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## article

# How can non-elected representatives secure democratic representation?

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Research on the democratic legitimacy of non-elected actors influencing policy while acting as representatives is often lacking in governance literature, despite being increasingly relevant worldwide. Recent theories of representation argue that there are non-electoral mechanisms to appoint such non-elected representatives and hold them responsible for their actions. Consequently, democratic non-electoral representation can be achieved. Through empirical analysis, this article explores democratic non-electoral representation in governance networks by comparing how non-elected representatives, their constituents and the decision-making audience understand the outcome of representation to benefit the constituency, authorisation and accountability. The research findings conclude that all three groups mostly share the understanding of democratic non-electoral representation as ongoing interactions between representatives and constituents, multiple (if any) organisational and discursive sources of authorisation and deliberative aspects of accountability. All of these are non-electoral mechanisms that secure democratic representation. These findings make an important contribution to the literature on non-electoral representation in policymaking.

**Key words** non-electoral representation • representative democracy • democratic representation • authorisation • accountability • governance networks

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## Introduction

All actors who participate in governance networks make representative claims on behalf of a wide range of affected groups, interests, values or causes (Hendriks, 2008; 2009; Saward, 2010; Torfing et al, 2009; Chapman and Lowndes, 2014). Their expertise and shared experiences with those affected justify these non-elected actors as representatives (van de Bovenkamp and Vollaard, 2018). When the network actors claim to represent the affected people, they are indirectly allowed to influence decision

making, provide input that qualifies public policy and thus take ownership of decisions made (Klijn and Skelcher, 2007; Sørensen and Torfing, 2018).

Governance networks are 'self-regulating horizontal articulations of interdependent, but operationally autonomous, actors from the public and/or private sectors' (Sørensen and Torfing, 2018: 304). Networks engage a broad range of actors in the policy process, and the relevant public and private actors included who are not politicians are viewed as non-elected representatives (Gilchrist, 2006; Hendriks, 2008; Ayres, 2020). Non-elected representatives comprise a diverse group of actors who supplement the elected representatives in governance networks, ensuring broader representation of interests in politics and eventually, better policy outcomes (Chapman and Lowndes, 2014; Sørensen and Torfing, 2018; Stoker, 2019). As such, non-elected network actors as representatives can overcome networks' struggles with representative democracy (Klijn and Skelcher, 2007; Jeffares and Skelcher, 2011; Klijn and Koppenjan, 2012; Sørensen and Torfing, 2018).

Saward's (2010; 2020) theory on representative claims, emphasising representation as the outcome of a dynamic representative–constituency relationship that may not involve electoral politics, enables non-electoral representation. Hence, democratic non-elected representatives cannot rely on being appointed and held responsible for their actions through elections (Knappe, 2017). Recent representation theories suggest that non-elected representatives depend on organisational and discursive mechanisms to secure democratic representation (Montanaro, 2017; 2019; de Wilde, 2019). Thus, it is possible to achieve democratic non-electoral representation in governance networks. However, without formal institutional processes, the availability of these non-electoral mechanisms' for constituents may differ. It is a risk that non-elected representatives may act as representatives without adhering to democratic norms. To understand the democratic potential of non-electoral representation, this article explores *how democratic non-electoral representation is understood in the context of governance networks*.

Few studies have empirically investigated democratic non-electoral representation in governance networks. The mechanisms to ensure democratic non-electoral representation have so far been studied in social movements, social and healthcare policy, pressure politics and among civil society actors (Schlozman et al, 2015; Knappe, 2017; van de Bovenkamp and Vollaard, 2018; Almeida, 2019; de Wilde, 2019). An exception is Chapman and Lowndes's (2014) study, which investigates democratic non-electoral representation in governance networks. Based on representatives' perceptions, beliefs and attitudes, the authors emphasise that representatives' authenticity, rather than formal means of authorisation and accountability, contributes to democratic non-electoral representation (Chapman and Lowndes, 2014: 287). In accordance with this cited study, the current research empirically investigates such non-electoral mechanisms that secure democratic representation in order to gain an understanding of the democratic potential of non-electoral representation. Adding to Chapman and Lowndes's (2014) research, this study explores how such mechanisms are understood by not only the representatives but also their constituents and the decision-making audience witnessing the representation. Studying these three groups of actors, each engaged in a representative claim, makes it possible to further develop the theory on non-electoral mechanisms in democratic representation. To do so, this study develops an empirical operationalisation of democratic non-electoral representation within the framework of representative claims and applies the operationalisation to governance networks.

To investigate the representatives', the constituency's and the audience's understanding of non-electoral representation, this research takes the form of an explorative study. Based on three networks organised around business and urban development, which touch on issues concerning commercial and social activities (for example, climate and environment, transportation, tourism, liveability and retail commerce) in the centre of the City of Oslo, this study examines democratic non-electoral representation among organised actors. The three networks selected to cover the diversity of organised actors include different types of economic interest groups, private businesses and public entities. This study's specific interest lies in representative claims made by organised actors, because they have the power to influence policymaking. This resourceful sub-elite is often accused of over-representing advantaged sub-groups, resulting in undemocratic representation (Schlozman et al, 2015; Montanaro, 2017; 2019). Moreover, in business and urban development, a lot is at stake economically for those affected, and there is a danger of conflict among constituents concerning what needs representation. Therefore, this policy area is particularly relevant to studying democratic representation because there may be advantaged sub-groups within the constituency that have the power, resources and will to shift representation to primarily benefit themselves. When investigating organised non-elected representatives, this article also addresses the literature on interest groups (Berry, 1984; 2016; Skocpol, 1999; Schlozman et al, 2015). Adding to this literature, this study investigates organised interests beyond representation by groups and broadens the concept of interest group representation past the group's members, followers or subscribers to encompass all those affected.

The article is structured as follows: the next section outlines the concept of democratic non-electoral representation using the theory of representative claims and applies it to governance networks. The methods used to answer the research question of how democratic non-electoral representation is understood in governance networks are then described. The subsequent sections present the perspectives of the non-elected representatives, the constituency and the audience and discuss the theoretical implications of the results. Finally, the article concludes that all three groups have a relatively equal understanding of democratic non-electoral representation as ongoing interactions between the representative and the constituency, multiple (if any) organisational and discursive sources of authorisation, as well as deliberative (rather than sanctioning) aspects of accountability. All of these can be considered non-electoral mechanisms that secure democratic representation.

## Democratic non-electoral representation

Pitkin's (1967: 116) account of representation as 'the act of standing for someone's interests' assumes that those represented have a clear and relatively fixed set of interests. In his critique, Saward (2010) argues that this idea of representation overlooks the dynamic aspect of representation. In Saward's theory, representation is reconceptualised as an activity of making claims to represent others. The process of accepting and rejecting representative claims makes representation an interactive process between the representative and the constituency of constructing what is represented (Saward, 2010; 2020; Sørensen, 2020). This view of representation makes room for non-elected actors to make others present in public (Knappe, 2017; Montanaro, 2017; Dovi, 2018; van de Bovenkamp and Vollaard, 2018). Following Saward's (2010: 36) definition of

representative claim making, this article studies the non-elected representative (claim maker) who presents oneself and one's organisation (subject) as the representative of a constituency (object) to a target observing the claim (audience). The next sections define who the claim maker, the subject, the object and the audience are in governance networks.

Non-elected representatives (claim makers) are those who claim to represent others, such as experts, employers' organisations, activists, celebrities or non-governmental organisations (Maia, 2012; Montanaro, 2019). In local politics, non-elected representatives claim to represent groups of citizens based on their experiences as members of or proximity to these groups (van de Bovenkamp and Vollaard, 2018). This study focuses on organised non-elected representatives. In accordance with the literature on interest groups (see, for example, Gormley, 1983; Berry, 1984; 2016; Skocpol, 1999), this article distinguishes between organisations with and without members as organised non-elected representatives. Membership organisations are economic interest groups that represent their members, subscribers or supporters. Organisations without members are politically active private businesses, foundations and public entities, such as universities or hospitals, that aggregate the interests of individuals affected (Redford, 1969; Berkhout, 2013; Schlozman et al, 2015; Montanaro, 2017). Applying the theory of representative claims to the representation by organisations with and without members introduces the concept of dynamic representation to the interest group literature (Schlozman et al, 2015). In a governance network, the non-elected representative is the organisation, either with or without members, participating in the network. Therefore, this article does not distinguish between the individual network participant and the organisation (the subject).

The constituency (object) comprises the group whose interests are represented (Montanaro, 2012; 2017; 2019). When the non-elected representative claims that some entities or individuals are affected or potentially affected, they form a constituency (Mulieri, 2013; Knappe, 2017; Guasti and Geissel, 2019). In the investigated networks, this article identifies the constituency as comprising employers and employees who are members of interest groups, individuals employed in the industry, industry companions, clients, and citizens in the urban area. Because representation involves affected interests, it is not necessarily tied to membership, supporters or subscribers. The constituents of a labour union may be employees who are members of the organisation, non-unionised employees or other labour union members (Montanaro, 2012; 2017). Hence, for organised non-elected representatives, the constituency is 'the membership basis of participating groups or organisations and the directly affected people' (Torfing et al, 2009: 288).

The audience is the recipient of a representative claim. The audience members are the observers of the claim makers who assign the function of a representative to these actors (Saward, 2010; Montanaro, 2017). Based on Guasti and Geissel's (2019) article, the present article defines the audience as the decision-making authority. In governance networks, the decision-making authority rests with the civil servants and politicians initiating and managing the networks, selecting participants and participating in the networks.

An outcome of the representative-constituent relationship that benefits the constituency and constituents, which can authorise and hold the representative accountable, is the set of mechanisms securing democratic non-electoral representation (Montanaro, 2017: 65; 2019: 195). Achieving an *outcome of the*

*non-electoral representative–constituent relationship that benefits the constituency* can prove difficult because what is beneficial may develop within the representative–constituent relationship (Knappe, 2017). However, Montanaro (2017: 65–66) argues that as long as the outcome of representation is equal, representation benefits the constituency. Equal representation occurs when the outcome of representation over time benefits all sub-groups within the constituency and can be measured empirically as the convergence between the constituents’ perception of how a representative should act and the representative’s actions (Wolkenstein and Wratil, 2020: 7). On this basis, this article operationalises an outcome of representation that benefits the constituency as a convergence among the actions, opinions, arguments and claims of the network participant and the constituency’s perception of how the network participant should act, which opinions and arguments to voice and the content of the claims made.

For non-electoral together with electoral representation, authorisation and accountability ensure democratic representation. However, without elections, the non-electoral mechanisms of authorisation and accountability are organisational and discursive (Montanaro, 2012; 2017). *Non-electoral authorisation* means the constituents’ approval of the non-elected representative (van de Bovenkamp and Vollaard, 2018). Organisational approval involves constituents supporting representatives by joining organisations, contributing financially and voting within the organisation. The constituency can discursively approve the representative through public agreement, for example, by supporting protests and sharing ideas on social media that strengthen the representative’s public reputation (Montanaro, 2012; 2017; 2019). Applied to the context of governance networks, authorisation is operationalised as the constituency’s indication of approval by signalling their support for and agreement with the network participants.

Similar to electoral accountability, *non-electoral accountability* relies on non-elected representatives’ obligations to explain and justify their actions to the constituency, which can then pass judgement and, if necessary, sanction non-elected representatives, demanding that they adjust what is represented according to the constituency’s expectations (Bovens et al, 2008: 227). The non-elected representatives explain and justify their actions by responding to questions and sharing information about their actions, practising face-to-face dialogue and – ideally – engaging in two-way communication with the constituents. Meetings, public debate or social media may encourage the deliberative aspect of accountability (van de Bovenkamp and Vollaard, 2018; Montanaro, 2019). If the constituency, given sufficient information, believes that the non-elected representatives do not deliver results as promised, it can sanction them by expressing disapproval. Organisational disapproval includes constituents’ opposition to representatives by withdrawing their membership, withholding money or refusing to vote within the organisation. Discursive disapproval relies on constituents expressing public disagreement, which undermines the involved representative’s reputation (Montanaro, 2012; 2017; 2019). For constituents, the purpose of expressing disapproval is to encourage representatives to do better and adjust what is represented accordingly (Montanaro, 2019). In this study, accountability is operationalised as i) information sharing, face-to-face dialogue and two-way communication between network participants and the constituency about the participants’ actions in the network, ii) the constituency’s indication of disapproval by signalling its opposition to and disagreement with the network participants and iii) the representatives’ adjusting what is represented.

In summary, by describing the non-elected representatives', the constituency's and the audience's understanding of representation with reference to an outcome of the representative–constituent relationship that benefits the constituency, authorisation and accountability, this article explores democratic non-electoral representation in governance networks.

## Methods

This study explores democratic non-electoral representation by organised actors in business and urban development networks in Oslo, the capital of Norway. The participants were selected from three networks to account for the diversity of organised non-elected representatives (Berkhout, 2013; Schlozman et al, 2015; Castiglione and Warren, 2019). One network includes mainly organisations without members, the second comprises membership organisations, and the third combines organisations with and without members. The three business and urban development networks operate in the same context, that is, they deal with the conditions for how industry, tourists and citizens, use urban areas and are governed by the same departments and municipal agencies in Oslo. All three networks have an advisory function, and participation provides an opportunity to influence policy. Although Oslo differs in complexity from other Norwegian municipalities, the private actors included typically participate in most Norwegian business and urban development networks. Interactions between these public and private actors are also relatively common in urban politics in most medium-sized European cities (Pierre, 2016).

The analysis is based on qualitative data collected from 40 in-depth semi-structured interviews with 43 respondents, consisting of key network participants, the interests they claim to represent and the civil servants and politicians participating in the three networks. All respondents were recruited voluntarily, resulting in 21 unanswered invitations and four refusals, with the latter based on insufficient knowledge about the topic. Table 1 describes the respondents and the distribution of the interviews.

The 20 non-elected representatives in this study were network participants with management positions in organisations with and without members. Half came from organisations that have no members, that is, private organisations and public entities such as businesses, universities, hospitals and non-profit foundations. The remaining ten respondents were from membership organisations encompassing economic interest groups, that is, employers' organisations, trade unions, chambers of commerce,

**Table 1: The groups of respondents**

	Non-elected representatives	Constituency	Audience
Groups of actors	Interest groups, private businesses, public entities	Members, employees, customers, clients, partners, competitors, investors, students, citizens, visitors	Civil servants, politicians
Position	CEO, managers	Owner, manager, senior employee, senior member	Adviser, senior adviser, director
Number interviewed	20	13	18

Note: Some of the interviewed respondents considered themselves both non-elected representatives and part of the constituency.

real estate associations and city-centre retail, business and residents' associations. Interviewing respondents from the constituency proved to be challenging because the respondents constituting the constituency may change as what is represented and the networks' issues develops. Consequently, the constituency that comprises those represented is somewhat less well represented in this study's sample. The interviewed constituents were members of interest groups and employees, customers or competitors of private businesses or public entities. Approximately two-thirds of the interviewed respondents as part of the constituency knew about the networks. These were identified through interviews with the network participants. This selection technique might result in a biased sample of constituency respondents, a sub-group close to the representatives that might have an overly positive understanding of representation. To have a more unbiased selection of respondents, some interviewed constituents were identified by asking the audience and searching public registers of members, followers, customers and competitors. The audience consisted of civil servants and politicians initiating and organising the networks and participating in them. Civil servants are over-represented among the respondents; however, civil servants rather than politicians are those whose daily responsibilities include managing the networks. This article omits the actual names of the networks and refers to the respondents by their occupations when using quotes to ensure confidentiality.

The data were collected between December 2019 and November 2020 and managed remotely with restricted access. The interviews were primarily conducted individually, both in person in workplaces and online during office hours. Three interviews were conducted in pairs. All respondents were given an information sheet and asked to provide written informed consent. The semi-structured interviews provided the author with the flexibility to adjust the questions in the course of the interview while capturing predefined theoretical concepts. Each interview lasted for approximately 45 minutes. With one exception, all interviews were recorded electronically and fully transcribed. To gain insights into the representatives', the constituents' and the decision-making audience's understanding of democratic non-electoral representation, the interview topic was the relationship between the representative and those represented. The interview questions dealt with the representative role, constructing what was represented, the reasons for acting and accepting a representative, practised dialogue and interaction, openness to input, access to information, and opportunities to take responsibility and be held accountable. In general, interviews offered valuable insights into the reasons behind the respondents' perspectives. Therefore, the interview questions were formulated using neutral terms to encourage individual reflections. However, as pointed out by [Beamer \(2002\)](#), the elite respondents interviewed in this type of study might have felt the need to respond in a socially desirable way when asked questions about democracy and representation. To control for this self-report bias, the author asked broad questions and approached the concept of democratic non-electoral representation from different angles.

Due to the theoretically driven research question, a deductive approach was applied when coding the interview data in NVivo. The codes were the theoretical concepts of an outcome of the representative-constituent relationship that would benefit the constituency, authorisation and accountability. These codes were operationalised in the coding protocol according to the definitions presented in the previous section. Therefore, data excerpts about 'spoken arguments, opinions and claims', the 'representative's actions' and 'expressed needs, interests and wants' were assigned to the

code an *outcome of representation that benefits the constituency*. Extracts about ‘supporting actions, selection and public agreement’ were allocated to the code *authorisation*. ‘Information sharing, two-way communication and face-to-face dialogue’ and ‘opposing actions, public disagreement and adjustments in what is represented’ fit the code *accountability*.

## How non-elected representatives in governance networks represent their constituents

The data show that the participants in the investigated networks made representative claims. The network participants affiliated with membership organisations claimed to represent their members. The network participants from organisations with no members claimed to represent their customers, partners, stakeholders, employees, competitors and even the entire industry based on their specialised expertise. These findings resonate with [Saward’s \(2010; 2020\)](#) idea that non-elected actors function as representatives, demonstrating that representation does not have to be electoral.

Furthermore, the network participants, the constituents and the audience did not view the individual network participants as representatives. Instead, the organisation with which the individual participant is affiliated was recognised as a non-elected representative. This recognition applies, regardless of whether the organisations in the network had or did not have members. Thus, what the individual participant communicated was considered the view of the organisation. The following subsections therefore present an analysis of the organisations, both those with and without members, that are included in the network as non-elected representatives.

### *Non-elected representatives’ understanding of how they represent their constituencies*

Non-elected representatives (that is, the organisations participating in the network) understood the act of expressing the needs, wants and potential struggles of their members, customers, clients, employees, owners, industry and students affected by network activities as an (expected) *outcome of representation that benefits the constituency*. The respondents explained that they act on behalf of their constituents because they ‘struggle with the same issues’, ‘are affected’, ‘know the members, sector or industry’, ‘have expertise’ and ‘anticipate future developments’. Non-elected representatives seemed to share an identity with those they claimed to represent – their constituency. The majority of the respondents shared this understanding of an outcome of representation that benefits the constituency.

In detail, membership organisations participating in the network argued that the mandate they receive from their members enables an outcome of representation that benefits the constituency. A manager of an interest group confidently explains it this way: ‘Because we are a membership organisation, [we are justified as representatives]. Our members gather around our political objectives, which they have decided through participation in the board of directors’ (Interview, 17.01.2020). The ‘political objective’ is the mandate received by the organisations from their members. Relying on a fixed mandate indicates the membership organisations’ belief that they represent, in [Pitkin’s \(1967\)](#) terms, relatively static interests. Organisations without members have no mandate to rely on. Such organisations therefore acknowledge that they must



change what they represent to ensure that the outcome of representation benefits the constituency, thus embracing what is identified as a dynamic representative relationship (Saward, 2010; de Wilde, 2019). A manager of a private business who claimed to represent its employees and the greening of the industry expresses the view that ‘there is a big gap internally in the organisation; we have those under 40 with a great desire to think [environmentally], and there are those in their 50s and older who are sceptical [...] and prefer how it has been [over] the last years’ (Interview, 21.01.2020). Non-membership organisations acting as non-elected representatives are more concerned about unequally representing sub-groups than organisations with a membership basis that function as representatives. However, only a few organisations without members expressed this worry.

The organisations participating in the network initially understood *authorisation* as the audience’s approval – inclusion to participate in the network. On closer examination, audience approval was granted in addition to constituency approval. A manager of an interest group emphasises this dual authorisation by saying, ‘Because we have existed for so many years, we have a position on urban development in the municipality, but formally speaking, we are a membership organisation’ (Interview, 17.01.2020). In their eyes, members joining their organisation signal constituents’ support. The financial contribution that membership often requires is interpreted as what Montanaro (2017; 2019) calls an organisational source of approval. All the membership organisations in the network shared the perspective of being supported through membership. Organisations without members, which could not rely on membership signalling support, depend on followership for constituency approval. A respondent in a private business management position explained that ‘all persons who own their vehicles are considered members here’ (Interview, 21.01.2020). Thus, followers, such as individuals employed, customers signing contracts, students enrolled and partners owning shares, have the same support function as membership. Eight out of ten organisations without members confirmed this view. Altogether, non-elected representatives in governance networks rely on dual authorisation. The need for double authorisation – membership or followership and being selected as a network participant – implies the lack of an institutionalised process of authorisation that ensures all constituents’ equal opportunities to authorise representatives.

The organisations participating in the network understand *accountability* as sharing information with the constituency and welcoming questions to ensure the visibility of their actions in the network. A respondent holding a management position in an interest group opined that ‘it is up to us to inform and get input [from our members], to know that we have support for our suggestions [in the network]. [Accountability] is more about ensuring that the members are backing us rather than being held responsible for our actions’ (Interview, 11.03.20). Information about the network is shared through face-to-face dialogue in meetings or telephone calls and social media channels, along with newsletters, short videos and membership and employee surveys. Thus, organisations with and without members rely on both one-way and two-way internal communication channels for accountability. Among these arrangements, one-way communication was most often mentioned. Four respondents from non-membership organisations mentioned presentations at external seminars or conferences, press releases and distribution of thematic reports as opportunities for public information sharing. This is because such organisations consider clients or competitors who lack access to internal information to be

their constituents. Non-elected representatives' accountability generally relies on providing constituents with information about the network, communicated through a combination of dialogue and one-way communication, which is primarily organised internally.

Almost all respondents considered these arrangements (for sharing information and asking questions) as opportunities for constituents to signal their opposition. One-third of the respondents even mentioned that they consequently adjusted what they represented. However, in the course of the interviews, it has become evident that almost all respondents believed that it was sufficient to provide information about their actions to sub-groups within the constituency. A CEO of a private business explained, 'I do not convey much [about the network] to our partners and shareholders. I inform the board of directors in the organisation and the management about updates from the network' (Interview, 24.02.2020). General information about the network is presented indirectly, for example, via the management team of the organisation's board of directors, while detailed information is primarily given to constituents, whose workday is significantly affected by network outcomes. This uneven provision of information may result in adjusting what is represented towards sub-groups within the constituency. When differentiating what and how much should be reported, the non-elected representatives defined their constituency more narrowly than when asked who they claim to represent.

### *The constituency's understanding of how they are represented*

For the interviewees representing the constituency (that is, the represented), an *outcome of representation that benefits themselves* means that the network participants act in such a way that their constituents feel understood, heard, acknowledged, seen or helped. The respondents representing the constituencies of non-membership organisations said that they are understood, heard or seen when the network participants share their views on broader causes (for example, climate and environmental protection) rather than personal needs (for example, internal work conditions). Those representing the constituencies of membership organisations are more inward thinking in what being understood, heard or seen entails. For example, a CEO of a transport business argued, 'We are members of an employer's organisation, who [in a difficult time] was there for us and our industry interests. Now, we sometimes experience it acting as an expert group rather than standing for us particularly' (Interview, 14.10.20). The constituents of membership organisations acknowledged that the outcome of representation does not constantly benefit them. This acceptance of representative outcomes that do not always benefit the constituency may imply the constituents' adhering to Pitkin's (1967) static idea of representation. Upon closer examination of what initially seemed like a relatively fixed perception, an underlying understanding of representation was revealed as something that develops as the situation, knowledge and ideas change. A respondent with a management position in a private business said, 'I think [that the membership organisation covers our interests], but it is also up to us to use them. We, as "the new kids on the block" in retail, together with a well-established actor, have paved the way for the membership organisation to provide us with good support' (Interview, 11.11.2020). The constituency acknowledged the possibility of negotiating the outcome of representation, recognising representation as an interactive process constructing what is represented (Sørensen, 2020). This

idea of negotiation was a common perception among almost all the interviewees representing the constituency.

The constituency understands *authorisation* as not explicitly disapproving of network participants' representative claims. The majority of the respondents from the constituency take it for granted that non-explicit disagreement with their representatives indicates discursive approval. Additionally, three interviewees forming the constituency of membership organisations highlighted the general importance of being a member of such organisations and the organisations' important role in policymaking. Signalling support for membership organisations by showing allegiance is a source of discursive approval, while joining organisations is a form of organisational approval (Montanaro, 2019).

The representatives forming the constituency understand *accountability* as entailing an ongoing dialogue with the representatives, where they, as constituents, receive reports on and discuss matters considered in the network, especially those that have an impact on their everyday life. The respondents understood accountability as providing reports on general network activities, rather than the network participants' actions. A senior business employer who was a member of an interest group explains accountability this way: 'It [the membership organisation] reports what it has [from the network]. Sometimes, one requires specialised expertise to explain the right thing to do; then someone from the group [a member] joins network meetings' (Interview, 22.01.2020). The constituents of membership organisations rely on two-way communication channels, which (in addition to being included in network meetings) involve regular meetings, including the general assembly or working groups and individual contacts when talking to the representatives. The constituents also receive reports on network activities through official websites, social media and newsletters; however, these arrangements do not secure two-way communication. All respondents representing the constituency of membership organisations mentioned at least one of these alternatives.

Among customers, partners, businesses and clients comprising the constituency of non-membership organisations, individual contacts and meetings that allow two-way communication are essential for reporting information. For example, a private business manager who claimed that the company's customers represent it said, 'Our customers [...], for example, within the circular economy, may meet with us to discuss their ideas [for us to collaborate], and afterwards, they present this [what we agreed] to others in the industry' (Interview, 24.01.2020). Face-to-face dialogue and direct communication are a natural part of these constituents' workdays and thus the representative-constituent relationship. In contrast, individual employees who also form the constituency of non-membership organisations expressed their reliance on indirectly communicating with the organisation via the safety representative in the workplace or the board of directors in the organisation. Two out of seven respondents representing the constituency of a membership organisation expressed this view.

Altogether, the interviewed constituents of the organisations participating in the network were split in understanding accountability as one-way, two-way, directly or indirectly communicating with the non-elected representatives. A plausible explanation for this divide is that resourceful constituents are provided with greater opportunities for accountability. Not being accountable to resourceful constituents may yield more significant negative consequences for non-elected representatives than not being accountable to most of the other constituents, for example, economically,

by losing a client or a partner. This result implies the constituents' unequal capacity to demand accountability.

The interviews showed that disapproval of representatives and adjustment in what is represented are rarely included in constituents' understanding of accountability. Thus, the general understanding of accountability resonates with the deliberative aspect of accountability, but disregards accountability based on sanctions (see [Montanaro, 2017; 2019](#)). Only one of 13 respondents, a CEO of a business, touched on signalling disapproval and stated, 'I have never been in a situation where the membership organisation has expressed something we strongly disapprove of [...], but if it came to it, I would say so and explain what is important for us' (Interview, 24.02.2020). This public expression of disagreement with the non-elected representative is a discursive source of disapproval.

### *The audience's understanding of the occurring representation*

The audience (that is, the decision-making authority, consisting of the politicians and civil servants initiating and organising the network) understood an *outcome of representation that benefits the constituency* as network participants making the voices of those directly affected by network activities known to the decision-making authority. The audience acknowledged network participants as representatives because they share similar 'experiences and values', 'knowledge', 'specialised expertise' and 'insights' of those affected. A senior adviser in a municipal agency commented that organised non-elected representatives 'are those of importance with formal influence and expertise [on issues relevant for the network] or those working with transport' (Interview, 28.01.2020). Membership organisations, which several respondents (who composed the audience) referred to as lobbyists, have 'formal influence', most respondents expected while non-membership organisations to have 'expertise' (for example, on 'climate and environment') to make the voices of those affected by network activities known.

For membership organisations participating in the network, the audience understood *authorisation* as having and keeping members. A senior advisor in a municipal agency explained, 'They [membership organisations] promote the industry's serious actors, who are also their members. The deceptive actors are not members; they won't pay the membership fee' (Interview, 02.04.2020). Therefore, a common perception among almost all respondents was that constituents signal their support of membership organisations using organisational approval. The majority of the respondents in the audience implicitly understood approval of non-membership organisations as constituents' non-explicit disagreement with these organisations, which often claim a leading role (for example, as prominent actors in the greening of industry) in promoting innovative business models or possessing economic resources. Their public reputation, maintained through public debate, is valuable to organisations with such a central position. Therefore, the audience expected the represented constituents to know about these organisations and express public agreement (for example, by reposting ideas presented on social media). Thus, the audience emphasised what [Montanaro \(2017; 2019\)](#) labels constituents' organisational and discursive approval of non-elected representatives.

The audience understood *accountability* as non-elected representatives' sharing of information about their actions in the network with the constituency to obtain their

input. Accountability is essentially deliberation to explain and justify one's actions (Bovens et al, 2008; Montanaro, 2019). A director of a municipal agency explained:

As far as I know, they have several membership meetings, and of topics, there is the latest news from [the network], and what to bring to us [the network] from the members next time. I'm sure that they [representatives] are good at anchoring the network, sharing insights and getting input from the members. (Interview, 11.02.2020)

In addition to these face-to-face dialogues, the audience mentioned that the organisations participating in the network also inform their constituency about their actions through one-way communication channels, such as social media, traditional media, newsletters, the organisation's board of directors and meeting minutes. All respondents in the audience believed that both organisations with and without members inform their constituencies. Only two respondents suspected that the network participants might exaggerate their achievements or not inform their constituency about every action. In the course of the conversation on accountability, several respondents became hesitant in their answers. The organisations in the network were included as non-elected representatives, but it has become evident that without verifying existing practices, the audience assumes that non-elected representatives practise accountability.

Half of these respondents believed that these arrangements have resulted in the organisations' (that is, the network participants') adjustment of what they represent. Thus, the arrangements seem to function as organisational sources of disapproval, where the constituency opposes the representatives and pressures them to revise their claims. However, there were disagreements concerning this perspective. Seven respondents were unable to answer the question about adjustments in what is represented, while two others suspected that adjustments in what is represented occur because of acquaintance with others in the network, societal trends and increased knowledge.

## Discussion

In summary, the non-elected representatives, the constituents and the audience mostly had a shared understanding of non-electoral representation with respect to an outcome of representation that benefits the constituency, authorisation and accountability. This finding reveals that without elections, non-electoral mechanisms can secure democratic representation in governance networks. Table 2 illustrates how all three groups understand these non-electoral mechanisms.

Although the representatives, the constituency and the audience formulate it differently, their understanding of non-electoral representation towards achieving *an outcome of representation that benefits the constituency* converges. The constituents benefit if they are heard, understood or seen by the representative. The representatives and the audience equally believe that the constituents benefit when the representatives listen to and express the constituents' needs and desires. Thus, the representatives, the constituency and the audience understand the constituents as well-represented. This understanding of an outcome of representation that benefits the constituency requires ongoing interactions between the representative and the constituency

**Table 2: Understanding of democratic non-electoral representation.**

	Non-elected representatives	Constituency	Audience
An outcome of representation that benefits the constituency	Expressing the needs, desires and potential struggles of the constituency	Feeling understood, heard, acknowledged or seen by the representative	Representatives making the voices of the constituency known to the audience
Authorisation	Membership or followership and inclusion in networks by the audience	Membership and non-explicit disagreement	Membership and non-explicit disagreement
Accountability	Sharing information about their actions with the constituency and welcoming (opposing) questions. What is represented is occasionally adjusted	Ongoing dialogue with the representative to report and discuss network activities	Representatives sharing information about their actions with the constituency to obtain its input. What is represented is occasionally adjusted

to continuously grasp what the constituents need to be heard and avoid unequal representation. Contributing to the field, the dynamic (in contrast to a static) representative–constituent relationship may theoretically be considered a mechanism that secures democratic non-electoral representation. However, capturing representation as a dynamic relationship proves empirically tricky, though not impossible. The respondents, especially membership organisations as non-elected representatives and their constituents, initially understood representation, following [Pitkin's \(1967\)](#) definition, as standing for someone's fixed interests. Nonetheless, most respondents' subjective stories, justifications and intentions about representation suggest the existence of a dynamic representative relationship. These findings indicate that democratic theorists' (see, for example, [Saward, 2010; 2020; Sørensen, 2020](#)) notion of representation as a process of interaction between the representative and the constituency is a fruitful point of departure for future studies on representation.

In their understanding of representation with respect to *authorisation*, the representatives, the audience and some constituents emphasise approval through membership or followership. Theoretically, this shows that organisational authorisation, suggesting that constituents use financial contributions, membership and internal democratic processes to authorise non-elected representatives, can secure democratic non-electoral representation. Furthermore, the non-elected representatives', the constituency's and the audience's understanding of authorisation indicates that non-electoral representatives depend on more than one authorisation source. The constituency and the audience emphasise discursive (not necessarily public) authorisation by the constituents, while the representatives rely on discursive authorisation by the audience. Advancing [Montanaro's \(2017\)](#) theoretical discussion on non-electoral authorisation, this finding adds that in order to compensate for the absence of formal authorising institutions, multiple authorisations are essential to secure democratic non-electoral representation. However, the findings also indicate that most respondents in the constituency were not particularly concerned about authorising a non-elected representative. Constituents' indifferent attitude towards authorisation may altogether theoretically question the importance of authorisation for democratic non-electoral representation.

Finally, the non-elected representatives', the constituency's and the audience's understanding of non-electoral representation with reference to *accountability* slightly

differs from what is emphasised theoretically. Although all three groups stress the importance of information sharing as a deliberative element of accountability, in their understanding, the respondents from the representatives were less concerned about interacting with the constituency than most respondents from the constituency and the audience. It is possible to ask questions, but the organisations participating in the network do not understand responding to constituents as essential for accountability. Nuancing existing theory, the findings generally show that sanctions may not form a meaningful part of non-electoral accountability. Sanctioning is rarely included in how the constituents (and some respondents among the representatives and the audience) understand accountability. This aspect undermines what [Montanaro \(2019\)](#) theoretically introduces as discursive and organisational accountability. If anything, the deliberative element of accountability offers an opportunity for the constituency to pass judgement and encourage the representatives to adjust what is represented. What [Montanaro \(2017; 2019\)](#) calls deliberative accountability might function as an opportunity to sanction the representative. Theoretically, non-electoral accountability, which ensures democratic representation, involves representatives explaining and justifying their actions to the constituency that (rather than sanctioning) may express its disapproval of the representatives using this deliberative element of accountability.

## Conclusion

This study has explored how representatives, the constituency and the audience understand non-electoral representation regarding an outcome of representation that benefits the constituency, authorisation and accountability in business and urban development networks. Although using different wording and with various degrees of emphasis, these three actor groups converge in the understanding of these non-electoral mechanisms that secure democratic representation. The representatives understand democratic non-electoral representation as expressing the needs of those affected by network activities. Membership, followership and inclusion in the network authorise the representatives, and information sharing and welcoming questions guarantee accountability. For the constituency, democratic non-electoral representation entails feeling understood by a representative – that it may not worry about disagreeing with – who engages in an ongoing dialogue. Finally, the audience understands democratic non-electoral representation as the involvement of a representative who makes the voices of those affected by network activities known. The representative is authorised via membership and the absence of public disagreement and ensures accountability through sharing information and collecting constituents' input.

Organisational and discursive authorisation and accountability have theoretically been considered non-electoral mechanisms to ensure democratic representation ([Montanaro, 2017; 2019; Knappe, 2017; de Wilde, 2019](#)). However, this study has shown that a well-represented constituency, ensured through ongoing interactions between the representative and the constituency, may also function as a mechanism to secure democratic non-electoral representation. Suppose that this relationship does not evolve with the interactive process that characterises being well-represented. In this case, multiple organisational and discursive sources (if any) of constituency and audience authorisation, as well as deliberative aspects of accountability, ensure democratic representation. Contrary to what [Montanaro \(2019\)](#) suggests, accountability based on sanctions is not considered essential to secure democratic representation.

Organisations selected to participate in a governance network may have reflected on the responsibilities of acting as representatives. Moreover, organised actors (for example, economic interest groups, private businesses or public entities) often have internal procedures to ensure democratic representation, influencing how democratic non-elected representation is understood. Thus, the conclusions would benefit from extending the empirical material to other non-elected actors. Investigating the role of individuals (that is, celebrities or activists rather than organised non-elected representatives) might lead to an increased understanding of democratic non-electoral representation. It would be fruitful to explore whether the identified non-electoral mechanisms also secure democratic representation when individual citizens act as non-elected representatives.

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