexistence of different models of democracy within a context of local ‘governance’. Within this framework, I elaborate the disintermediation proposition. In Section 3, I shortly discuss the changes that are taking place in the institutions of local government in the Netherlands and the UK. In Section 4, I introduce the two cases. In Section 5, various examples of citizen involvement are examined. I look at the available opportunities and the strategies pursued by the councillors in the two cities to reinstate their roles as political intermediaries. In Section 6, I draw some conclusions.

## *2. Local democracy in the context of governance*

The idea of making connections between different democratic devices is, of course, not new. In his normative account of democracy, Dahl (1989) included the indirect mechanisms of pluralistic interest intermediation and representative democracy, as well as some deliberative devices. In recent discussions about democratic innovation, new institutional designs are searched for, in which different models of democracy work in ways that can be mutually supportive (Saward, 2001; see also Papadopoulos, 2003).

I define democracy as ‘responsive rule’, i.e. in terms of the correspondence between acts of governance and the (equally weighted) felt interests of citizens with respect to these acts. This definition is borrowed from Saward (1989). As a predominantly outcomes-based definition, it can be regarded as somewhat lacking, because it does not indicate a mechanism for achieving responsiveness that would count as ‘democratic’. This, however, is the next step in the proposed conceptualisation. Figure 1 depicts the local democratic polity in the context of governance.

[Figure 1]

On the right of this figure, the vertical, multi-level dimension of governance is pictured, at the bottom the horizontal dimension of cooperation between (quasi-) public and private agencies. At the top, I place the representative institutions and executive structures. The four thick arrows on the left stand for the political activities of citizens, either individually or via organisations. A thin arrow is added for the contributions of individual citizens in deliberative arrangements.

I distinguish six democratic regimes, each providing a specific mechanism and appropriate institutions for achieving responsiveness. Each regime also embodies certain values about the way in which political conflicts should be resolved, thereby pointing to certain norms pertaining to the quality of democratic intermediation.<sup>1</sup> I place *deliberative democracy* in the centre of this figure, within or in the immediate

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<sup>1</sup> For an exploration of this, in the context of deliberative democracy, with regard to the role of the moderator, see: Edwards (2002).

environment of the interorganisational networks in which public policies are formulated and implemented. It includes all those arrangements in which citizens can discuss public issues, and exchange their views with politicians and officials representing the various agencies that are involved in public policies. Examples are round table conferences, citizen juries and policy exercises on the Internet. *Pluralist democracy* constitutes the arena in which interest groups, social movements, and other citizens' initiatives articulate citizens' concerns and demands, and try to influence the political agenda-setting and decision-making. Pluralist democracy and deliberative democracy involve the citizens as active participants or co-producers of public policies. In *competitive democracy* (Miller, 1983) political parties or individual candidates compete for legislative and executive offices. This form of democracy overlaps 'representative democracy' as it denotes both the election of councillors and the direct election of executives. In contrast, *direct democracy* provides the citizenry with opportunities to make their own binding collective decisions on specific issues. Competitive democracy and direct democracy involve the citizen in his role as a voter. Lastly, *customer democracy* addresses citizens in their role of service users. It provides them, individually or in their client associations, with opportunities to give feedback on public service delivery. In *associative democracy*, service provision is devolved to self-governing associations functioning internally as representative, deliberative or direct democracies. This model of democracy also includes the arrangements of self-government in neighbourhoods (Hirst 1994).

Within this framework, we can situate the main forces that may account for a disintermediation of the council from the local decision-making arenas:

- The de-centring of collective decision-making to interorganisational networks;
- The differentiation of the local polity into different democratic regimes, with different intermediaries, constituting different 'markets for political activism' (Richardson, 1995);
- The emergence of arrangements for the direct election of executives, notably the directly elected mayor.

Against the disintermediation scenario, however, we have to posit the strategies that may be available for the elected representatives to re-intermediate themselves, thereby re-inventing their representative roles in a changing institutional context. In the recent

e-commerce literature, from which I borrow the idea of an ‘intermediation-disintermediation-reintermediation’ cycle, the attention has shifted from the early proposition that electronic transactions would lead to the elimination of intermediaries to a more careful analysis of different institutional conditions and available strategies for old (and new!) intermediaries in electronic markets (Giaglis, Klein and O’Keefe, 2002; Chircu and Kauffman, 1999; Sarkar, Butler and Steinfeld, 1996). In this line, I concur with Goss (2001), who redefines the councillors’ roles as those of a caseworker, an advocate, a broker or a facilitator:

“In a world in which direct and participatory democracy coexists with representative democracy the role of a representative changes, and becomes one of ringholder, advocate, broker, listening to and bringing together the views of different communities. The job of the representative becomes that of integrating different sorts of democracy and different sources of democratic legitimacy” (p. 135).

In this paper, I want to make a start with unravelling the dynamics that may hinder or further such a development.

### *3. The institutional context: reforms in local government in the Netherlands and the United Kingdom*

#### *The Netherlands*

Around the beginning of the 1990s, the local politicians in the Netherlands felt a growing concern about the legitimacy of local government. A crucial factor was the 1990 local elections, in which the turnout of just above 60% was perceived as dramatically low and as an ominous sign for the involvement of citizens in local politics. The local authorities responded with trying various devices for involving citizens in the policy process. The experiments with ‘city talks’, ‘round table conferences’ and the like gave rise to a deliberative practice of ‘interactive governance’, which is now a common phenomenon in Dutch local government. Until now, the experiences are, in terms of increased participation, real influence on political decision-making, quality of policies and public support, rather mixed, but it

is still too early to designate this practice as a complete failure or success (Edelenbos and Monnikhof, 2001). Rather, it should be regarded as a learning process in which the conditions are explored for its appropriate usage and implementation.

Furthermore, several Dutch municipalities introduced the referendum as a device of direct democracy. Lastly, the Dutch municipalities embarked on a process of innovating their public service delivery, which includes new instruments for feedback and participation of service users. However, a more or less comprehensive practice of 'customer democracy', as seems to exist in the UK, did not arise in the Netherlands.

Since 2002, Dutch local government is undergoing a reform process that is aimed at a major renewal of local politics. This reform was the result of the recommendations made by a state commission, which pleaded for a stronger 'visibility' of local politics (Staatscommissie 'Dualisme en lokale democratie', 2000). Research had established that the most important political decisions took place behind the closed doors of the meetings of the political groups in the council. In particular, an institutional intertwining had grown between the parties forming the majority coalition and the executive. The core reforms are intended to strengthen the scrutiny role of the council towards the executive, thereby revitalising the councillors' roles as representatives of the voters. Basically, these reforms involve a renewal of the local political culture, but the most important changes that were introduced in this so-called 'dualisation' process are legal changes in the structure of local government (Derksen and Schaap, 2004):

- The aldermen are no longer council members. They are still appointed by the council, but after their appointment their council membership expires. Moreover, aldermen can be appointed from outside the council.
- The roles of the executive and the council are separated. The role of the executive is exclusively administration, whereas the council roles are focused on representation of the people, establishing general policy frameworks, and scrutiny. As a result of this repositioning of roles, several administrative competences were transferred by law to the executive board. At the same time, the council received several new instruments, for instance the right to initiate an inquiry.
- The council has got the right to provide itself with official assistance. In each municipality a 'council registrar' is appointed. The council has the freedom of deciding on the size and substance of the registrar function.

- Each municipality has to establish an audit function, either in the form of an independent auditor's office or an audit commission of the council.

In contrast to the UK, the position and way of appointing the mayor were not included in the reforms. In the Netherlands, the Crown appoints the mayors. Gradually, a practice has come into being in which the local council has a formal position in the procedure, and can exert a major influence on the appointment decision. In 2004, the new Dutch cabinet has proposed a draft bill for a directly elected mayor. This reform would have important consequences for the relationship between council and executive in Dutch local government.

### *United Kingdom*

Local politics has been losing legitimacy in the UK since the 1970s. As Goss (2001: 118) has indicated, with turnouts of around 30% fewer people voted in British local elections than almost anywhere else in Europe. The Conservative governments attempted to increase the involvement of citizens in local government, addressing them primarily in their role of service users. Citizens were invited to participate in the assessment of public services or in the management of organisations involved in public service delivery. The subsequent Labour governments have extended this agenda by addressing the citizen also in his political roles. New methods of consulting citizens, such as citizen juries and citizen panels were introduced.

The Labour government has included the renewal of the democratic institutions of local government within its programme to modernise public administration. In its White Paper on local government, the Blair government criticised the traditional committee system for being inefficient and intransparent, leading to a situation of distorted priorities and decisions taken behind the closed doors of party meetings (DET; Noppe and Ringeling, 2001). Local authorities were required to separate executive and scrutiny roles. The new powers of the councillors include scrutiny, 'community leadership', and certain regulatory powers:

- All councils have to provide maintaining and review of executive policies and activities. They have to establish a scrutiny commission made up of councillors who are not members of the executive or cabinet.

- Community leadership involves taking ‘a comprehensive view of the needs and priorities of local areas and lead in the work that is needed to meet these needs’.
- The councils retain the power to make quasi-judicial decisions on how to apply regulations to specific local matters, such as planning and licensing decisions (LGA, website).

Furthermore, the Blair government offered three models for structuring the executive and its relationship with the council (DETR, 1998):

- (1) A directly elected mayor heading a cabinet. The mayor appoints a cabinet from the members of the council;
- (2) A leader with a cabinet. The council elects the leader. The other cabinet members are chosen from the members of the council by the council or the leader.
- (3) A directly elected mayor with a council manager.

For smaller local governments, a fourth alternative was added, allowing for the preservation of an adapted version of the old committee system, if this was supported in a citizen consultation. Most councils have chosen for the second model (Wilson, 2002). Lewisham was one of the few municipalities that opted for the first alternative.

In their focus on the relationship between the council and the executive, the proposed reforms in the two countries, as well as the arguments underlying them, bear some striking similarities.<sup>2</sup> The same holds true for some of the criticism they met in the scholarly literature. According to Wilson (2002), the Labour reforms, in particular the option of a directly elected mayor, may lead to a more elitist decision-making, with the result of marginalising the ‘ordinary councillors’. In the same vein, some Dutch commentators have argued that the dualisation process in the Netherlands will result in a further shift of power towards the executive (Derksen, 2000).

#### *4. The cases: Almere and Lewisham*

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<sup>2</sup> There are also important differences. For instance, the members of the cabinets in the UK keep their council membership.

Within the similar discourses and institutional contexts described above, two cases were selected which are rather dissimilar in their specific constitution of the council-executive relationship, namely Almere in the Netherlands and Lewisham in the UK. In this respect, they are not representative for the entirety of municipalities in the two countries. As noted above, Lewisham was one of the few municipalities in the UK that opted for a directly elected mayor. But Almere, too, can be regarded as a special case in the Dutch context. With some of its innovations, the Almere Council has gone farther than any other municipality in the Netherlands.<sup>3</sup>

### *Almere*

Situated some 25 kilometres east from Amsterdam, Almere is a new town with a current population of 173,000 inhabitants. In the next 20 years, Almere is expected to grow further to one of the largest municipalities in the Netherlands.

The Council consists of 39 members. The executive board (with six aldermen) is a broad coalition of the Labour Party (two aldermen), the local party 'Livable Almere' (two members), the Christian Democrats and GreenLeft (each with one alderman). Since 2004, the Almere Council uses a new form for its council work. The traditional commission and council meetings have been replaced by a weekly 'Political Market'. The first part of the evening is a kind of roundabout of activities focused on 'research and preparation'. Different issues are treated in separate (but adjacent) rooms. The activities vary from reading documents or consulting experts to having discussions with civil servants, members of the Executive, citizens and social organisations. The second part of the evening is intended for political debate and final decision-making. With this formula, the Political Market also serves as a channel for citizens for influencing local politics. During the first part of the evening, the councillors, civil servants, Mayor and aldermen are directly approachable for citizens. A tight management of the agenda provides clarity and certainty on which issues are discussed, when and where. Furthermore, citizens who assembled at least 50 signatures can put an issue on the agenda (a so-called citizen activity').

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<sup>3</sup> The information in the Sections 4 and 5 is based on official documents and (when indicated) on information on the municipalities' websites. Interviews were held with the registrar of the Almere Council and with the Head of Community Governance and Public Management in Lewisham.

### *Lewisham*

Lewisham is a borough within the Greater London Area, with a current population of 246,000 inhabitants. The Council consists of 54 members, three elected by each of the 18 wards within the borough. The council is overwhelmingly Labour controlled (42 councillors). In 2002, Lewisham elected Steve Bullock as its first directly elected mayor. He has appointed a Cabinet of nine councillors to assist him in decision-making and policy proposal. Those members of the Council who are not in the Cabinet have the task of overview and scrutiny. These members form Select Committees for this work, and also a Business Panel which coordinates the Select Committees and holds the power of call-in over executive decisions. In the UK, Lewisham has a reputation as one of the forerunners in consultation procedures with citizens. Recently, a special consultation website has been set up about all the Lewisham's consultations since January 2004, including their results and 'how citizens' views have informed the decision making process' ([www.lewisham.gov.uk](http://www.lewisham.gov.uk))

### *5. The cases examined: Disintermediation tendencies, re-intermediation strategies*

In Section 1, I distinguished three sorts of dynamics that bear upon the position of the councillors in the intermediation between citizens and decision-makers in local governance. In this Section, I examine various examples of citizen involvement in the two cities, which can be taken as indicative for this.<sup>4</sup> Together, the examples should give us the indications needed to infer whether the disintermediation scenario seems to hold true or that a re-intermediation may occur. A disintermediation can be observed when in the 'linkage chain' (Lawson, 1988) between the expression of preferences by the citizens and the final decision-making, the councillors tend to be eliminated, giving way to direct interactions between the citizens and the decision-makers or to the inclusion of other intermediaries. First, I look at the intermediation from the council towards the executive. Then I look at some practices in the broader context of 'governance'.

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<sup>4</sup> These are all the examples mentioned by the two interviewees in the two cities.

In Almere, the Political Market provides a new channel for citizens to forward their concerns and interests. A first evaluation (Gemeente Almere, 2004) suggests that the Political Market attracts more citizens to the town hall, and also improves the relation between citizens and councillors. Of course, the open formula implies that besides the councillors, the visitors can also approach the civil servants, the aldermen and the mayor. In this respect, the council functions as a kind of ‘host’ for the citizens and the other players involved in the municipal decision-making.<sup>5</sup> An advantage for the councillors is that the meetings now run parallel with the meetings of the executive. Before, the plenary council meetings were held only once a month. At the same time, because of the abolition of the committee meetings, there seems to be a net time gain that can be used for external contacts with citizens and organisations.<sup>6</sup> The possibility for citizens to forward an issue on the agenda of the Political Market, with the aim of stopping a pending decision of the Executive, was used twice since its incipience in early 2004. The first ‘citizen activity’ was an initiative of residents to preserve the plane-trees in an avenue in their neighbourhood, the second one was an initiative to preserve the so-called ‘city-meadows’. In both cases, councillors stepped into these issues vis-à-vis the Executive.

In Lewisham, the main access-points for the citizens are the surgeries of their ward councillors and the local Area Forums. There are six Area Forums, each made up of three wards. The meetings are arranged by the councillors as a way to listen about the local issues that concern citizens. In the plenary council meetings, which are held once in two months, councillors have the opportunity to present petitions on behalf of the residents. Common petitions concern local traffic problems and road safety. In the coming period, the councillors will run across a powerful competitor in their wards. Between September 2004 and December 2005, the mayor will visit each of the 18 wards to meet residents, community representatives, schools and businesses. These visits can be interpreted as leading towards disintermediation, although they could also function as a catalyst for re-intermediation strategies, depending, for instance, on the room left to the councillors for an active involvement in the

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<sup>5</sup> One alderman told that since the start of the Political Market the number of visitors of his surgeries sharply diminished (VNG Magazine, 12 March 2004). Further research would be needed to establish whether the Political Market only has a substitution effect or results in a net gain in interactions with citizens, and how this is distributed between councillors and members of the executive.

<sup>6</sup> Of the councillors who participated in the evaluation, 49% indicated that they now spend as much time, and 39% even more time to their council work. However, 49% of the councillors also indicated that they have now more time for external contacts with citizens and organisations (p. 7).

preparation of the visits and their follow up. [to expand on in a later version of this paper]

The mobilisation of citizen input for the scrutiny function might be one of the most promising opportunities for councillors to reinstate their position in the decision-making arena and to connect them to the wider community (Goss, 2001). In both cities such a practice has to develop as yet. In Almere, the Political Market can serve this function on specific issues. Besides, the Almere Council intends to set up ‘monitoring groups’ (*volggroepen*) for specific (large) policy projects. These groups will have discussions with the professionals involved in the implementation and service provision, target groups and experts. By ‘giving the floor’ to the involved professionals and citizens, and consolidating their contributions in the evaluation report, the councillors would take on a facilitator or moderator role. The Council’s scrutiny role also includes the way in which consultation procedures are implemented by the municipal agencies. At the time of writing this paper, the local Auditor’s Office is conducting a comprehensive review, which will be discussed in the council. [to expand on in a later version of this paper]

In Lewisham, the overview and scrutiny functions are carried out in seven Select Committees and in the Business Panel. The Business Panel meetings have a predominantly formal nature. In the Select Committees substantive discussions may take place about reviews, audits etc.<sup>7</sup> A Select Committee may also question the mayor about his views and policy ambitions. Third, they may discuss the reports of citizen consultations. In September 2004, a consultation procedure has started about the Controlled Parking Zones. A citizen jury addresses the general issue of ‘the Place of the Car in Lewisham’. The feedback will be given to the Executive, which will develop proposals for specific areas. These proposals will be discussed with the residents and businesses in the areas. The final decision will be taken by the mayor, but with a scrutiny moment for the council.

The Almere Council experimented two times with the ‘Talk with the Council’ formula. The purpose of these consultations was to form an independent judgment and then to discuss the matter with the Executive. Members of the Executive are invited to be present at the meeting, but are not allowed to participate. Councillors may give them the floor at the end of the meeting if they (the councillors) have any

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<sup>7</sup> For instance, in the Children and Young People Select Committee meeting on 14 September 2004 a School Effectiveness Annual Report was discussed.

specific questions. In both cases, the issues were matters of the Executive, namely the building of a mosque and the relocation of a school. Both issues had aroused some unrest in the city, upon which the Executive chose to leave room to the Council (and even suggested the Council) to enter into talks with the residents. On the second issue, the procedure resulted in the assignment of another location than previously indicated by the Executive. This result could be clearly attributed to the contribution of citizens. In these instances, the councillors performed a kind of mediator role, which put them, of course, in a field of tension between the citizens and the executive.

We now turn to the involvement of the councillors within the broader context of governance. In the period 2002-2003, the Almere Council arranged a ‘discussion with the city’ about youth policy. Youth policy can be regarded as a typical governance issue, in which the municipality has a mediating and coordinating role towards the various institutions in the sectors of culture, care, education and law and order. In its ‘council programme’, youth policy was designed as a special theme for that year. The formulation of a special theme for the year was regarded as one of the new work strategies of the Council in the ‘dual’ system of local government. Discussions were held with the involved institutions and young people in the city. The council formulated a document with policy recommendations for the Executive. The Executive incorporated these recommendations in an own policy document. The way in which the Executive dealt with the recommendations provoked a discussion with the Council. According to the Council, the alderman went its own way with the recommendations instead of translating them directly into policy proposals.

A good example of ‘governance’ in Lewisham is the Lewisham Strategic Partnership (LSP). The LSP brings together representatives from the public, private, voluntary and community sector. It has the broad aim ‘to deliver improvements in the social, economic and environmental wellbeing of all those who live, work and study in the borough’. The LSP is presided by the Mayor. In addition to the mayor, the council is present in the Board with three members of the Cabinet.

The tasks of the LSP include the following:

- To prepare and implement a Community Strategy;
- To develop and deliver a local Neighbourhood Renewal Strategy ‘to secure more jobs, better education, improved health, reduced crime and better housing’ ([www.lewishamstrategicpartnership.org.uk](http://www.lewishamstrategicpartnership.org.uk)).

Neighbourhood renewal is about improving the most disadvantaged and needy communities in Lewisham. The LSP has set up Neighbourhood Management structures in these areas, including a ‘neighbourhood manager’. A body called the Service Providers Panel acts as a ‘go between to ensure that experiences and information from the areas is fed back to the LSP’ (website LSP). In this case we see that a new structure of intermediation is created, in which the ward councillors do not seem to be included.

## *6. Conclusions*

The aim of this paper was an exploration of the consequences of two strands of institutional renewal, the introduction of forms of participatory democracy and reforms in the relationship between the council and the executive, for the position of the councillors as intermediaries between citizens and decision-makers in local governance. I looked at practices of citizen involvement in two cities in the Netherlands and the United Kingdom. In their focus on the separation of administrative and scrutiny roles between the executive and the council, the institutional reforms in these countries share a similar direction. Within this context, two cases were selected, Almere and Lewisham, which are dissimilar in their constitution of the relationship between council and executive, the main difference being that Lewisham has opted for a directly elected mayor who has appointed a cabinet of (nine) councillors to assist him in his decision-making.

Our exploration reveals a strikingly different picture between the two cities. In Almere, the Council has put a lot of energy in adapting its work strategies and methods vis-à-vis the Executive and in its own consultations with the citizenry. We see the contours of the roles of a ‘host’, advocate, facilitator, mediator and broker. In Lewisham, I observe a clear trend towards a disintermediation of the council. Wilson’s proposition that the Labour reforms, in particular the option of a directly elected mayor, would lead to a marginalisation of the ‘ordinary councillors’ seems to come out. The addition ‘ordinary’ is essential here, because of the special position of the councillors in the Cabinet, who (in contrast to the Dutch aldermen who were initially elected in the council) preserve their Council membership.

Still, the Lewisham case does not allow us to infer that there is a necessary causal link between the institutional conditions given by the option of the directly elected mayor and the disintermediation of the Council. Rather, the Almere case suggests that the strategies pursued by the councillors may have a major influence on the outcome. In the interview in Lewisham, the viewpoint was brought out that the councillors should concentrate their energies in the wards, reaching out to the people, stirring their participation in consultation procedures, representing their views in the central decision making ('these are the voices'), thereby working strategic issues out of small concerns. Still, one could maintain that the conditions for this are less conducive in Lewisham than in Almere. In Almere, to be sure, several autonomous factors, such as the creativity and driving-power of the Council registrar and the council presidium, as well as the personal support of the Mayor, have contributed to the innovations (although also these factors can be related to certain institutional conditions!). It is, therefore, too early to come to definitive conclusions on this issue.

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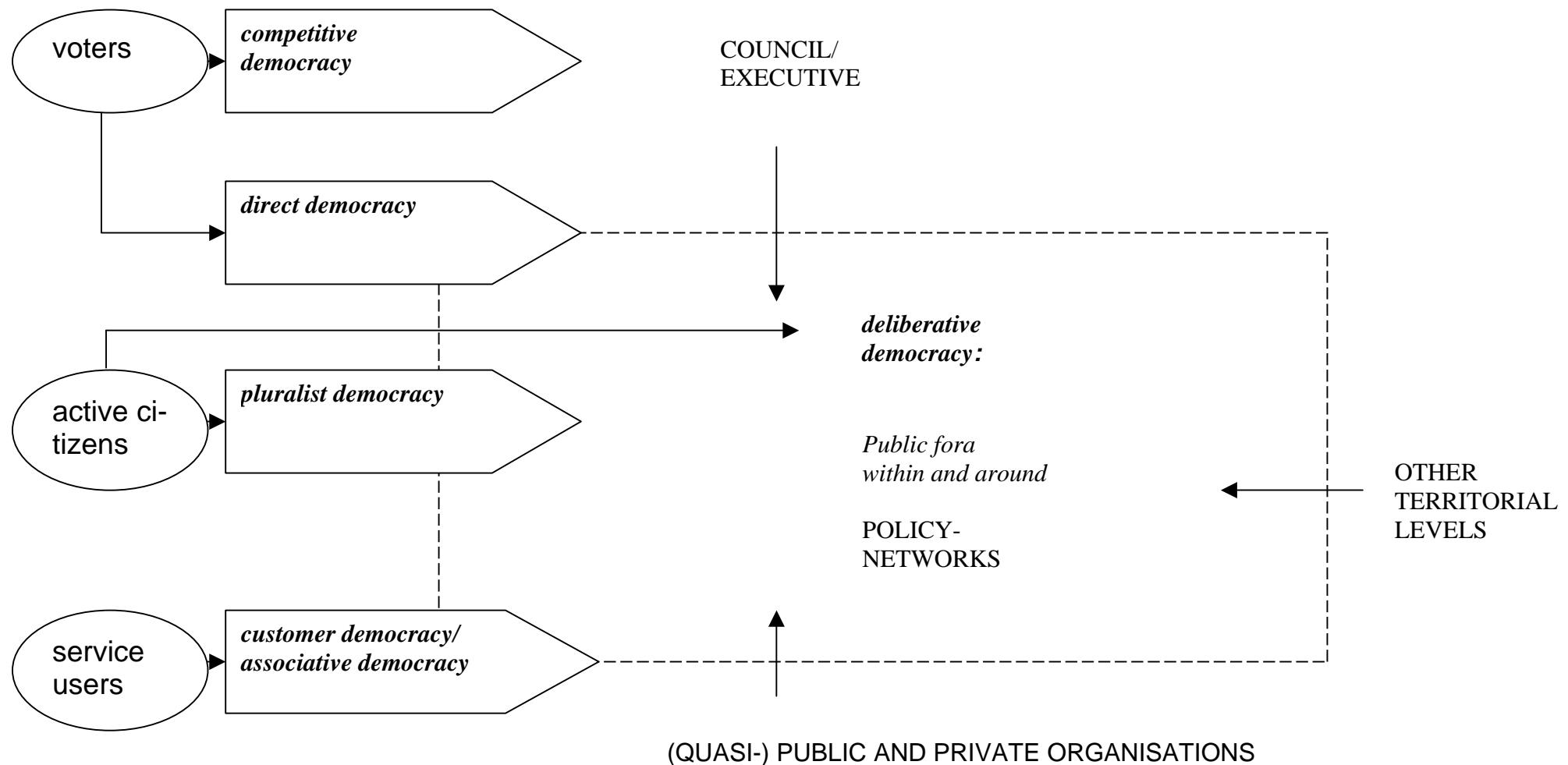


Figure 1: local democracy in the context of governance