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The thesis of the German sociologist Ulrich Beck that politics is often displaced from traditional institutions that promote democratic politics to several other spheres of social life has gained special recognition in the study of technological innovation. A case study about the introduction and supervision of a flexible public transport system shows that „displacements” of decision making are an inherent trait of innovation. The question addressed in this article is how these politics of displacements can be evaluated and on what ground such an evaluation could take place. Two different perspectives on technology and democracy are presented and a framework is proposed that integrates elements of both. An assessment of evaluation criteria shows that three principles should be foregrounded: representative participation, empowerment, and impact. Provided that relations of power and accountability between different settings are adequately taken into account these criteria suffice for a proper evaluation. A democratic evaluation of the case is conducted based on these criteria and conditions.

Keywords: innovation, displaced politics, democracy, public transport

Introduction

The deeply ambivalent relationship between democracy and technology is one of the central themes in science and technology studies of the last decades. While
science and technology have helped to improve standards of living and seem to make the world more transparent, they also challenge the common meaning of (democratic) politics (Nahuis and Van Lente, 2008; Salomon, 2000). Phrases like „science is the continuation of politics by other means“ (Latour, 1987) and „the politics of artefacts“ (Winner, 1980) clearly locate politics beyond formal institutions for democratic politics. In his study of the risk society the German sociologist Ulrich Beck (1991, 1996) highlights a proliferation of decentralized locations of „subpolitics“: the economy, labour unions, media, science, industry, the private realm, courts, and social movements. Rather than by laws of parliament or decisions by the executive branch, the future is shaped by incidental, thematic coalitions and oppositions at these locations. Politics is being displaced from democratically legitimated institutions to several other spheres of social life. This thesis has gained special recognition in science and technology studies, where the relation between knowledge and power has been of key interest for a long time (Garrety and Badham, 2004; Gjøen and Hård, 2002; Pfaffenberger, 1992; Summerton, 2004).

In this paper I contrast two different perspectives on technology and democracy, a proceduralist and a performative perspective, after raising a number of specific points in question in a case study. The case study shows that „displacements“ of decision making are an inherent trait of technological innovation. That does not automatically imply an undemocratic qualification of this decision making process. The point is that, in order to look for more democratic innovation processes, we should try to understand the democratic merits and
deficits of displacements, for example when elected governments formulate policies and mandates and delegate authority, when societal organizations deliberate with civil servants, or when users vote with their feet. A more nuanced evaluation framework is required to explain whether displaced politics is democratic or not.

The case study deals with decision making about the introduction and development of a flexible public transport system in and around the town of Hoogeveen (in the Netherlands). The data used for the case study are derived from archival records, policy documents, evaluation reports, and minutes of meetings. Archives of newspaper articles were effective starting points, because popular media often focused on innovations in public transport. The snowball method was used to interpret the content of meetings, policy documents, project proposals, and other primary sources. For scrutiny of settings this study made use of thought experiments by asking: what are in this particular setting the access conditions, the attributes, and the audience?¹

This study serves to show that innovation in a public transport service can be considered as a political process characterized by displacements. Decision making takes place in a number of different, but coupled settings. When decision making power about a particular issue shifts from one setting to another, we may speak of displaced politics. The question addressed in this article is how these displacements can be evaluated and on what ground such an evaluation could take place. I discuss a

¹ A full account of this case study can be found in Nahuis (2007 and forthcoming). Due to restrictions on the length of this article, one particular episode is selected to set the stage for a comparison of the two perspectives that are contrasted here.
proceduralist and a performative perspective on answering this question and conclude that an appropriate framework should integrate elements emphasized by both perspectives. The framework will then be employed for the evaluation of the case.

**The Case of a Flexible Public Transport System**

The politics of the Netherlands take place within the framework of a parliamentary representative democracy, with about four larger and various smaller political parties. It is a decentralized unitary state. Most political parties are national and have sub-national branches. The first-level sub-national divisions of the state are the twelve provinces, each governed by a locally elected provincial council, called the States Provincial. The States Provincial elects a provincial commission charged with executive power, called the Deputed States. The second-level divisions are the similarly governed municipalities.

Apart from the train system, decision making about public transport has been decentralized to the local (major cities) and the provincial level (towns and regions). Historically, public transport policy in the Netherlands is justified by two major public interests: (i) reliable connections in densely populated areas to stimulate economic activity and (ii) a minimum service level to guarantee accessibility of hospitals and other public services (see Ministry of Transport, 2004). Public transport has been put out for competitive bid since the end of the twentieth century. And such public interests are usually incorporated into the programs of requirements (proposal evaluation criteria).
This is the context in which, in 1999, a former civil servant and his American companion negotiated with States Deputed of Drenthe, a province in the northern part of the Netherlands, a contract to provide a transport service with small buses for elderly and disabled in the town of Hoogeveen. Those days transport company Arriva provided regular public bus transport within the town, as it did in and between nearly all regions in the north. In addition, a railway operated by the Dutch Railways connects the town to the cities of Groningen and Zwolle. The transport system which the two entrepreneurs initially had in mind was supposed to serve the „bottom of the market“, thus complementing regular public transport. They proposed a quite innovative service concept for a number of reasons: in proportion with the town size and target group, the buses were just large enough to transport eight passengers; instead of at designated bus stops, the buses stopped for anyone on the route who raised his hand; it was even possible to pick up (disabled) people from their homes if that would not disrupt the time schedule; and panels of users determined the principle routes, time schedules, and tariffs (Schlingmann, 2002). These features amounted to a highly flexible and demand-driven system which was very attractive for small towns. States Deputed of Drenthe decided to start the experiment in Hoogeveen and the two entrepreneurs founded a company called Millennium Transport International (MTI). After a successful initial period, States Deputed decided in 2001 to scale up the experiment and to grant MTI a contract to provide a regular public transport service in and between the towns of Hoogeveen and Meppel (InterHoMe region).
Table 1 presents the set of stakeholders and their interests in the project. Most, but not all, of these stakeholders were represented in the Development Group Southwest Drenthe, which was founded and chaired by the provincial officials to supervise the project. This group, and the circumstances in which it met, is the first setting that is discussed in this case study. It is important to note here that the Development Group worked with a mandate from States Deputed and that States Deputed was obliged to inform the elected members of States Provincial about the performance of MTI, especially when a contract extension would be considered.

**Development Group Southwest Drenthe**

MTI wanted to provide regular public transport in and between Hoogeveen and Meppel and this ambition was to be realized in conjunction with the interests of other stakeholders in the Development Group. The group held bi-weekly meetings starting in May 2001. Participants were provincial officials (who chaired the Development Group) and the municipalities in the region, as well as someone from traveller organization ROVER, who represented the Consumer Platform. Furthermore, the participation of both Arriva and MTI reflected constructive intentions: the group could directly allocate tasks to those actually serving the region.

After a relatively cooperative and constructive initial phase until about halfway through the MTI service contract period of three years, the case started to become controversial when the agenda of the group included a number of small issues that were not adequately taken up. MTI postponed or did not execute its tasks and over
Table 1. Stakeholders and their interests in the MTI project

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stakeholder</th>
<th>Interests</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Inhabitants and users</td>
<td>For whom the service is meant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>States Provincial</td>
<td>The provincial parliament that has the right to be informed by States Deputed and has power to fire deputies. Members of States Provincial are members of political parties and elected by the inhabitants of Drenthe.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>States Deputed</td>
<td>The executive board in charge of the provincial administration and responsible for public transport. Deputies are elected and controlled by States Provincial. The composition of the States Deputed is usually the result of negotiations between political parties.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provincial officials</td>
<td>Employees of the provincial administration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Municipalities of Meppel and Hoogeveen</td>
<td>Officials of local administrations, indirectly representing the inhabitants of Meppel and Hoogeveen and taking care of local traffic policy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MTI</td>
<td>Transport company, initiator of the project</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arriva</td>
<td>Multinational transport company, providing nearly all public transport in the northern part of the country</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consumer platform</td>
<td>Meeting of fifteen societal organizations active in Drenthe, obligatory passage point for major public transport decisions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Traveller organization ROVER</td>
<td>National lobby group for good public transport, with local branches</td>
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time the list grew and turned into an issue itself. Provincial officials presented a document to the Development Group, which summarized thirty-eight insufficiently executed tasks documented during the last five meetings, most of them attributed to MTI and related to travel information and communication.

It was unclear whether there would be adequate follow up since the director of MTI often excused himself from meetings of the Development Group. The document reports that he was late once, replaced by subordinates twice, and just absent from the last meeting. The conclusion of the document clearly reflected the group’s annoyance:

Unfortunately, MTI time and again shows its unprofessional side in spite of guidance by the province. There is a number of reasons, like a lack of experience in public transport, the small board of MTI, the many miscommunications within the company, and the non-attendance of meetings. There is a strong hierarchy at MTI, where the top decides what happens. The other parties in the development group unanimously find MTI unprofessional and there is explicit doubt whether MTI is capable of operating public transport services at all. (Development Group, 2003, translation by Roel Nahuis)

The initial support for MTI thus transformed into opposition around the question whether MTI was competent to deliver the contracted services.

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2 The overview was sent to members of the Development Group as an appendix to the minutes of the previous meeting.
Private Meeting between the Provincial Deputy and MTI Board

Continuation of the MTI project was both a concern for MTI and for the deputy and officials of the province, who had committed themselves to the project. If MTI were to survive in the next tender invitation then the issue needed to displace to another setting where MTI could be given a second chance. This displacement came about when the deputy of the province, who was in charge of the officials representing the province in the Development Group, invited MTI for a private meeting. In this „clarifying conversation“ the deputy of the province urged the board of MTI to work on an action list.

In effect, this displacement marked the beginning of rehabilitation. Firstly, the action list, an initiative of provincial officials, already reduced the variety of issues to one single issue: MTI’s capability to operate a public transport system. Secondly, in the conversation the two parties made arrangements about this most urgent issue without interferences and irritations of the other actors. As a result, the action list returned on the agenda of subsequent meetings of the Development Group and MTI addressed the concerns and reported task by task about the state of affairs. In this refreshed atmosphere the Development Group did not raise new issues and the most controversial ones gradually disappeared from the agenda.

Project Evaluation

A second step towards rehabilitation of MTI and eventual support from States Provincial was a
displacement of the issue to the office of a consultancy company. The deputy had commissioned this consultant to perform a project evaluation. In the Process Evaluation Experiment InterHoMe report (Diepens and Okkema, 2003), the consultancy company did not hold MTI primarily accountable for the current conflicts and tensions. Rather than evaluating MTI’s performance the evaluation aimed at lessons for the province regarding forthcoming tenders. The evaluators mentioned a lot of problems, miscommunications and ignorance, but they only drew conclusions about how provincial officials should have prevented or solved these problems. For example, they ascribed the growing action list to a lack of steering by the province:

In the implementation phase the province insufficiently controls the execution of arrangements between Arriva and MTI […] and MTI gets too much freedom in (not) living up to appointments. (Diepens and Okkema, 2003, translation by Roel Nahuis)

The Project Evaluation concluded that the project was indeed innovative and feasible and would have been better managed if provincial officials had played a more leading part. This focus on policy lessons offered valuable input for the new tender invitation, but it also neutralized the annoyance and “excused” MTI for its failings.

States Provincial

When the first contract was expiring, Deputed States of the province prepared a new tender invitation. It
wanted to continue with MTI and should have informed States Provincial about MTI’s doubtful capability to operate a public transport system. However, in the Committee on Spatial planning, Infrastructure and Mobility (SIM) – a committee composed of members of States Provincial and the deputy, who prepares debates in States Provincial – the deputy expressed his belief that public transport in rural areas could benefit from experiments like these. The deputy also defended a tender invitation that clearly favoured MTI. Deputed States had invited three transport companies to compete for the contract, but the program of requirements largely reinforced the existing situation: the winner should drive the same lines with the same time schedules and the same kind of equipment as MTI had been doing for the last two years. The program even required the absence of regular bus stops (except for unsafe locations), which was one of the specific features of the MTI concept. Moreover, the contract would just last for one and half years, because Drenthe and its southern neighbour Overijssel had already agreed to invite tenders for an extended region around July 2005. This short period was of little attraction to newcomers. Because the requirements obviously favoured MTI, the company indeed appeared to have made the most economic tender and was selected on that ground. Members of States Provincial, neither those participating in the committee SIM nor those in the audience of this decision making process, objected to the procedure and the outcome. The reason for this is their lack of empowerment. Due to the „clarifying conversation“ and its effects in the Development Group and the neutralizing evaluation report, members of States Provincial were just ignorant.
about the doubts concerning the capability of MTI to provide public transport.

The Politics of Displacements and the Question of Democracy

Before drawing conclusions about the democratic quality of decision making in this case I would like to emphasize the starting points for developing an evaluation framework. First, the case shows that decision making about innovation has a clear political dimension which begs for democratic evaluation, especially in the public sector. Various stakeholders are involved. The inhabitants of the province, who regularly or incidentally make use of public transport, have demands to be served. Societal organizations represent these interests. The province also looks after these interests, while being the main funder of the transport service. Local authorities have more specific interests related to travel demand and local policies in their municipality. MTI hopes to make a profit. And transport company Arriva serves other parts of the region, having an interest in good connections. Aligning these interests is clearly a political issue, which ought to take place in a democratic way given the political culture in the Netherlands on matters of public transport and the central role of the province in this case.

Second, the case runs through a number of different settings: the Development Group, a private meeting between the provincial deputy and MTI, an evaluation, and States Provincial. These settings are quite different in their characteristics. The composition of participants varies from broad to narrow, audiences play different parts or are excluded, the focal issue is the transport plan
in one setting, and the organization of supervision in another, and the role of mandates to attribute legitimacy to authority varies across settings. An evaluation thus has to take into account how the characteristics of particular settings affect the overall decision making process.

Third, settings are nevertheless not institutionally separated. The private meeting is composed of actors participating in the Development Group, the evaluation is commissioned by States Provincial, and the Development Group works with a mandate from States Provincial. These settings are linked via chains of accountability, for instance by the fact that the audience in one setting is the gatekeeper of another. For an evaluation it is important to study these relations between settings. The concept of displacements will be further elaborated for this purpose.

Fourth, a case in public transport is interesting for analytical purposes. Public transport in the Netherlands is an empirical field where democratic legitimizations of decisions have always been very important since most transport companies were deprivatized in the first half of the twentieth century (Groenendijk, 1998). The case presented here, which occurred in the context of wider debates about re-privatization and liberalization at the end of the twentieth century, raised concerns about democratic quality and called for additional forms of control, of which the Development Group is an example. The fact that such debates surrounded the case enables learning about the democratic implications of displacements.
Perspectives on Technology and Democracy

From what perspective could lessons about the democratization of displacements be learned? In a review of science and technology studies (STS) on the relevance of the notion of displaced politics for technological innovation, Nahuis and Van Lente (2008) have distinguished five different perspectives on technology and democracy. First, an "intentionalist" perspective emphasizes how designers are politically active when they materialize particular values and norms in the technical content of artefacts. The second perspective is more focused on the process than the outcomes and is based on the criticism that mutual dependencies, interactions and contingencies are easily dismissed in the first. Social constructivist approaches to technology development, on which the "proceduralist" perspective is based, rather look for politics in settings and procedures where mutually dependent social groups interact. Another response to the first perspective is actor-network theory. An "actor-network" perspective also emphasizes the importance of interactions and network formation in the development of technology, but extrapolates these mechanisms to explain the emergence of hegemony in general. A fourth, "interpretivist" perspective is based on the reflexive turn in STS. Self-application of insights about the dynamics of scientific development inspired the exploration of the role of ambiguity, rhetoric and network formation in analytical and evaluative accounts themselves. A last, "performative" perspective builds on insights from actor-network theory, but specifically highlights the constraining and enabling conditions of settings. In contrast to the proceduralist perspective, this perspective emphasizes the need for relative evaluation.
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criteria, like the potential to surprise and engage new audiences.

Due to their focus on the role of settings the proceduralist and the performative perspectives are particularly promising for our purposes. We want to contrast these perspectives as a source of inspiration for constructing a framework for democratic evaluation of the politics of displacements.

The Proceduralist Perspective

The key question from the proceduralist perspective reads: how to intervene (democratically) at the right places and the right moments? It does not focus on design criteria of any new technology, but on procedures for involvement in the decision making process. It defines democracy in terms of participation, deliberation and consensus seeking (Bijker, 1997, 1999; Hamlett, 2003; Sclove, 1995). Strong arguments for the democratization of technology development have been made on the basis of claims that there is no a priori distinction between experts and lay people from a social constructivist point of view. Everybody is expert in some aspects and lay in others; expertness is a negotiated attribution. When relevant social groups (including citizens, organizations, architects and engineers) participate in committees, advice groups and vote sessions, then this should principally be on an equal basis and the outcomes should be the result of shared responsibility (Bijker, 1997). In this tradition, several authors have proposed criteria for evaluating whether individuals with diverse or opposing values and preferences can reach an aggregated, reasoned, informed,
consensual judgment when they get a fair opportunity to discuss controversial issues (Hamlett, 2003; Rowe and Frewer, 2000; Rowe, Marsh, and Frewer, 2004). Table 2 presents these criteria, which define a democratic process, particularly when applied to political innovations like consensus conferences and dialogue workshops. Democracy, in this perspective, is understood as a deliberative practice with strong, direct participation (Barber, 1984). By sharing preferences and interests among participants, mutually listening and proposing solutions, it is assumed that partial and private interests aggregate into solutions that are acceptable to everyone (Bijker, 1997; Hamlett, 2003; Sclove, 1995; Zimmerman, 1995). As Hamlett states: “The expectation is that the participants will find their ideas, preconceptions, and eventually their preferences changed and molded by the experience, rather than engaging only in various bargaining or advantage-seeking tactics to secure unchanged goals” (p. 122).

What can the understanding and evaluation of displacements in the politics of technology gain from the proceduralist perspective? The perspective points to the conditional role of settings and procedures and offers a coherent set of criteria for evaluation of deliberative practices such as consensus conferences and dialogue workshops. They have been applied to relatively well-organized and proceduralized settings (Rowe and Frewer, 2000, 2004; Rowe, Marsh, and Frewer, 2004).
Table 2. Democratic evaluation criteria for innovation processes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Criteria</th>
<th>Definition</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Acceptance Criteria</strong></td>
<td>The participants should comprise a broadly representative sample of the affected population.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Representativeness</strong></td>
<td>The participation process should be conducted in an independent (unbiased) way.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Independence</strong></td>
<td>The participants should be involved as early as possible in the process, as soon as value judgments become salient.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Early Involvement</strong></td>
<td>The output of the procedure should have a genuine impact on policy.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Influence</strong></td>
<td>The process should be transparent so that the relevant population can see what is going on and how decisions are being made.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Transparency</strong></td>
<td>Participants should have access to the appropriate resources to enable them to successfully fulfil their brief.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Process Criteria</strong></td>
<td>The nature and scope of the participation task should be clearly defined.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Resource Accessibility</strong></td>
<td>The participation exercise should use/provide appropriate mechanisms for structuring and displaying the decision making process.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Task Definition</strong></td>
<td>The procedure should in some sense be cost effective from the point of view of the sponsors.</td>
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Source: Rowe, Marsh and Frewer (2004) [modified format].
It is difficult to maintain that the settings featuring in our case were all organized according to such procedures. States Provincial is an institutionalized setting for democratic politics, the Development Group was designed for stakeholder deliberation, the „clarifying conversation” should be characterized as a principle-agent meeting, and the evaluation by the consultancy company should be characterized as a setting to render account for a public service. In this context it is interesting to follow Hamlett’s (2003, p. 123) suggestion that application of these criteria can be extended to several other kinds of settings by treating them:

as one anchor of a continuum of political structures that might reach from the broadest participatory democracy; through various forms of limited participation democracy, such as pluralism, interest group bargaining, corporatism, or other representative forms; through to various forms of elitist, technocratic, or authoritarian systems.

This argument thus suggests a possibility for evaluating different kinds of settings for decision making about innovation, including the rules and procedures that de facto structure them. However, such evaluations have rarely been undertaken in an integrated way.

The Performative Perspective

There is more than a suggestion in the proceduralist perspective that settings should be neutral. See for example the second criterion in table 2. For authors who take the performative aspect of settings as a starting point, this is an untenable assumption. They emphasize
the role of settings in the mobilization of a particular discourse of democratic legitimacy. Levidow (1998), for example, argues in an essay on the regulation of agricultural biotechnology in Europe that in settings devised to democratize biotechnology the idea of „democracy“ in its turn is „biotechnologized“. “Participatory exercises help legitimize the neo-liberal framework of risk-benefit analysis, which offers us a free consumer choice to buy safe genetic fixes” (p. 223). Procedures for public participation, safety regulation and science education set the terms for expert regulation: “In all these ways, European democracy is biotechnologized” (ibid.).

According to the performative perspective, the setting of activities is never neutral but performative, it does something. In addition to asking „who participates“, the question „what enables people to become participants“ should be addressed (Gomart and Hajer, 2003; Mol, 2002). Settings empower some actors to be effective participants, while excluding others. The characteristics of settings define who has access and what counts as relevant information, reasonable arguments, and legitimate decisions. Barry’s (2001) notion of „demonstration“ provides a nice illustration. In its common political meaning „demonstration“ refers to protest. Typically the harmed and weaker party in a conflict protests against a situation to gain public support for its cause. In its second meaning „demonstration“ refers to the practice of showing something to an interested audience, which is historically rooted in the anatomical theatres as the origin of medical academia. This second meaning emphasizes the equipment needed to perform the (political) demonstration: a stage to speak
up, a case, valid argumentation, communication technology, an audience to speak to, and – more specific for the political settings – mandates, proposals, cost-benefit analyses, public enquiry and evaluation reports. The setting thus consists of those elements and techniques that make a performance possible.

Gomart and Hajer (2003) use the notion of bias to elaborate further on this performative dimension of settings. They argue that bias is inevitable, because settings always interfere with the performance. But they do not consider bias as a disturbing factor for democratic decision making, but rather as a productive factor. It is politically productive in the sense that a well-designed setting does not reproduce established patterns of power, but instead disrupts the usual patterns. In their opinion, politics is helped by new perspectives, by sudden reversals in the framing of problems and solutions, and by the engagement of silenced stakeholders and new audiences. The question, thus, is not whether a setting is pure and neutral, but which setting is more likely to bring about interesting outcomes and to surprise its audience. The point of this argument is that one does not need external criteria for evaluation if one would emphasize the positive role of bias. Interesting and surprising are relative principles for democratic evaluation. This is clearly a relevant position for the politics of displacements. If the bias of a setting indeed reveals certain aspects and engages certain audiences, then a democratic political process may benefit from the „mobilization of bias“, from passing through a variety of settings, and from the displacement of issues. Each displacement potentially offers surprising effects.
Like the proceduralist perspective, the performative perspective puts the role of settings in the centre of analysis. They also share an explicit commitment to the democratization of innovation. But in the performative perspective „democracy“ does not refer to a model existing independently from the practices under study as in the proceduralist perspective. The performative perspective builds on the criticism of the proceduralist perspective that the latter presents one meaning of democracy as the most important or essential one (De Wilde, 1997). “Among all the different and often rival concepts one meaning obtains a privileged ontological status: direct democracy is thought to be the most ‘real’ democracy” (p. 41). With reference to „surprise“, in contrast, it is suggested that criteria for democratic quality can be derived from the practices themselves: “Surprise […] insists that criteria are inherently immanent and cannot be picked a priori to guarantee outcomes” (Gomart and Hajer, 2003, p. 40).

According to critics of the performative perspective, however, such external criteria do seem to have slipped in via the backdoor. In the case described by Gomart and Hajer, the development of a plan for a multipurpose area called the Hoeksche Waard, creative experiments with political forms indeed led to the unexpected voicing of hitherto silenced „Hoekschewaarders“ (the inhabitants) among other things. But the authors also selected a case where creativity in political solutions happened to coincide with remedying injustice. By celebrating the first, they avoid spelling out what is involved in the second (Pestre, 2004). For example, would they also celebrate „sudden reversals“ and „unexpected turns“ if these instead revealed power centralization?
The Politics of Displacement

The politics of displacement implies that the shaping of technologies and services by means of discussing and settling aspects of design, funding, regulation, marketing, and use occurs in more than one particular setting. Decision making about innovation generally extends over this range of settings. The performative perspective emphasizes a hardly explored dimension of the politics of innovation: the (positive) contribution of the biases of settings to the politics of innovation. Based on this perspective it is possible to further elaborate on the notion of displacement. Displacement refers to the movement of decision making with regard to an issue from one setting to an often differently organized setting. Consequently, displacements are not value-free. Conflicts may be won or lost by displacement, because each displacement mobilizes other biases. This may reinforce existing positions and roles, but it may also open up new opportunities and engage new allies or resources for advantageous solutions. Displacements are thus an essential characteristic of politics.

The displacement of politics is usually associated with a democratic deficit. In these associations displaced politics takes place in settings which lack democratic features like transparency, equality, accountability, or division of power (Beck, 1991, Bovens et al., 1995). If, in Winner’s (1980) famous example, New York architect Robert Moses engages in racist politics by means of bridge building, then the democratic deficit emerges from the elitist nature of architects’ decision making in contrast to democratic decision making in councils. This could be evaluated from a proceduralist perspective. But if the game passes through multiple settings with
performative characteristics, then the proceduralist perspective falls short. One should also evaluate the relations between settings where issues are dealt with. For example, the audience in one setting might be in power in another. Settings may reinforce or compensate each other’s biases. Such interdependencies cannot be taken into account without analysing displacements. Whether displaced politics are undemocratic should not be taken for granted, but should result from the analysis. This then raises the question on what grounds a democratic evaluation could take place.

**A Definition of Democracy**

A proceduralist perspective proposes a list of democratic evaluation criteria (see table 2). I take this list as a starting point and follow Hamlett’s (2003) suggestion that it can be treated as an anchor point for evaluating more mundane forms of politics as well. I argue that it is possible to reduce the elaborate list of criteria to three core principles: participation, empowerment and impact. Participation is the degree to which (representatives of) stakeholders are able to have input or express their point of view, either directly or indirectly. Empowerment is the degree to which all stakeholders have access to resources to articulate their ideas and interests. Impact is the degree to which the articulation of ideas and interests affects outcomes. Participation is a precondition for empowerment and empowerment for impact.

My argument is that the criteria emphasized by the proceduralist perspective (table 2) are reducible to the three principles if one views decision making about innovation as a politics of displacement. This argument
should not simply be understood as the mere substitution of a set of concrete criteria with a smaller set of more abstract ones. Instead, the argument partially draws on the performative perspective by assuming that some criteria are immanent to the process and dealt with by actors themselves. Whether this happens democratically can be assessed on the basis of the three principles.

The principles can be further clarified in comparison with the criteria in table 2. The criteria of „involvement“, „resource availability“ and „influence“ are directly covered by the three principles of participation, empowerment and impact. Other criteria can be derived from these principles. Consider for example „representativeness“: if a participant in a certain setting claims to represent a broader constituency, then the analyst should trace back his/her mandate to the setting where it originates. Whether the mandate is legitimate should be determined by studying the displacement of the mandate, for example by asking whether all constituency members are sufficiently participating and empowered with resources in the voting process. A similar argument holds for „transparency“. A key characteristic of performative settings is the audience. The presence of stakeholders in the audience matters for the quality of the performance they witness. If the performance in a setting is not transparent, then stakeholders in the audience are insufficiently empowered as audience.

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3 Involvement should not be early per se, I would argue. It should be timely and the right moment of participation depends on the evolution of the issue, that is: the moment when someone turns into a stakeholder.
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Remaining criteria can be legitimately disregarded for different reasons. “Independence” should be dismissed, because settings need not be independent or neutral at all. Instead, the multitude of settings should together bias in favour of effective participation of a broad set of stakeholders. The criteria of “task definition”, “cost-effectiveness” and “structuring”, finally, are emergent features of the process and evaluated by the actors involved. If a setting does not provide tasks and structure, then participants may be dissatisfied and contest the legitimacy of the setting along with the issues on the agenda. Criteria like transparency, independence, cost-effectiveness, task definition, and structuring refer to the bias of a setting. From a performative perspective, these qualities of settings should be evaluated in relation to other settings and the performances these enable and delimit. Applying the criteria in table 2 to the politics of displacement thus boils down to evaluating the multitude of settings and displacements in terms of participation, empowerment and impact.

Democratic Evaluation of the MTI Project

How could these principles be applied to our case of implementation and supervision of the MTI project in Hoogeveen and Meppel? The supervising Development Group was installed to align the interests of MTI, the inhabitants of the province and other stakeholders in the region. The authority of this group was based on a mandate from States Provincial to look after the arrangements in the contract between MTI and the province. Representative participation of the inhabitants was ensured in three ways: via the municipalities of Hoogeveen and Meppel, via a representative from the
consumer platform, and via the mandate carried out by provincial officials. Due to the composition of this Development Group a constructive client perspective prevailed and as long as MTI took suggestions from participants into account, inhabitants were adequately represented. But the growing action list evoked serious doubts about hitherto unquestioned capabilities of MTI. If these doubts were right, then inhabitants would not get value for their money. At this point in time, representatives of inhabitants should have been empowered to decide about the conditions for continuation of the project. Instead, the group did not meet for some time. Provincial officials and their deputy tried to settle the issue via displacements to settings with limited access. The deputy met separately with MTI board members and bracketed the distrust in the Development Group. The Process Evaluation Experiment InterHoMe report merely focused on policy lessons.

Once the issue of MTI competency was displaced, the mandate from States Provincial remained the only mode of representative participation of inhabitants. Members of States Provincial should therefore have checked whether the mandate was carried out properly and question the mandate again when things did not work out as agreed upon. But when the project indeed got stuck, they remained silent. Members of States Provincial had not been very interested in the politics of the Development Group. They did not raise their voice in the name of inhabitants and did not prevent the bracketing of distrust as happened in the „good conversation” and the „excusing” Process Evaluation Experiment InterHoMe report. While States Deputed
POLITICS OF DISPLACEMENTS

decided about the next tender, the results of these bracketing displacements – the image of a cooperative and flexible transport provider called MTI – became available as arguments pro MTI in States Provincial. The silence\(^4\) in States Provincial after MTI”s victory in the next tender invitation proves the strength of this cooperative and flexible image.

Whether deliberate or not, by excluding the stakeholders represented in the Development Group and by bracketing doubts and distrust, dominant provincial officials exceeded their mandate and constructed a „successful” project. They were able to do so because members of States Provincial did not take part in the audience to look upon the mandate. As a consequence, members of States Provincial who represented inhabitants were not empowered to criticise States Deputed for continuing the project when the issue finally displaced to the committee of States Provincial.

Conclusions

There is an important political dimension to innovation processes, which begs for democratic evaluation. This is especially urgent for innovation in the public sector, such as in public transport. Despite increased recognition of this political dimension and despite lively and ongoing debates about their democratization, there is no consensus in the literature on innovation and democracy. Different perspectives exist next to each other. This article contrasted two of these

\(^4\) Only one question about MTI’s application of labor conditions was raised, but the deputy answered that labor conditions are a legal, not a political, issue (see references note 1).
perspectives, a proceduralist and a performative, which share a commitment to the democratization of technology development and a focus on settings for decision making. Differences exist in the conceptualization of settings – ideally neutral in the proceduralist perspective and inevitably biased in the performative perspective – and in assuming the existence of a transcendent reference model for democratic quality. With regard to setting, the performative perspective seemed to fit best given the many differences in the organization of settings encountered in this case. With regard to democratic criteria, this article develops a middle road. The proceduralist perspective postulates an essentialist view on democracy, which not only results in a long list of criteria, but also assumes that evaluators have moral authority over those who are evaluated. The performative perspective, in contrast, insists that actors themselves use criteria to evaluate the setting along with the issues on the agenda. Relative criteria like surprise or interesting reversals are proposed to reveal such actor evaluations. The problem with the claim that any criterion is immanent to the process, however, is that it turns „democracy” into an empty concept. There is no convincing case of democratic decision making without some (implicit) reference to generally accepted democratic principles.

A middle road between proceduralist and performative positions could comprise a number of principles concerning effective stakeholder involvement, e.g. participation, empowerment and impact. These principles should be understood as dimensions of democracy that are general enough to capture local variation and specific enough to make a difference
between good and bad politics. They are general enough to cover local variations like issue-specific requirements to participation, the actor-specific agreement about the proper level of empowerment, or contingent influences on the outcomes of the decision making process. Nevertheless, they are also specific enough for normative evaluations; they offer a ground for normative comparison of settings and henceforth a way to assess the contribution of displacements to democratic quality.

These principles, together with an account of the responsibilities related to the use of mandates are more important than criteria concerning the appropriateness of settings and procedures. The reason for this is that the quality of settings depends on the effects of the setting on the performance in relation to the effects of other settings in a chain of displacements. It may be the case that displacements amount to hegemony; it may also be the case that the democratic merits of one setting compensate for the democratic deficits of another. Whether and when displacements contribute to democratic quality is, however, essentially an empirical question.

To illustrate this latter proposition, an empirical study and evaluation of displacements in a case of public transport innovation was conducted. The study showed how an issue was depoliticized at the expense of empowerment requirements. These results illustrate how the conceptual framework that was developed in this research highlights the conditions that need to be fulfilled for the democratization of innovation processes. In this case, it appeared that elected members of States Provincial, who were supposed to be the main audience throughout the process and who eventually had to decide
about the continuation of the project, were insufficiently empowered to assess the transport company’s capabilities.

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