1. Introduction

In the Netherlands, as in many other European countries, municipal councils are a crucial link in local representative democracy. In the traditional model of representative democracy the council is in a pivotal position in an ‘electoral chain of command’ (Dearlove 1973: 25-46). As being the directly elected representatives of the electorate, councillors are primarily responsible for the translation of local inputs (citizen demands and needs) into authoritative decisions to be executed by the local political executive and its officers (Denters 2005: 432).

It is immediately obvious that in such a model the council and its members have to perform two complementary roles. On the one hand the representative role: here the key criterion is the responsiveness of the council vis-à-vis the local citizenship. On the other hand the council will have to control and supervise the local political executive and the municipal officers. In this paper we will refer to the second role as the scrutiny function of the council. Here the main criterion is whether the council is capable of securing the accountability of the executive leadership and its administrative apparatus.

As we have already argued more extensively in several other publications (Denters and Klok 2003, 2005; Denters et al. 2005; Denters 2005) both functions of the council in Dutch local government have come under pressure. On the one hand the
The council’s representative role has been challenged, because of a decline in electoral turnout in municipal elections and party membership, and an increasing use of alternative channels for political participation. On the basis of such developments the democratic primacy of the council as the “voice of the people” is not as evident as it may have been previously (Denters 2005: 427-429).

The council’s scrutiny role is equally problematic. For long years the capacity of the council to control and supervise the political executive and the administrative apparatus has been questioned. In the light of the increasing responsibilities of local government and the ensuing growth of its executive branch, it was argued that the councillors – as essentially amateur (part-time) politicians – could play little more than a marginal role in local politics. The shift from government to governance and the consequent fragmentation of the local government system have made the scrutiny role of the council even more problematic (Denters 2005: 425-427). These developments are by no means specifically Dutch. Similar tendencies can be observed in other countries in and outside Europe (see Denters and Rose 2005: 255-261). In various countries these developments have given rise to reviews of the role of the elected council in local government. In both the Netherlands and the UK efforts have been made to reinvigorate both the representative and the scrutiny role of the council (Denters and Rose 2005: 255-261).

In this paper we will discuss the results of the Dutch reforms that were introduced in 2002. At the core of the Dutch council reforms were a number of major legislative changes, resulting in a major restructuring of the local government model. However, the reformers were convinced that merely changing the ‘rules of the game’ would not suffice to bring about the desired improvements in the quality of local representative democracy – in terms of responsiveness and accountability. Therefore, prior to the introduction of the legislative reforms in 2002 and in the four years thereafter, the Association of Dutch Municipalities and the Ministry of the Interior and Kingdom Relations launched an intensive campaign to support the institutional changes. In combination, the legislative changes and the campaign would have to result in major changes in the role conceptions and the behavior of councillors, ultimately resulting in a better functioning local democracy. In this paper our main question will be whether these local government reforms have indeed brought about the anticipated changes in the role conceptions of councillors. In the view of the reformers, this form of cultural
change is an important condition for the desired behavioral changes (at the level of individual councillors) and ultimately on the democratic quality of local government (at the aggregate level of the council). Although our focus will be on cultural change, the penultimate section will also provide some research-based evidence about the possible consequences of the reforms for the democratic performance of councils.

Before we turn to this question we will first of all outline the main elements of the reform.

1.1 The Dutch reforms
After the enactment of the Municipal Law of 1852, most of the main elements of the model of local democracy in Dutch municipalities have remained unaltered. In this traditional model the directly elected municipal council was at the head of municipal government, at least in formal terms. There were, however, two additional offices in municipal government with independent powers – the Mayor and the Board of Mayor and Aldermen (BMA). Councillors elected the aldermen on the BMA from their own ranks, and the council could also dismiss them. After their election, aldermen continued their membership in the council and their party group in the council. The Mayor – who was appointed by central government on the basis of a shortlist drawn up by a committee from the council – had several powers granted by national law in the fields of public order and public safety. The BMA, in addition to its general responsibility for the preparation and implementation of council decisions, had specific powers in executing many national policies. Both the Mayor and the BMA were responsible to the council for their use of these powers. In a formal sense, in other words, the primacy in local decision making rested with the council. In practice, however, the centre of power resided with the BMA. Because of their political weight (partly the result of the combined membership of the council and the BMA), their information advantage, and the professional support of their staff, relations between aldermen and ordinary councillors are normally heavily tilted in favour of the former (Denters and Klok 2005: 69-70).

As has been already indicated, the traditional model came under increasing pressure and was finally replaced in 2002. Then a new Municipal Law was enacted,

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1 The most important changes pertained to successive extensions of the suffrage for local elections, broadening the scope of the democratic legitimation of the council.
based on the proposals of a Royal Commission. The 2002 reforms had a dual aim. On the one hand they were aimed at strengthening the actual position of the council vis-à-vis the BMA and creating favourable conditions for better **executive accountability** with regard to council. This was done by a series of measures strengthening the independence of the council. The two most important measures in this respect were: 1) abolishing the aldermen’s membership of the council 2) the provision that aldermen no longer can act as chairs of council committees. Moreover, the councils were given new formal powers in order to be better able to perform their powers of scrutiny. Finally, the support for councillors to perform their duties was improved. Table 1 provides a more detailed overview of the various measures. These measures were especially needed since the 2002 reform entails a concentration of governing authorities with the board.

In addition to strengthening the council’s actual position in the local political process, the reforms also aimed at strengthening the representative function of the councillors: “The main idea here was that the concentration on the control and scrutiny roles would allow councillors to invest more time and energy in their relation with the citizenry. This would imply a reinforcement of their traditional representative role which would result in a more **responsive municipal government**.” (Denters 2005: 432).

Table 1: The 2002 reforms: most important measures

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of measure:</th>
<th>Short description:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Position</td>
<td>- Strengthening independence by abolition double role of the Aldermen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Aldermen no longer chairs council committees</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Formal powers councillors</td>
<td>- Obligation for Mayor and BMA to inform council actively on all that may be deemed relevant for the council to perform its duties</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Rights of control for councillors (initiative; amendment)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Information rights (parliamentary questions; interpellation; parliamentary inquiry)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support functions</td>
<td>- New budgetary instruments for the council</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Introduction of Council Clerk</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- Introduction of local Court of Audit</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- Right of administrative support and advice</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Source: Denters 2005: 431)
2. **Mechanisms of change**

In this paper we are interested in the consequences the 2002 reforms may have had for democratic accountability and democratic responsiveness in Dutch local democracy. As we will explain in more detail in the methodological section, accountability and responsiveness are concepts that can refer to both the attitudes (role orientations) and the activities of *individual councillors* and to the political culture and performance of the council as a *collective body*. For the main part of this paper we will focus on changes in the individual role orientations of councillors. In this section we will therefore first discuss which mechanisms can explain how institutional changes outlined in Table 1 could have an effect on relevant role orientations of councillors. Therefore the main question in this section is how the envisioned attitudinal changes can take place? Theoretically there are two mechanisms of change of (Chatman 1989, 1991; Knoke 1973; Oldham and Hackman 1981). Firstly, the mechanisms of socialization: councillors who work under the new institutional conditions will gradually adapt to their new environment and develop new attitudes and habits. Secondly, the mechanism of exit and selective recruitment. This is very much a two-sided process. On the exit side, incumbent councillors who do not feel at ease or dysfunction in the new institutional environment may decide not to run for office again or may be “thrown” out in favor of their more well-adapted colleagues. On the recruitment side, the new institutional conditions may be more attractive for some aspiring councillors (with different backgrounds, “new” attitudes and habits) than for others (with a more “traditional” profile). At the same time the institutional reforms may enthuse recruiters to select “nontraditional” new candidates rather than new candidates with a more traditional mindset.

The two mechanisms might change the person-organization fit (PO fit). The PO fit entails the congruence between organizational norm, values and goals and personal values and goals (Cable and Judge 1996, 1997; Cable and Parsons 2001; Chatman 1989, 1991). The PO fit influences the individuals’ attitudes and behaviors (Kristof 1996; Pervin 1989). Low fit could have at least three outcomes: the person

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2 High fit is not always preferable: organizations and its members may become unable to react upon environmental changes. Low fit enhances members to grow and learn. Organizations might bring in persons with different perspectives and new ideas helping organizations to adapt to changing environments. Therefore Chatman (1989) speaks of an ‘optimal fit’. (Chatman 1989).
adapts to the organization, the organization’s values change (not very likely), or the person leaves the organization. In creating a PO fit socialization and selection are not competitive processes, but they can operate jointly to get a desired outcome (Chatman 1989: 345).

The mechanism of socialization is a psychological phenomenon that leads to **personal change**, and we can observe it when we compare attitudes and activities of individual councillors over time: by comparing e.g. his/her attitudes or activities on T₀ and T₁. The mechanisms of exit and selective entry however are about “**change of personnel**”; new councillors replacing incumbents leading to changes in the composition of the council. We can observe such compositional changes by comparing the attitudes and activities of discharged councillors (DC) with re-elected councillors (RC) and with the newly-elected councillors (NC).

Although both mechanisms should be analytically distinguished they may be very difficult to disentangle. Unless, for example, we interview newly-elected councillors before or right after their election it will be hard to tell to what extent their attitudes or activities are the result of recruitment or of socialization.

### 2.1 Socialization

Socialization refers to learning processes that shape people’s attitudes, cognitions, skills and activities. Socialization takes place in numerous contexts, in families, in schools, in informal groups (e.g. amongst friends), in voluntary associations and formal organisations. All these social contexts, unintentionally or sometimes also deliberately, shape their members’ views and actions. Formal organisations, in addition to informal mechanisms of socialization, have often designed programs to stimulate the development of attitudes, skills and activities amongst its members, in order to bring about organizational change or to make the organisation function more effectively (Biddle 1979; Fischer 1986; Saks and Ashfort 1997; Van Maanen 1976; Van Maanen and Schein 1979). Municipal councils are not any different, and have a variety of formal and informal mechanisms for the socialization of new members (Dearlove 1973).
Feldman (1981) states that researchers and practitioners expect socialization programs to increase the motivation of employees to certain types of behaviour (Feldman 1981: 317). Socialization programs are especially important during reorganisations. In order to make structural reforms in the formal organisation work, it is often deemed necessary to supplement the structural reforms with programs to change the attitudes, skills and behaviour of the members. For precisely these reasons the Royal Commission that proposed the structural reforms of the Dutch local government model also advocated a (re-socialization) program aimed at transforming the local political culture in the councils. Without such cultural change, the Commission argued that the legislative reforms in the new Local Government Act 2002 alone would not be enough to bring about the desired changes in councillor roles. Following the recommendations of the Royal Commission, the Ministry of the Interior and Kingdom Relations provided a four-year budget for an ambitious Local Government Innovation Program. This program, that was developed and executed in close co-operation with the Association of Dutch Municipalities (VNG), entailed a cooperation of several relevant actors (including the various political parties, and the professional associations of mayors and chief-executive officers in local government). The program provided for a wide range of activities, including the publication of a regular newsletter and guidebooks on the practical implications of the reforms, conferences for councillors and other target groups, training modules, facilities for counseling and advice and research to monitor the implementation of the reforms. An internet platform was introduced to re-enforce and propagate the program by providing municipalities with information and support and exchanging ideas for renewal and best practices. By use of this website current initiatives enhancing a cultural change were mapped and made accessible. The main aim of the program was to stimulate that councillors, under the new legislative regime, would indeed change their role orientations and role behaviour and henceforth give a high priority to their representative and scrutiny functions (Staatscommissie Dualisering 2000; Startdocument Vernieuwingsimpuls 2000).

Resocialization is about establishing a match between the priorities and values of the individual and the organization. A match leads to organization members who are happier, have positive feelings, and are more likely to stay a member of the organization (Chatman 1991; Meir and Hasson 1982). Those members who have a
low fit but decide to change rather than to leave may end up as being valuable supporters of the organizations values, priorities and goals (Chatman 1991: 464). Re-socialization focuses on reshaping prevalent attitudes and values (McCorkle and Korn 1954) and is therefore bound to be a toilsome process. Socialization not only provides actors with attitudes, but also with a ‘cultural bias’ with which they ‘view the world’ (Thompson et al. 1990). Changing such an established biased view is likely to be a very time-consuming process with insecure results. Therefore, it has been argued that ‘[t]he rhythms of institutional change are slow’ (Putnam et al. 1993: 60).³

The socialization process basically comes down to the enculturation of organization members (O'Reilly and Caldwell 1979; Ott 1989; Schein 1968; Schein 1985). However, some individuals can be more susceptible to socialization than others. ‘Previous studies have shown that susceptibility is greatest at the time of entry into the organization and then declines with tenure (Louis 1980)’ (Harrison and Carroll 1991). Hence, organizational tenure matters: it is an external variable that needs to be taken into account. Organizational tenure in the context of our research refers to the number of years the actor served as a councillor under the old institutional regime. The experience of the old regime has an influence on the mechanism of socialization. Councillors and aldermen that came into office under the ‘ancient regime’ were socialized under the rules and the prevalent role orientations of the time; orientations that were backed by a history of 150 years. It can be expected that the product of such a process of socialization (attitude, skills and action repertoires) are hard to change.

This expectation is supported by the Upper Echelons Perspective (UEP). According to this perspective managerial/executive background characteristics partially predict organizational outcomes in terms of strategic choices and performance levels (Hambrick and Mason 1984). Hence, certain profiles lead to

³ After all, the institutional context exerts a strong influence on people’s actual behavior (Bruns and Waterhouse 1975; Dalton 1980; Davis-Blake and Pfeffer 1989). Through a variety of rewards (‘increased prestige, stability, legitimacy, social support, internal and external commitment, access to resources, attraction of personnel, fit into administrative categories, acceptance in professions, and invulnerability to questioning’; Oliver 1991) individuals are motivated to comply with external social pressures (e.g. government regulations, here, LGA 2002) (Oliver 1997).

Such structure-induced behavioural changes need not be accompanied by consistent attitudinal changes. People could very well be merely ‘going through the motions’. But people also have a natural tendency to reduce inconsistencies between their actual behaviour and their behavioural orientations. When it is impossible to undo the institutional reforms, at least some of the members will therefore be inclined not only to change their role behavior but also to adjust their role orientations. (Festinger 1962).
certain strategies/behaviour. An important background characteristic is organizational
tenure (Bergh 2001). Short-tenured members, pursue more innovative strategies
compared to longer tenured members (Bantel and Jackson 1989; Thomas et al. 1991).
Furthermore, executives with short organizational tenure are characterized by open-
mindedness (Bergh 2001). Long-tenured employees are possibly more committed to
prior strategies (Hambrick et al. 1993) which might result in resistance to change. In
Bergh’s (2001) words:

*Executives committed to former methods of managing the organizations, who rely on
routine and familiar information sources, are vulnerable to inertia, and have
tendencies to become rigid and resistant to change ...*  
(Bergh 2001: 608)

Yet, there is also theoretical support for the opposite argument: the longer an
actor serves in an organisation, the more flexible the actor is in adapting to changes in
the environment. Bergh (2001: 603) describes the Resource-Based View (RBV):
organization members with long organizational tenure have the advantage of unique,
valuable and non-transferable knowledge and skills not available to their less
experienced colleagues (Cannella and Hambrick 1993; Lanzara 1998). On the basis of
these resources more experienced members are more open-minded and better able to
adapt to new circumstances. Less experienced actors on the other hand are forced to
stick to a standard action repertoire. (Bergh 2001). In the context of our research this
implies that this points to an alternative hypothesis: longer tenured councillors have
the skills that allow them to adapt to a changing environment which also makes them
less change-averse than their less experienced colleagues. Although this argument has
its merits, in our view the first hypothesis is more plausible. The second perspective
ignores the fact that – especially in a political context – standard action repertoires are
inextricably bound up with vested interests and power relations. Taking this into
account would imply, that although long-tenured, more senior members may be
capable of changing their ways, they would be unwilling to do so because of their
vested interest in the status quo.

Hence, which tenured group deals best with socialization processes can be argued
about. But fact is that socialization plays an important role for new members. By
learning the newly recruited councillors immediately the new way of working and the new roles of the council, the possibility of councillors showing the desired behavior is increased. New members are often blank as far as experience with the new Local Government Act is concerned. This increases the likelihood that they will adopt attitudes and behavioral strategies in line with the new institutional arrangements. Feldman (1981) describes this specific socialization process as a three-phase process\(^4\) (Feldman 1976; Porter et al. 1975; Van Maanen 1975). The first phase regards ‘anticipatory socialization’, referring to all the learning that is done before a new member joins the organization. This stage entails realism about the organization and the job. The second phase is concerned with ‘encounter’ (Porter et al 1975; Van Maanen 1975): the new recruit discovers what the organization is truly like, change in attitudes and shifting of values may occur. This stage focuses on the formulation of a role definition and the management of role conflicts. The third phase has to do with ‘change and acquisition’ (Porter et al 1975): changes for the long term take place, ‘new recruits master the skills required for their jobs, successfully perform their new roles, and make some satisfactory adjustment to their work group’s values and norms’ (Feldman 1976: 310). This stage concentrates on the resolution of role demands and making satisfactory adjustment to the group culture. Phase two and three might overlap. The socialization process intensifies the enculturation of new members (O’Reilly 1989; Ott 1989; Schein 1968; Schein 1985).

2.2 Mechanism of exit and selective recruitment

The mechanism of exit and selective recruitment entails two important components: the (in)voluntary leaving of current members and the selection of new members. Hence, it is about membership turnover. The turnover process enhances the retention of highly socialized members and encourages the departure of those members who have not yet been successfully socialized (Harrison and Carroll 1991: 555; see also the attraction-selection-attrition framework\(^5\) of Schneider 1987). After the municipal

\(^4\) This process regards role definition (attitudes), skills (perceived behavioral control), and group norms and values (culture) (Feldman 1981).

\(^5\) Similarities (in terms of values and goals) cause for attraction between individuals and organizations (Cable and Judge 1997: 546; Cable and Parsons 2001). Values guide individual’s attitude and behaviors (Chatman 1989; 1991). According to the ASA framework individuals are not randomly assigned to organizations but they work there based on selection (Cooper-Thomas et al. 2004: 55). The ASA framework explains the person-organization fit.
elections certain council members will leave the council and others will join. This section first discusses the decision of incumbents (not) to stand for reelection, after that we will turn to the recruitment of new members.

Exit
Why are people leaving an organization, or in this case: why leaving the council? Harrison and Carroll (1991) state that ‘individuals leave organizations for a wide variety of reasons, including better jobs, dissatisfaction, and family concerns’ (Harrison and Carroll 1991: 560). Councillors who think the reforms (will) have a negative effect on the realization of their personal objectives will have a stronger inclination to resign than actors who have a more positive attitude towards the reform (cf. Chatman 1991; Cooper-Thomas et al. 2004: 55; Denton 1999; Schneider 1987). An important element in this argument is the expectation that one will be able to do a satisfactory job. Councillors who think that the council reforms have negatively affected their capacity to do their work properly will be less inclined to stand for re-election, than colleagues who have a more positive evaluation of the reforms. At the same time, councillors who were unable or unwilling to adjust their attitudes and behavioral strategies in line with the reforms are pressured by relevant others (e.g. party members, the party chair) to leave the council (cf. Harrison and Carroll 1991: 560; cf. Schein 2000 (1999): 23). Both arguments imply a clash of opinions. In the first case there is an incongruity between the councillor’s personal normative role conception (ideas about what he ought to do) and his actual role performance. In the second case the relevant incongruity is between the normative role expectations (what should a councillor do?) of relevant others and their perceptions of the councillor’s role behavior. In both cases, however, the effect is that councillors who are satisfied with their job under the new regime and who – in the eyes of others – do a good job as a councillor are more likely to stand for re-election than councillors who are dissatisfied and who are considered to dysfunction.

The idea of being able to do a proper job (or to act in conformity with one’s personal normative role conception – in the jargon of role theory) may be seen as the nucleus of one’s professional identity. Loss of identity or the apprehension of such a loss may be an important factor for people’s decision to retire (Schein 2000(1999)).

In the literature such normative role expectations in the environment of the organization member have also been referred to as the ‘management ideal’ (Harrison and Carroll 1991; Wanous 1980).

In both situations the final decision whether or not to retire rests with the councillor/councillor. The two situations, however, differ because the locus of the initiative for the decision (not to run) differs. In
Selective recruitment
The other side of the recruitment process concerns the selection of new members. Here the recruiters typically want to select candidates whose profile matches the organization’s desired or current culture (Cable and Judge 1996; Cable and Judge 1997: 546; Cable and Parsons 2001; Chatman 1989, 1991). Again the degree of congruity (P-O fit) is crucially important. Through careful search and selection, role incongruities can be minimized (Harisson and Carroll 1991: 554).

This matching process has two sides: attraction of job seekers and selection by the organization (cf. Wanous 1980). Attraction entails the self-selection of people based on person-organization fit (Cable and Judge 1996). ‘People actively search for and choose an organization to join’ (Chatman 1989: 344). The first step in the process here is made by potential candidates. On the basis of personal motives (based on expectation about remuneration, prestige, job satisfaction and other ‘rewards of office’) people decide to apply or not. It is only after this that the selection commission can make its decision. In this context the role of such personal criteria is very important for the outcome (Wanous 1980: 10). Potential candidates will try to form expectations about the chances that they will be able to realize their personal objectives in the new position. An important element in this assessment is the degree to which aspiring councillors on the basis of their personal standards (normative role conception) expect to be able to do a proper job. Therefore, aspiring councillors will have an incentive to inform themselves properly about what this new job is about. At the same time the selectors and the municipality have an interest in supplying adequate information about the membership of the council, and the implication of the new legislation for the performance of this job (cf. Chatman 1991: 481).

The other side of the matching process is selection by the organization. Recruiters use the P-O fit to select new members (Cable and Judge 1997). New recruits with already similar values and a close fit to the organization are more likely to show the desired behavior (Chatman 1989: 334, 344; Schneider 1987). On the basis of a set of pre-established criteria the selector approaches candidates who are likely
(or are already known) to meet these criteria. The invited candidates then have to decide whether or not they want to apply (and if selected whether or not they actually want to accept the position). This perspective is organization-centered, because it starts with the organization’s desire to minimize incongruities in order to improve job performance (Wanous 1980: 10). In the context of our research, municipalities, councils or political parties could look for new councillors by using a revised and up-to-date recruitment profile. The aim is to recruit new local councillors who – in the eye of the selectors – will be able to do a proper job under the new institutional conditions.

The implication of this is that in the process of recruiting new councillors, both the selectors and the candidates will try to make an assessment of the chances that the aspiring new council members will be able to perform adequately under the new legislative regime. Hence, the recruitment process is likely to be selective in the sense that councillors who think (or are thought) to be able to do a satisfactory job under the new legislative regime (viz. the LGA 2002) are more likely to be selected than other candidates (cf. Oldham and Hackman 1981: 66-67, 78).

3. **Methods**

This research uses repeated surveys in order to measure the effects of the new Local Government Act which was implemented in 2002. In 1999 there was a pre-measurement ($T_0$), in 2007 a post-measurement ($T_1$). A two-staged sample was used: all councillors in 150 municipalities received a mail-questionnaire.

In 1998 a Royal Commission was established with the assignment to advise the government on which new institutional structure should be implemented in local government. On behalf of the Commission, the research bureau of the Dutch Associations of Municipalities conducted a survey of councillors in Dutch municipalities. These data are used as a pre-measurement of the 2002 institutional reform in Dutch local government. In 2007 the University of Twente conducted a second survey (post measurement) using the same sample and methods as in 1999.

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9 The Dutch Association of Municipalities and The Ministry of Home Affairs have developed a Recruitment *Profile of Councillors* that local parties could use as a basis to revise their criteria for selecting their party’s candidates for the council elections after the introduction of the new legal regime.
Because of the fact that cultural change needs time, 2007 is a good year to look for effects, also, because it is one year after the municipal elections.\textsuperscript{10}

The data in 1999 and 2007 were collected by means of mail-questionnaires. The questionnaires (almost) exclusively consisted of closed questions. For both surveys respondents received an advance letter, informing the respondents about the aims of the survey. This letter also listed the support of important official organizations for the survey; in 2007 for example both the Association of Dutch Local Councillors and the national organization of Council Clerks incited the councillors to complete the questionnaire. The survey was also announced on the websites of these organizations. A few weeks after sending out the questionnaire non-respondents received a reminder, emphasizing the importance of their co-operation.

In 1999 the Royal Commission Elzinga conducted a survey in 150 municipalities in the Netherlands. The decision to study a sample rather than the entire population was made for practical reasons (mainly cost-related). The data file IRIS, administered by the VNG, formed the basis for the random sample of 1999. This file is used, among other things, for the mailing of the VNG magazine. It is a complete and up to date file, containing home addresses of all the respondents. SGBO chose the municipalities as follows. Municipalities were selected from a numbered list (with all 538 municipalities ordered on the basis of population size) through a systematic sampling procedure where every fourth municipality was selected in the sample, beginning with a randomly selected starting number between 1 and 9).\textsuperscript{11} This sampling procedure guaranteed representativeness in terms of population size. Moreover the sample size of 150 also guaranteed representativeness in terms of an adequate representation of the sample in other respects, e.g. regional location. The 1999 research had a response\textsuperscript{12} of 61%.

In the 2007 survey we used the same sample as in 1999, in order to allow for adequate comparisons with the 1999 survey. Due to amalgamations, however, some of the municipalities in the 1999 sample were abolished and ‘new’ municipalities were formed. As a consequence the 2007 sample contains 143 municipalities. In 2007

\textsuperscript{10} The 2007 survey is conducted as part of an international survey of local councillors in which 14 European countries participate: Italy, Norway, the Netherlands, Germany, Spain, Switzerland, Sweden, United Kingdom, France, Belgium, Greece, Portugal, Poland and Finland. This research is a follow up of the European mayor study.

\textsuperscript{11} Municipalities that were involved in recent amalgamations were excluded from the list.

\textsuperscript{12} The 1999 respondents form a good representation in terms of municipal size and political parties (Staatscommissie Dualisering 2000).
we again used a mail questionnaire, which was send to all the councillors. The 2007 research had a response of 41%.

4. Results: changing role orientations?

The Dutch reforms were aimed at increasing the responsiveness and the accountability of local governments. The new legislation and the accompanying Innovation Program were aimed at strengthening the role of councillors as representatives and scrutinizers. In order to see how the reforms have affected relevant role orientations of Dutch councillors we have used four indicators. Two of these indicators refer to how councillors value activities aimed at securing their responsiveness to citizens. In our view responsiveness implies:

- the extent to which councillors undertake activities to listen to the citizens in order to get an insight in their demands, preferences and needs, and
- the extent to which they explain and justify the policy decisions to the citizens.

(cf. Pitkin 1967; Van der Kolk 1997)

On the basis of this definition it is obvious that responsiveness requires on the one hand that councillors are accessible and willing to listen carefully to citizens and local organizations. On the other hand responsiveness also implies that councillors make continuous efforts to explain and justify themselves in public.

13 Unlike 1999 we had to rely on municipal addresses instead of home addresses. In order to guarantee a reliable respondent list from the VNG: their list was checked twice (two months prior and again a few weeks before sending the questionnaire) and also corrected by looking at municipal websites for updates on the composition of the council.
14 The 2007 respondents form a good representation in terms of municipal size, political parties, regions, age and gender.
15 1999: How important is it for you as a councillor to represent the citizens in your municipality (a.o. ombudsman function)? (scale 1-4: not very important – very important)
2007: How important is it for you as a councillor to represent the issues and demands that are of interest to the citizens? (scale 0-4: not important – very important)
Notice, that the question wording and the range of the scale are somewhat different between 1999 and 2007. We assume that the gist of the items is similar enough to warrant a comparison over time. Since the lowest score in 2007 (0) is never chosen we decided to ignore the scale difference.
16 1999: Having contacts with citizens, local organizations and party supporters (members, sympathizers), how important is it to explain or justify council decisions? (scale 1-4: not very important – very important)
2007: How important is it for you as a councillor to explain decisions of the council to the citizens? (scale 0-4: not important – very important). Again the question wording and the range of the scale are somewhat different between 1999 and 2007. We again assume that the gist of the items is similar enough to warrant a comparison over time. Since the lowest score in 2007 (0) is chosen only once we decided to ignore the scale difference.
Accountability refers to the relation of the council and the executive (see figure 1) and is defined as:

- the extent to which councillors undertake activities to formulate general principles and guidelines and make them known to the board in order to steer the board and
- the extent to which they control and scrutinize the behavior of members of the local executive (both the political executive and its bureaucratic apparatus).

(cf. Lupia 2003: 35)

In order to secure such accountability it is first important that the council develops the main criteria and guidelines that the political executive and the local administrative apparatus should observe. Councillors should value this as an important aspect of their role. Such criteria and guidelines, subsequently, provide councillors with a framework for holding the political executive to account. Therefore, it is also important that councillors conceive of scrutiny as an important aspect of their role.

The results will be discussed as follows. First we describe different types of local councillors, based on organizational tenure. Then we look at the attitudinal change in general. This change is the result of both the socialization mechanism, and the exit and selective recruitment mechanism. Since, these mechanisms are difficult to separate we focus first on socialization (by tenure) by comparing cohorts.

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17 1999: How important is it for you as a councillor to determine regulation, policy plans, and budgets? (scale 1-4: not very important – very important)
We use three indicators since in 1999 the concept that combines these three elements did not yet exist. After 2002 these specific elements were combined in the Dutch phrase ‘kaderstellen’ (formulating general principles and guidelines to steer the board).
2007: How important is it for you as a councillor to define the main goals of the municipal activity? (scale 0-4: not important – very important). Again the question wording and the range of the scale are somewhat different between 1999 and 2007. We again assume that the gist of the items is similar enough to warrant a comparison over time. Since the lowest score in 2007 (0) is never chosen we decided to ignore the scale difference.

18 1999: How important is it for you as a councillor to control for a good execution of decisions taken? (scale 1-4: not very important – very important)
2007: How important is it for you as a councillor to control the municipal activity? (scale 0-4: not important – very important). Again the question wording and the range of the scale are somewhat different between 1999 and 2007. We again assume that the gist of the items is similar enough to warrant a comparison over time. Since the lowest score in 2007 (0) is never chosen we decided to ignore the scale difference.
4.1 Different types of local councillors

For our analysis of attitudinal change it will be useful to distinguish between three types of local councillors based on their organizational tenure. Those who are new in the council (freshmen, newly elected in the most recent municipal election), those who served for a maximum of one term (for the respondents in the 2007 survey, this implies that they had no experience under the pre-LGA 2002 regime), and those who have been a local councillor five or more years (for the respondents in the 2007 survey, this implies that they also experienced the pre-LGA 2002 regime). The experience of the councillor is measured by the question ‘for how long have you been a local councillor (in total)?’

Local councillors in 2007 spend on average 6.15 years in the council (N = 1172). This is not different from the average amount of time spent in the council in 1999 (6.11 years; N = 1475). The majority of local councillors in 2007 started their job after the introduction of the LGA 2002 (61.3%). Table 2 shows the representation of different types of councillors. The 2007 percentages are compared to the 1999 distribution. The figures are rather similar. This is an important finding, which neither confirms fears that the council reforms would make the job of a councillor less attractive (leading to an exodus of experienced members), nor does it bear out the high hopes of some reformers that – on the contrary – the reforms would make the job of the councillor more interesting and perhaps less time-consuming (resulting in fewer dropouts and longer tenure).

Table 2: Number of years experience as a local councillor in percentages

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Council experience</th>
<th>1999 (%)</th>
<th>2007 (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cohort I: 1 year</td>
<td>35,3</td>
<td>34,1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cohort II: 1-5 years</td>
<td>28,4</td>
<td>27,3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cohort III: &gt; 5 years</td>
<td>36,3</td>
<td>38,6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4.2 Attitudinal change at level of individual councillors

Comparing the attitudes in 1999 and 2007 first of all indicates that councillors consider both representation and securing accountability as important tasks. All scores are in the range between 3.00 and 4.00 (either important or very important). These similarities notwithstanding, we can make two important observations. First,
considering activities of responsiveness and accountability, there is a shift towards accountability activities. This becomes especially clear by looking at the ranking figures: in 1999 responsiveness activities are perceived as more important than accountability activities, in 2007 this pattern is reversed. Second, this change is not so much the result of a decrease in importance of responsiveness activities (2007 scores not deviating much from the previous scores), but more the effect of an increasing saliency of accountability activities.

Table 3: Comparing attitudes 1999 and 2007

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Attitude towards activity</th>
<th>1999</th>
<th>2007</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>x (sd)</td>
<td>ranking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Responsiveness</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘representing’</td>
<td>3.26 (0.78)</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘explaining’</td>
<td>3.12 (0.72)</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accountability</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘defining main goals’</td>
<td>3.06 (0.74)</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘controlling’</td>
<td>3.09 (0.76)</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Scale: 0 - 4 (not important to very important)

Third, it is also remarkable that the increase in saliency is selective: in comparison to 1999 the accountability activities have grown in importance, whereas there was no similar change in the subjective importance of responsiveness activities. This asymmetry does not reflect the dual normative case for the reforms that emphasized the importance of both concerns. Apparently local actors have prioritized the accountability goals of the reforms.\(^\text{19}\)

The question that now rises is how to explain this pattern change? In the first part of this paper we discussed two possible explanations: the socialization mechanism, and the exit and recruitment mechanism. To what extent do these mechanisms explain the observed attitudinal changes? The next section tries to answer this question. First we look into the socialization mechanism.

\(^{19}\)This also reflects the fact that most measures in the reform package (see Table 1) were targeted at an improvement of the position of the council vis-à-vis the BMA and not to the external orientation of the council in its relation to the citizenry.
4.3 Change mechanisms

If only the socialization mechanism would be responsible for the change that we observed in the previous section, we would expect that for the 2007 respondents the importance attached to responsiveness and accountability would co-vary with organizational tenure. Based on socialization theory we would expect that the reform values (accountability and responsiveness) would be most effectively inculcated in cohort II -- councillors with one term experience, under the new legal regime. The freshmen (cohort I) have yet to be fully socialized, whereas in cohort III, the socialization process may be less effective because it has to undo the results of previous socialization under the old legislative regime. This would imply a curvilinear relationship between tenure and value change. In order to see if our expectation is right we compare the three previously distinguished tenure cohorts (Table 4).

Table 4: 2007 socialization mechanism

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Attitude towards activity</th>
<th>Cohort I: 1 year: x (sd)</th>
<th>Cohort II 1-5 years: x (sd)</th>
<th>Cohort III &gt;5 years: x (sd)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>‘representing’</td>
<td>3,26 (.698)</td>
<td>3,19 (.753)</td>
<td>3,26 (.735)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘explaining’</td>
<td>3,02 (.767)</td>
<td>3,06 (.784)</td>
<td>3,03 (.812)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘defining main goals’</td>
<td>3,54 (.624)</td>
<td>3,61 (.577)</td>
<td>3,63 (.555)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘controlling’</td>
<td>3,38 (.629)</td>
<td>3,36 (.686)</td>
<td>3,34 (.685)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4 shows that there is no (real) and consistent differences between the three cohorts: the tenure hypothesis based on socialization theory is not corroborated. This result can be explained in a number of ways. First, the socialization mechanism may have been ineffective. Given the body of evidence in support of the impact of organizational socialization this is not a very plausible option. An alternative explanation is that results of organizational socialization have been attenuated by the recruitment mechanism. As a result of the recruitment process (as a combination of self-selection and selection by recruiters) all three cohorts of councillors elected in the 2006 elections -- irrespective of their socialization history -- had a similar attitudinal

20 The resource-based-perspective would imply a different pattern in which cohort III would endorse the reform values even more strongly than cohort II. Previously we have argued, however, that we think the curvilinear pattern is more plausible.
profile. In order to probe this option we have subsequently tried to isolate a recruitment effect. Isolating a possible recruitment effect is most realizable when we compare new recruits in 2007 with their equals in 1999.\textsuperscript{21} We expect to see an increase in importance of responsiveness and accountability activities since the 2007 recruits are selected and attracted by use of a different profile: one that supports the LGA2002 and the ideas behind it.\textsuperscript{22}

Table 5: New councillors (Cohort I: 1 year experience) 1999 compared to 2007

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Attitude towards activity</th>
<th>1999: x (sd)</th>
<th>2007: x (sd)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>‘representing’</td>
<td>3.28 (.828)</td>
<td>3.26 (.698)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘explaining’</td>
<td>3.08 (.757)</td>
<td>3.02 (.767)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘defining main goals’</td>
<td>3.05 (.530)</td>
<td>3.54 (.624)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘controlling’</td>
<td>3.09 (.768)</td>
<td>3.38 (.629)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5 shows that for the freshmen there is an increase in importance for accountability activities. This confirms the hypothesis of a substantial recruitment effect in the case of the accountability activities. Further confirmation is provided by the fact that when we compare the changes (from 1999 to 2007) in cohort II and III we find rather similar differences. This suggests that all three cohorts on the eve of the 2006 elections went through a rather similar screen, a sieve that was different from the selection process in 1999; a selection process in which especially the accountability values were more heavily emphasized than before.\textsuperscript{23} Hence, there is a recruitment effect, one that explains the general change in attitude discussed in section 4.2. This brings forth the conclusion that socialization might have an influence, but always in combination with recruitment. Apparently recruitment has an equalizing effect on socialization. Of course there might be alternative explanations.

\textsuperscript{21} After all, neither of these groups have been subjected to a lengthy socialization process in the organisation.

\textsuperscript{22} As we saw before the patterns of change differ for the responsiveness and the accountability components.

\textsuperscript{23} There is a third alternative, that of the 2002 council reforms and its supporting rhetoric have gone hand in hand with a swing in the public opinion climate. From this angle the reform rhetoric – emphasising accountability and responsiveness as desirable outcomes – either through genuine attitudinal change amongst councillors or through effects of social desirability may have brought about an exogenous change in councillor attitudes. We cannot rule out this alternative hypothesis, although it is hard to explain why – especially in the aftermath of the Fortuyn revolution – in this interpretation accountability values would change whereas the importance to responsiveness values would remain much the same as before.
for our findings. One would be to say that the findings are the result of the general opinion of this time (spirit of the time) or the result of social desirability. Explanations like these cannot be ruled out.

5. Conclusions

In this paper we aimed at establishing and explaining the attitudinal effects of a Dutch reform to strengthen the councillor as a representative and a scrutinizer. The Local Government Act 2002 was supposed to improve the responsiveness and accountability of the municipal council. This paper focused on the attitude of individual councillors towards responsiveness and accountability activities. This study’s results show that the reforms have resulted in a change in councillor role orientations. We have shown first of all that in line with the reform’s objectives councillors consider their scrutiny activities substantially more important than before the reforms. With regard to the representation function, however, we did not find evidence for similar changes. The reforms therefore appear to have been mainly successful in strengthening the council’s focus on its control and scrutiny functions. Moreover, we have also shown that this attitudinal change is likely to be largely a recruitment effect. Although socialization may is also important, the process of selection and self-selection, provides a mechanism that guarantees that only the councillors who are best adapted to the new council system “survive”. Hence, by selecting and attracting a specific type of councillor, one who fits the profile of a councillor working under the LGA2002, the attitude towards accountability activities (formulating mains goals of the municipal activity and controlling the board) is improved. In the next stage of our research we will also investigate the behavioural effects of the reforms for both councillors and councils.
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