

# THE IMPACT OF PARTICIPATORY DESIGNS ON LOCAL COUNCILLORS' ATTITUDES ON PARTICIPATION

EVIDENCE FROM A VIGNETTE-SURVEY IN BELGIUM (WORKING PAPER)

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**Nina De Smedt<sup>1</sup>, Kristof Steyvers<sup>2</sup>, Tessa Haesevoets<sup>3</sup> and Bram Wauters<sup>4</sup>**

## **Abstract**

The last few decades, representative democracy in which local councillors are key actors, is believed to be in crisis. This alleged defect democracy called for action, consequently local democracy in Belgium has evolved from a primarily representative democracy to a more hybrid system combining participatory arrangements with classic elements of representative democracy. Evidently, local councillors are challenged by this increasing implementation of participatory practices.

Therefore, this paper explores local councillors' attitudes towards participation in Flanders (Belgium). More in particular, we investigate whether different participatory designs make a difference in this respect. Our contribution deepens existing research by distinguishing between participatory arrangements on the basis of the impact that they have (consultative, codecisive or decisive) and on the basis of who takes the initiative (local government or citizens). Our large-scale survey indicates that there is an optimum of political participation with co-decisive forms being more preferred than modes with less impact (consultative) and with more impact (decisive).

**Keywords:** Democracy, Citizen participation, Participation; Legitimacy; Local government

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<sup>1</sup> Doctoral researcher at [GASPAR](#), [nina.desmedt@ugent.be](mailto:nina.desmedt@ugent.be)

<sup>2</sup> Professor at [Centre for local politics](#), [kristof.steyvers@ugent.be](mailto:kristof.steyvers@ugent.be)

<sup>3</sup> Postdoctoral researcher at [the department of social psychology](#), [tessa.haesevoets@ugent.be](mailto:tessa.haesevoets@ugent.be)

<sup>4</sup> Professor at [GASPAR](#), [bram.wauters@ugent.be](mailto:bram.wauters@ugent.be)

## 1. Introduction

Participatory democratic initiatives are increasingly initiated over the last decades to cure the widespread disenchantment of society with the traditional representative democracy (Elstub & Escobar, 2019; Newton & Geissel, 2012; Smith, 2009). Citizens' trust in the core actors, institutions and procedures of representative democracy is shrinking (Bedock & Pilet, 2020; Eder, Mochmann, & Quandt, 2015; Geurkink, Zaslove, Sluiter, & Jacobs, 2020). As a reaction local governments across the globe have increasingly experimented with different forms of citizen participation the last few decades: for example participatory budgeting, cocreation projects, referenda and deliberative mini-publics (Caluwaerts, Kern, Reuchamps, & Valcke, 2020; Kuhlmann & Wollmann, 2011; Vetter, Klimovský, Denters, & Kersting, 2016). These participatory arrangements try to formulate an answer to the widespread distrust towards representatives and the functioning of political institutions. By enabling citizens more political participation beyond the ballot box in policymaking, various local governments tried to address societal dissatisfaction (Bowler, Donovan, & Karp, 2007; Dalton, Burklin, & Drummond, 2001; Neblo, Esterling, Kennedy, Lazer, & Sokhey, 2010; Newton & Geissel, 2012; Schuck & De Vreese, 2015).

In addition, the growing complexity of society resulted in more participatory governance (Michels & De Graaf, 2010; Ryan, 2014; Sønderskov, 2019). Elected politicians increasingly encounter difficulties to solve so-called wicked issues and realize that they no longer can solve them independently. Therefore, adopting participatory initiatives is also seen as a strategy of policy-makers to cope with complex policy issues (Radzik-Maruszak & Haveri, 2020; Sørensen & Torfing, 2017; Thompson, 2019).

In this paper, the term political participation will be used to describe policymaking through expanding the active political role of ordinary citizens (Hague, Harrop, & McCormick, 2016; Hendriks, Loughlin, & Lidström, 2011; Michels & De Graaf, 2017; Vetter et al., 2016). This covers a wide range of practices where citizens get involved in public policy and decision-making about collective life (Fazi & Smith, 2006).

The perspectives of local councillors on more participatory governance are crucial. Many scholars describe that the success of citizen participation strongly depends on representatives' attitudes concerning participatory democracy (Lowndes, Pratchett, & Stoker, 2001; van der Does & Jacquet, 2021; Werner, 2020b). Local councillors can enable the participatory process, can listen to proposals emanating from these processes and can eventually follow them. They can act as a metagovernor or stimulate participation as it can potentially lead to better policy-making. At the

same time, local councillors are challenged by participation, as citizens gain influence at their expense.

Local councillors' attitudes about the legitimacy of participatory initiatives will therefore be investigated as a dependent variable. We presented all local councillors in Flanders different descriptions of types of local decision-making. Legitimacy perceptions towards participatory arrangements were measured by asking respondents to evaluate the described decisionmaking. Thus, the term legitimacy will be used in this paper to refer to sociocognitive perceptions by councillors. We investigate to what extent they believe that citizens' input, participatory processes (throughput), and output policies are accepted as justifiable (Schmidt, 2013). Previous research mainly focused on merely one aspect to measure legitimacy (Garry et al., 2021; Gundelach, Buser, & Kübler, 2017; Jacobs & Kaufmann, 2021; Pogrebinschi & Ryan, 2018; Rojon & Pilet, 2021; Werner, 2020a) or on one particular type of participation (on citizen panels e.g. Andrews, Entwistle, and Guarneros-Meza (2019), on mini-publics e.g. Germann, Marien, and Muradova (2021), and on referendums e.g. Bedock and Pilet (2020)). Although previous research hints at a considerable impact of participatory design on democratic governance (Fung, 2015; Gundelach et al., 2017; Michels & Binnema, 2019; Pogrebinschi & Ryan, 2018), to date no previous study has investigated the perceptions of local politicians concerning different designs of political participation.

Flanders (region in Belgium) offers an excellent case for investigating the impact on the attitudes of local councillors (Jacquet, Niessen, & Reuchamps, 2022; Van Damme, Jacquet, Schiffino, & Reuchamps, 2017; Vrydagh, Devillers, Jacquet, Talukder, & Bottin, 2021). This country has seen the implementation of various participatory arrangements in the last decades and has recently been at the forefront of the "participatory wave" by institutionalizing political participation at local levels (Van Damme et al., 2017; Vrydagh et al., 2021). Next to the considerable growth of political participation in Flemish local government, it is commonly referred to as the level of government most proximate to the citizens (Fitzgerald & Wolak, 2016; Gelders, Brans, Maesschalck, & Colsoul, 2010). The present research examines, for the first time, whether different design features of participation shape councillors' attitudes. For this purpose two dimensions will be combined, namely the initiator (government or citizens) and the power that is granted to citizens in participatory arrangements (consultative, co-decisive or decisive). It is expected that councillors perceive citizen participation with a greater loss of control (with citizen-initiated decisive forms as most extreme case) as more undesirable and thus less legitimate. A large-scale survey using vignettes is conducted among Flemish local councillors. The goal of this paper is to assess **whether and how**

**different design features of participation shape councillors' attitudes on the legitimacy of various modes of decision-making (RQ).** Section two begins by laying out the following theoretical dimensions: the development, consequences and types of participatory democracy. The third section is concerned with the hypotheses derived from the theory around participation. The methodology for this study will be described in section four. The preliminary results in section five show that councillors evaluate co-decisionmaking with citizens as the most legitimate, while classic representative policy-making as the least legitimate. Besides, councillors estimate top-down arrangements somewhat more legitimate than bottom-up participation. We will give some concluding remarks in section six.

## 2. Participatory local democracy

Many researchers have described an allegedly defect representative democracy (Dalton & Weldon, 2005; Junius, Matthieu, Caluwaerts, & Erzeel, 2020; Norris, 2011; Poguntke et al., 2016). This constitutes a potential threat to the functioning of democratic processes (Marien & Hooghe, 2011). Since low levels of political trust are associated with less law compliance, it can undermine the effective governing of the people. This indicates that the crisis of the representative democracy endangers the governability of society.

Additionally and related, policy-makers increasingly have to deal with complex policy issues (Radzik-Maruszak & Haveri, 2020; Sørensen & Torfing, 2017; Thompson, 2019). Governments have installed participatory governance (Bussu, Bua, Dean, & Smith, 2022; Sørensen & Torfing, 2016) since involving citizens in policymaking is seen as one of the possible remedies to these problems (Kersting, 2016; Vetter et al., 2016; Warren, 2009).

This clear international trend towards participatory democracy occurs at all levels of government and in diverse contexts (Hendriks et al., 2011; Kerley, Liddle, & Dunning, 2018). According to Pateman (2012) participation evolved towards being a mainstream practice in democracy. Normative participatory democratic theories emphasize the importance of citizen participation to save the quality of democracy (Barber, 2003; Beauvais & Warren, 2019; Pateman, 2012; Sønderskov, 2019) and to improve democratic governance (Elstub & Escobar, 2019; Newton & Geissel, 2012; Smith, 2009). Consequently, certain scholars report that increased participation is believed to make the democracy more legitimate (Barber, 2003; Núñez, Close, & Bedock, 2016; Pateman, 2012; Van Damme et al., 2017). When governments exercise their power through fair procedures, it is found to improve the acceptance of policy-making, this is commonly referred to as 'procedural fairness' (Beyers & Arras, 2020; Grimes, 2006; Smith, 2009; Tyler, 2006). Next, complex policy problems require involving multiple actors (Bua, 2019), whereby outputs often prove to be effective and align with citizens' political views (Beyers & Arras, 2020).

Participation is a broad term that encompasses different forms ranging from limited to extensive involvement, and from small to large impact (Arnstein, 1969; Fung, 2015). Some governments have introduced far-reaching participatory arrangements, while others have been more modest (Karlsson, 2012; Plüss, 2014; Radzik-Maruszak & Haveri, 2020). In this paper, we will distinguish between the actor that takes the initiative in a participatory arrangement (citizen or government) and the impact participation has (consultative, co-decisive, decisive).

There is clear evidence that the introduction of participatory innovations has changed (and still changes) the nature of local democracy (Hendriks et al., 2011; Kerley et al., 2018). Democratic innovations both challenge and complement representative democracy. In the next section we consider how local councillors stand towards these developments

### 2.1. Elected politicians and participation

Connections between citizen participation and existing democratic institutions are crucial for the well-functioning of participation (Bingham, Nabatchi, & O'Leary, 2005; Klijn & Koppenjan, 2000; Sørensen, 2002; Thompson, 2019). More in particular, it was found that the successful development of participatory initiatives largely depends on the way representatives institutionalise these democratic innovations (Hertting & Kugelberg, 2017; Thompson, 2019). And Baxamusa (2008) concluded that councillors' support for citizen-initiated participative arrangements is a precondition for citizens to strengthen their voice. Local elected representatives can take on different roles in participatory arrangements; for example as a facilitator, resister or metagovernor (Thompson, 2019; Verhelst, Reynaert, & Steyvers, 2011). As they can both stimulate (as facilitator) or obstruct (as resister) participation, it is highly relevant to consider local councillors' attitudes. Unfortunately, only a limited number of studies focused on the power and role of local councillors in participatory democracy (Denters & Klok, 2013; Karlsson, 2012; Røiseland & Vabo, 2016a). For local councillors, there is a possible tension, between traditional representative democracy and participatory democracy.

Interests (or instrumental motivations) are important driving factors for representatives to support (or obstruct) citizen participation (Junius et al., 2020; McKenna, 2012; Rahat, 2009; Thompson, 2019). On the one hand, participation can improve knowledge on a topic, can generate new insights, and can stimulate ownership of policy decisions, which can all positively affect the quality of decisions of local councillors (Fazi & Smith, 2006; Torfing, 2019). Councillors can benefit from participatory arrangements, because bringing practical experiences and different voices to the table is expected to produce more reasoned, informed and innovative policy-decisions (Boulianne, Loftson, & Kahane, 2020; Sønderskov, 2020; Warren, 2009). As discussed above, it could enrich policy-making and increase decision-acceptance (Røiseland & Vabo, 2016b), which is to the benefit of local councillors.

On the other hand, participation can be seen as harmful from the perspective of councillors (Karlsson, 2012; Klijn & Koppenjan, 2000; Røiseland & Vabo, 2016b). Participation establishes a paradigm shift, away from the indirect and representative logic of elected representatives (Dalton

et al., 2001). In the classic representative model the city council is considered to be a core institution in the electoral chain of command (Denters & Klok, 2013; Egner, Sweeting, & Klok, 2013; Qvortrup, 2005). The idea is that through the electoral link councillors will make decisions on behalf of the voters and represent their interests. Voters can in turn hold the elected accountable for their actions in the next election. Due to participatory initiatives, citizens and civil society actors attain more power in the policy-making process (independent from local councillors), which creates conflicting roles of councillors and citizens. Power is a zero-sum game, which means that when one actor is gaining power (citizens), another actor (councillors) lose some of their power. In Flanders, internal policy-making is mainly controlled by civil servants and the municipal executive, which means that councillors tend to become less powerful (Caluwaerts et al., 2020; Gelders et al., 2010). Furthermore, citizen participation complements a trend in which councillors' role is reduced by other phenomena such as network governance and party government. Therefore, councillors risk to lose power, and are hence less likely to appreciate citizens' participation (Núñez et al., 2016). Councillors seem to dislike most the forms of citizen participation that weaken most their final decisionmaking role (Egner et al., 2013; Qvortrup, 2005). For instance, because they want to be in charge on "high politics", they will be more enthusiast to devolve responsibility to citizens for "low political topics" such as local planning.

Previous research has shown that elected politicians have varying attitudes concerning political participation, ranging from being the fierce opponents to the most fanatic advocates (e.g. Brazil: (Wampler, 2008); Finland (Koskimaa & Rapeli, 2020); Germany: (Kersting, 2016); Norway: (Sønderskov, 2019); UK: (Copus, 2003; Ryan, 2014). In Belgium Verhelst, De Rynck, Reynaert, and Steyvers (2013) and Egner et al. (2013) demonstrated that Belgian councillors do in general appreciate and even desire citizen participation. An important shortage of the research field is that it does not deal with councillors' evaluation of the specific design features of participatory arrangements (Christensen, 2020).

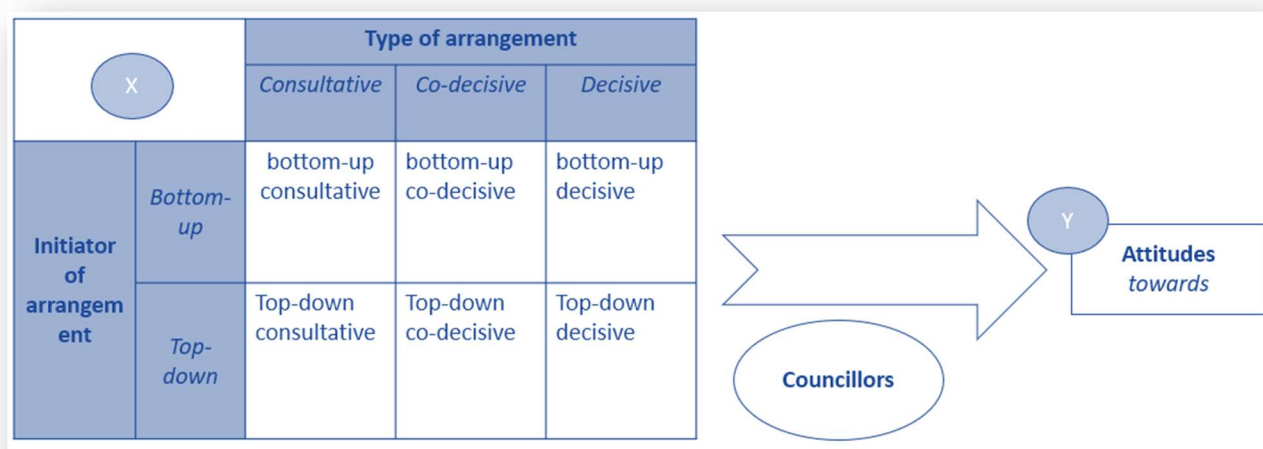
## 2.2. Design of participatory arrangements

There exist strong indications that different design attributes may have an impact on councillors' preferences concerning participatory arrangements (Egner et al., 2013; Gundelach et al., 2017; Michels & Binnema, 2019; Pogrebinschi & Ryan, 2018; Werner, 2020b). The objective of this research is to determine how different types of participation (independent variable, x) have an impact on legitimacy perceptions among Flemish local councillors (dependent variable, y). For the independent variables, we distinguish between two dimensions, namely the citizens' impact and the initiators. This paper tries to get a more comprehensive understanding by combining the power

dimension (consultative, co-decisive and decisive) with bottom-up and top-down-initiated participative arrangements (see Figure 1).

Previous research already pointed to the impact of both initiators and the binding nature on support for referendums (Caluwaerts et al., 2020; Qvortrup, 2005; Setälä, 2006) and for mini-publics (Jacquet & van der Does, 2021; Niessen, 2019). The survey of Caluwaerts et al. (2020) focused on Belgian local party chairs, Van Damme et al. (2017) on Belgian parliamentarians and the study of Niessen (2019) on different Belgian politicians and stakeholders. These studies show that when participatory outcomes are binding, it is judged more negative than advisory ones. Politicians sometimes do not want co-decision, since the behaviour of the participations is considered unreliable in such circumstances (Voorberg, Bekkers, & Tummers, 2015) and because they risk to lose most power then. Another possible explanation for opposing participatory arrangements might be the risk-averse administrative culture of politicians. This paper extends these insights to other forms of participation.

**Figure 1: Effect of participatory arrangements on attitudes**



In the present study, participation **initiated** by the government is defined as **top-down**. In this case, local government itself takes the initiative to offer citizens a larger say in the policy making process. The term **bottom-up** is used here to refer to participation initiated by citizens. In this type of participation citizens and civil society actors assemble and persuade (or even urge) the local government to take their concerns into account.



Next also the **impact** of citizens on the final policy-decision is considered. This was conceptualised by Arnstein (1969) in a ladder of citizen participation. We differentiate the vignettes according to the extent of power and authority given to citizens (Fung, 2015). When local government remains the institution with most power, the arrangements are called **consultative**. Politicians still take the final decision in policy-making, and they can even ignore the advice of the citizens. Citizens and civil society actors only have a consultative function in this type of participation. More substantial influence to policy is given in the so called **co-decisive arrangements**. In this type of participation, citizens and government collaborate in developing solutions, and the decision-making power is shared between government and citizens. Elected politicians are not fully replaced by citizens in policy-making due to co-decision (Røiseland & Vabo, 2016b). The most far-reaching type of participation used in this analysis are **decisive arrangements**. Here, power is handed over from government to citizens, who are the final decision-makers..

The following types can be identified when combining the design feature dimensions initiators and the citizens' impact: (a) top-down consultative arrangements, (b) bottom-up consultative arrangements, (c) top-down co-decisive arrangements, (d) bottom-up co-decisive arrangements, (e) top-down decisive arrangements and (f) bottom-up decisive arrangements. This research is embedded in an interdisciplinary project<sup>5</sup> where we assess the impact of the initiators of participatory mechanisms and of the power attributed to citizens on civil society, civil servants, executive politicians and citizens. In this paper we will investigate the impact of the above-mentioned participatory designs on local councillors' attitudes.

### 2.3. Legitimacy perceptions

In order to measure their attitudes, we distinguish between three subdimensions of legitimacy (being input legitimacy, throughput legitimacy and output legitimacy). First **input legitimacy** encompasses inclusion and equal input of diverse citizens (Hendriks, 2021). Inclusiveness, on the one hand, implies that each citizen has an equal chance to participate, in order to create more diversity in socio-demographic terms (Caluwaerts & Reuchamps, 2015). On the other hand, input legitimacy of participation can also be measured by responsiveness (Caluwaerts & Reuchamps, 2015; Scharpf, 1972; Schmidt, 2013), i.e. the voice of diverse groups of our society is heard (Michels & De Graaf, 2017; Smith, 2009).

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<sup>5</sup> This research is part of the larger project "The changed face of local democracy? The impact of citizen participation on roles, relationships and legitimacy perceptions of democratic institutional stakeholders" (funded by Ghent University Special Research Fund - BOF21/GOA/008). More information: <https://participatievedemocratie.be/>.

Second, the term **throughput legitimacy** has come to be used to refer to the appropriateness of decision-making, the proper process and fair procedure (De Fine Licht, Naurin, Esaiasson, & Gilljam, 2014; Hendriks, 2021). It is commonly equated with procedural fairness, which presumes that fair procedures will foster the acceptance of outcomes (Beyers & Arras, 2020; De Fine Licht et al., 2014). This theory supposes that the decision-making procedures strongly affect individuals' willingness to accept them (Esaiasson, Persson, Gilljam, & Lindholm, 2019).

Last, **output legitimacy** is generally understood as efficacy and efficiency of decisions (Hendriks, 2021). Efficacy is the capability of the policy-making process to link policy options with preferences (Scharpf, 1972; Schmidt, 2013). While efficiency focuses on the capacity of the outcome to solve problems with an optimal use of (financial) means and on the satisfaction with the solutions.

In this regard, the first central research question of this paper is as follows: Does the initiator of a participatory arrangement have an influence on local councillors' attitudes towards this participatory arrangement? **(RQ1)**. Secondly, does the impact of a participatory arrangement have an influence on local councillors' attitudes towards this participatory arrangement? **(RQ2)**

### 3. Hypotheses

The following section will discuss the expected impact of participatory designs on councillors' legitimacy perceptions. It can be assumed that councillors make a rational calculation of benefits and drawbacks of participatory arrangements. As discussed above, participation is expected to possibly deliver richer, more reasoned, informed and innovative problem-solving (Boulianne et al., 2020; Sønderskov, 2020; Warren, 2009), but most councillors understand the related shortcomings (loss of power in particular). Councillors try to prevent handing over their (final) decisionmaking role (Egner et al., 2013). Elected politicians are assumed to remain cautious and try to stay in control, hence councillors are expected to prefer the local government as initiator of participative arrangements. It is assumed that top-down participation might retain the status quo in terms of power relations, whereas bottom-up forms of participation might actually give democratic power to citizens (Lowndes et al., 2001).

**Hypothesis 1:** Councillors perceive top-down arrangements as more legitimate than bottom-up arrangements.

Earlier studies found that Belgian local party chairs (Caluwaerts et al., 2020) and Belgian MPs (Jacquet et al., 2022; Jacquet, Schiffino, Reuchamps, & Latinis, 2015; Vandamme, Jacquet, Niessen, Pitseys, & Reuchamps, 2018) are less supportive of binding participatory initiatives than of advisory ones. Caluwaerts et al. (2020) demonstrated that interests drive support for advisory referendums, whereas support for the binding referendums mostly depended on party ideology. Co-decision and decision are forms of participation where the power of the local elected institutions might actually be challenged in the longer run (Røiseland & Vabo, 2016b). Although there is consensus on benefits and the usefulness of participation, representatives are not always eager to facilitate nor implement co-decisive initiatives (Jacquet, Moskovic, Caluwaerts, & Reuchamps, 2016; Klijn & Koppenjan, 2000). Jacquet et al. (2022) additionally showed that Belgian MPs refrain to support sortition processes where citizens decision-making power is more than consultative. Politicians sometimes do not want co-decision, since the behaviour of the participations is considered unreliable in such circumstances (Voorberg et al., 2015). It can be assumed that local councillors are less supportive of non-consultative participatory arrangements (Jacquet et al., 2022; Røiseland & Vabo, 2016a; Warren, 2009). Therefore, councillors are expected to favor consultative forms of participation.

**Hypothesis 2:** Councillors perceive consultative arrangements as more legitimate than co-decisive and decisive arrangements.

## 4. Methodology

The section below describes the methodology of this study: a macro-scale web-based vignette-survey (see appendix A1) was conducted in order to get a comprehensive understanding of the councillors' viewpoints on participation. The survey was programmed and administered on Qualtrics between February and April 2022. A fictitious political decision-making process around the reallocation of a vacant secondary school building was presented. We tried to evaluate the effect of different forms of citizen participation (X) on councillors' attitudes (Y) via a vignette survey (see Figure 1). We employed a mixed-factorial design in which we included the initiator of the arrangement (two-levels: government-initiated vs. citizen-initiated) as the between-subjects factor and the type of arrangement (four-levels: classic, consultation, co-decision, decision) as the within-subjects factor. In recent studies on participation, survey experiments using vignettes were also applied to measure legitimacy attitudes (Jacobs & Kaufmann, 2021; Rojon, Rijken, & Klandermans, 2019; Schafheitle, Weibel, Meidert, & Leuffen, 2020). The vignette survey started with a baseline condition of traditional local public decision-making and was succeeded by three participatory scenarios in random order (consultative, co-decisive and decisive).

### 4.1. Operationalization: dependent variables

Perceived legitimacy will be measured by a number of subdimensions of legitimacy (being input, throughput and output legitimacy) and by the overall satisfaction of councillors with the participatory arrangement. The overall favorability of the different modes of decision-making was formulated as *'I find this is a good way to decide what will happen with the old school building'*. Participants were asked to what extent they agree with that statement on 11-point Likert scale. Previous research commonly investigated general legitimacy perceptions (Garry et al., 2021; Rojon & Pilet, 2021; Rojon et al., 2019; Werner, 2020a) or one of the legitimacy-dimensions, mostly throughputlegitimacy (Gundelach et al., 2017; Jacobs & Kaufmann, 2021; Pogrebinschi & Ryan, 2018). In Table 1, we list the statements that were put forward to our respondents in order to grasp the different aspects of legitimacy. Hence, our survey method develops a novel multidimensional assessment covering the whole aspect of legitimacy perceptions.

**Table 1. Dimensions and aspects of legitimacy (outcome variables)**

<b>Question</b>	To what extent do you agree with the following statements (0-10)?
<b>Dimension</b>	<b>Aspect</b>
<b>Overall evaluation</b>	I find this is a good way to decide what will happen with the old school building
<b>Legitimacy</b>	<b>This way of deciding what will happen with the old school building...</b>
<i>Input</i>	In1 Allows as many points of view and interests as possible to be taken into account
	In2 Gives citizens from all walks of life the opportunity to be heard
<i>Throughput</i>	Tr1 Gives everyone a clear view on how the decision is made
	Tr2 Is a fair way of decision-making
<i>Output</i>	Ou1 Provides a solution that will work
	Ou2 Provides an efficient solution

#### 4.2. Sample

Data is still being collected while writing this paper, therefore the present paper describes only preliminary results on sample of Flemish local councillors (N = 765). For this paper, only participants who finished our questionnaire on the 7<sup>th</sup> of April were taken into account. The response rate of this survey approximately reaches 14 percent of the Flemish councillors. This sample seems to be representative<sup>6</sup> for the population of 5535 Flemish councillors, although there is no exact data available on the demographics<sup>7</sup>. This population does not include executive councillors such as mayors and alderman (who continue to be part of the local council in Flanders) because we would like to gain insights in the attitudes of local councillors without an executive mandate. All analyses were carried out using SPSS, version 28. In this paper the institutional and contextual features will be held constant, because all respondents operate within the same political system and regulatory context. Local government in Flanders is generally dominated by the municipal executive, although formally the city council has the largest policymaking role (De Ceuninck & Verhelst, 2021).

<sup>6</sup> Appendix A2 contains more demographic information on the sample

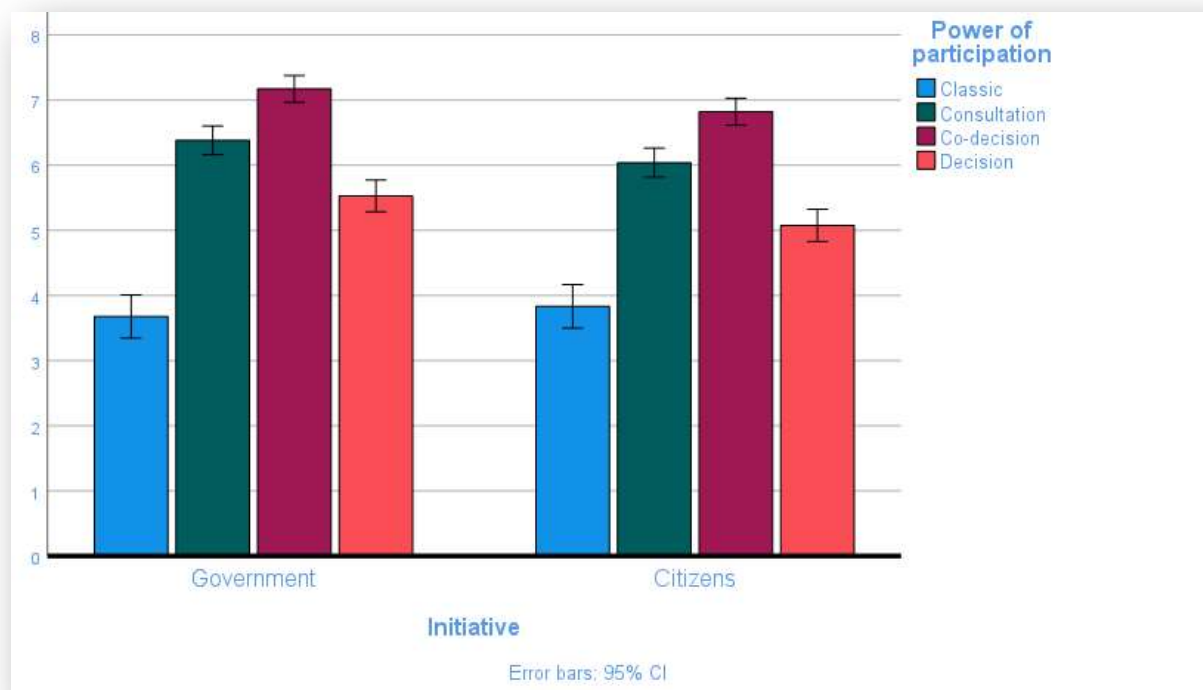
<sup>7</sup> The exact population of Flemish councillors is difficult to determine, since the mandate holders are constantly changing.

## 5. Preliminary results

This fifth section describes some preliminary results on the impact of our two independent variables (type of initiator and type of arrangement) on our dependent variable (overall evaluation), we have conducted a repeated measure ANOVA. These results are visually illustrated in Figure 2. This analysis, first of all, revealed a significant main effect of type of initiator,  $F(1, 763) = 4.82, p = .029$ , partial  $\eta^2 = .006$ . In agreement with Hypothesis 1, councillors indeed perceive participatory arrangements as significantly more legitimate when they are initiated by the government (i.e., top-down;  $M = 5.69, SE = .08$ ) than when they are initiated by citizens (i.e., bottom-up;  $M = 5.44, SE = .08$ ). Although it must be noticed that the difference between these two initiators is rather small ( $\Delta M = 0.25, SE = 0.113$ , 95% CI for the difference:  $[0.03, 0.47]$ ).

Moreover, this analysis also revealed a significant main effect of type of arrangement,  $F(3, 761) = 277.98, p < .001$ , partial  $\eta^2 = .523$ . The difference between the four types is thus large. Subsequent pairwise comparisons (with LSD correction) showed that the classical arrangements ( $M = 3.75, SD = 3.32$ ) are perceived as significantly less legitimate (all  $ps < .001$ ) by councillors than the three participatory arrangements (i.e., consultative, co-decisive, and decisive arrangements). Moreover, when comparing these three participatory arrangements with each other, it is revealed that councillors perceive the co-decisive arrangements ( $M = 7.00, SD = 2.06$ ) as significantly more legitimate (both  $ps < .001$ ) than both the consultative ( $M = 6.21, SD = 2.23$ ) and the decisive ( $M = 5.31, SD = 2.46$ ) arrangements. The difference between the consultative and the decisive arrangements also turned out to be significant ( $p < .001$ ). As such, it can be concluded that Hypothesis 2 is only partially confirmed. As expected, councillors indeed perceive consultative arrangements as more legitimate than decisive arrangements. Yet, contrary to our expectations, co-decisive arrangements are perceived more legitimate than consultative arrangements.

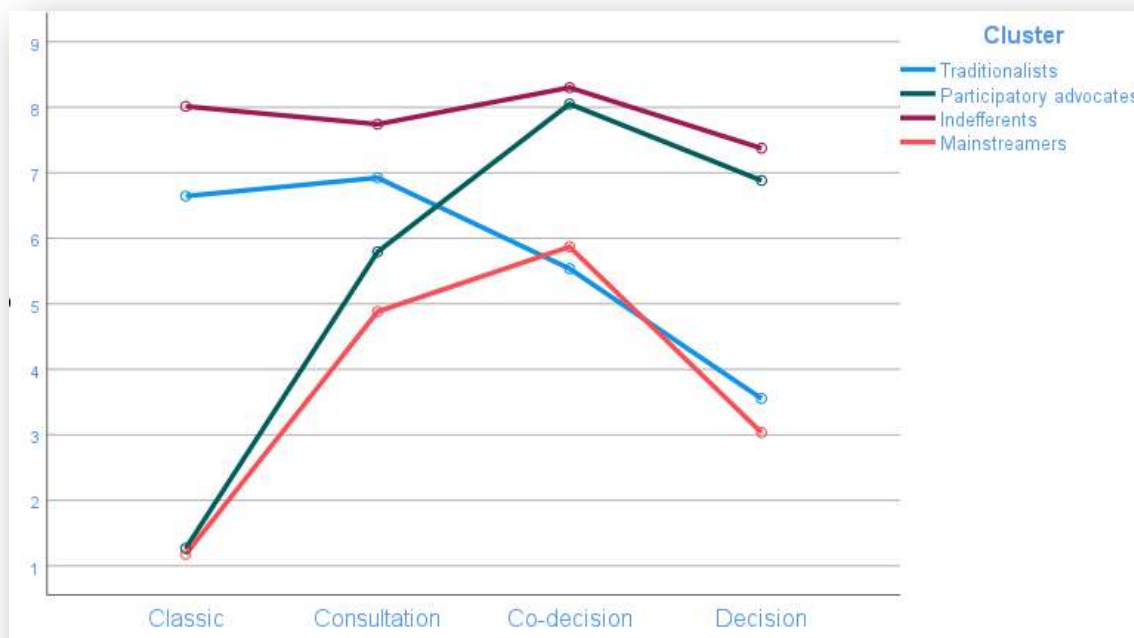
**Figure 2: Overall evaluation of arrangements, divided by initiative<sup>8</sup>**



Next, we also conducted two additional analyses. First, we conducted a cluster analysis on the overall evaluation of the participatory arrangements in order to distinguish groups of councillors. In Figure 3 four clusters are graphically displayed that have different attitudes according to the participatory design. First, almost one out of four councillors belongs to the blue cluster, whom can be called ‘traditionalists’ since they evaluate classic decision-making and consultative arrangements as more legitimate than co-decise and decisive arrangements. Second, the green cluster shows councillors who are believed to be ‘participatory advocates’, considering that they extremely dislike classic decision-making and are increasingly enthusiast when citizens’ impact increases. They are even quite positive about the decision arrangement. This group consists of more than one out of three councillors in this study and is therefore the biggest cluster found. Third, some councillors seem to be rather indifferent about the way of policy-making. This group consists of less than one out of five councillors and is visualised in Figure 3 by the red line. The last cluster contains a group of more than one out of five councillors. They can be identified in the orange cluster as ‘mainstreamers’ who follow the general pattern of evaluation as depicted in Figure 2.

<sup>8</sup> Councillors were asked to evaluate each participatory arrangement on 11-point Likert scales, n=765

**Figure 3: clusters of councillors' evaluation of arrangements (colloped across the two types of initiator)**



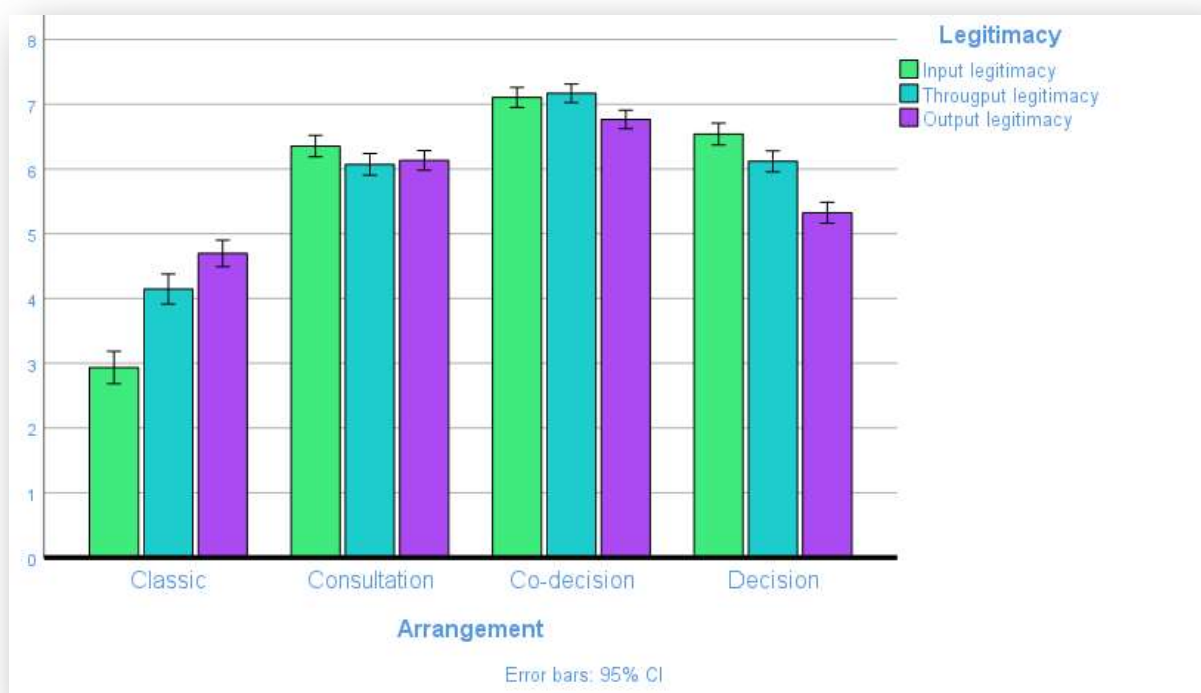
Furthermore, we conducted an additional analysis on the legitimacy subdimensions<sup>9</sup> via repeated measure ANOVA. Figure 3 displays the interaction effect of power and the subdimensions of legitimacy,  $F(6,758)=104.90$ , partial  $\eta^2 = .454$ . We will focus on the classic and decisive arrangements. First subsequent pairwise comparisons (with LSD correction) revealed strikingly that councillors evaluate the input legitimacy of classical decisionmaking ( $M = 2.94$ ,  $SD = 0.13$ ) significantly (all  $ps < .001$ ) lower than its throughput and output legitimacy. We can thus conclude that councillors believe that citizens are not included adequately and not in a diverse way in classic decision-making processes, while rating the throughput legitimacy ( $M = 4.15$ ,  $S = 0.12$ ) and output legitimacy ( $M = 4.70$ ,  $SD = 0.11$ ) at a low level, but significantly higher than the input legitimacy. Additionally the decisive participatory arrangement was assessed rather legitimate in terms of input legitimacy ( $M = 6.54$ ,  $S = 0.09$ ), but the throughput legitimacy ( $M = 6.12$ ,  $SD = 0.08$ ) and output legitimacy ( $M = 5.33$ ,  $SD = 0.08$ ) are rated at a lower level. In sum, the overall low evaluation of the

<sup>9</sup> Councillors were asked to evaluate each dependent (see Table 1) on 11-point Likert scales, the mean score of dependent In1 and In2 was used to measure input legitimacy, We work with the mean score of Tr1 and Tr2 for the evaluation of throughput legitimacy and the mean score of Ou1 and Ou2 into a variable for outputlegitimacy



classic arrangement appears to be mainly due to a low input legitimacy, while the overall rather low evaluation of the decisive arrangement is mainly driven by output legitimacy. This demonstrates that it makes sense to distinguish between different dimensions of legitimacy.

**Figure 3: Councillors' legitimacy perceptions on arrangements (colloped across the two types of initiator)**



## 6. Conclusions

In this section, we will give some concluding remarks and start the discussion on the impact of participatory arrangements on councillors' attitudes on participation. Together the reported results provide important insights into participatory local democracy and the impact on councillors' attitudes. First, co-decisive forms of participation are seen as the most optimal way of local policy-making by councillors compared to the three other types of decision-making (classic, consultation and decision), whereas the representative classic decision-making is relatively perceived as the worst. These results show that their attitudes are differentiated according to the initiator and the impact of the participating citizens. It might thus be correct that councillors' opinions are built on instrumental motivations. An implication of these conclusions is the possibility that councillors are going to dismiss and neglect arrangements where citizens are fully in charge (e.g. citizen initiatives). Councillors seem to be exasperated with the present local decision-making. There is considerable evidence that councillors want to change the way local policymaking works to a more cooperative way as long as they do not lose too much power. Second, questioning the different subdimensions of legitimacy appear to be helpful in measuring and thus understanding what councillors think, since there is a clear distinction between the way councillors assess the input legitimacy and output legitimacy of both classic decisionmaking and decisive participation.

Despite these interesting results, there are still many unanswered questions about the impact of participatory arrangements on local democracy. This study focused on the case of a vacant school building, but councillors possibly evaluate participatory arrangements differently according to the problem at stake. Future research could investigate the effects of the topic at stake. Councillors differ from each other, therefore in future studies various moderating variables should be taken into account. For example electoral chances and government-opposition dynamics might shape councillors' support. In addition, further research should go beyond attitudes of councillors, and could investigate the roles of councillors and their relationship to other actors in participatory arrangements, both in hypothetical situations and in real-life settings.

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