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### **CITIZENS' PREFERENCES FOR THEIR POLITICAL REPRESENTATION: A QUALITATIVE STUDY OF THE UK, SPAIN, POLAND AND MACEDONIA**

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The views expressed in this paper are those of the author, and do not represent the collective view of ISET.

## **ABSTRACT**

The relations of representatives with the residents of their electoral district are an under-researched field. Previous work on countries with single-member plurality (SMP) electoral systems has focused only on the effectiveness of MPs as legislators, their perceptions of their representational roles, and the extent to which incumbents are able to secure re-election through individual popularity, rather than on the citizens preferences. In countries with multi-member proportional representation (PR) systems, there is even less research. Yet evidence of citizens' disaffection with politics suggests that a re-examination of the relations of representation at constituency level would be useful for reviving public interest in political affairs. Such a re-examination would need to take into account the critique of feminist scholars questioning the concept of political representation and demanding gender parity on elective bodies, as well as the issue of political representation for ethnic minorities.

Using the qualitative method of the discussion group, the study explored citizens' preferences for links with their representatives from a grass-roots user perspective, covering Spain, Poland, Macedonia, and the UK, and taking into account gender and ethnic differences among district residents. It aimed to contribute insights for revived relations of representation by asking new questions such as what would ideally make citizens feel politically represented.

## **KEYWORDS**

Political representation   Constituency links   Parliamentarians   Gender   Ethnicity

## **1. Introduction**

In 2009 the British House of Commons set up an Outreach Office to engage the public with the work of Parliament. Parliament's own Modernisation Committee found that 'people increasingly distrust politicians as a group, and feel disconnected from the institutions of democracy. Around 67% of the public feel they know nothing or very little about Westminster' (Stanley 2009). The Speaker of the House, John Bercow, declared he was making outreach his personal mission and that the links between Members of Parliament and constituencies needed to be revitalised (2009). This occurred despite British MPs' tradition of devoting time to constituency work, meeting local organisations, and holding walk-in sessions open to the public.<sup>1</sup> The House of Commons had already changed its procedures in 1997 to accommodate the 'burgeoning constituency role of British MPs' by introducing some 'non-sitting Fridays' and finishing business early on a Thursday (Norton 2002:36). Clearly, if so much effort still leaves the public feeling disconnected - a phenomenon one could call 'the Westminster paradox' - the links between citizens and parliamentarians need to be examined afresh.

Scholars claim there is little research on representatives' actual relationships with the residents of their district, since most is focused on their effectiveness as legislators, their perceptions of their representational roles, and the extent to which incumbents are able to secure re-election through individual popularity – in single member (SMP) systems, whether the US, France, Britain, Canada or Australia, with far less on proportional representation (PR) systems. A re-examination could additionally take into account the scrutiny of feminist scholars questioning the whole notion of representation (from Sapiro 1981, to Phillips 1998, to Lovenduski 2005, among many others) together with the claims of women's movements since the 1990s for gender parity in all elective bodies. It should also consider that Young (1990, 2002) and Hardy-Fanta (2006), amongst others, have raised the issue of political representation for ethnic minorities. In this context, a study that explores grassroots views of the links between parliamentarians and constituents – the citizens' perspective - together with a European comparisons covering both PR and single-member electoral systems, while taking into account gender and ethnic differences among district residents, could bring key insights to the question of how citizens could feel reconnected to political process.

The present study was designed to advance understandings of residents', citizens' and voters' views through qualitative research. It does so in an innovative way, firstly by exploring subjective factors such as what residents and potential voters would ideally like from their parliamentarians and local councillors; secondly, by discussing the aim of the representation process in terms of creating for citizens a feeling of being politically represented, in contrast to researching voting intentions or current satisfaction with the political institutions which is standard in surveys<sup>ii</sup>; thirdly, by addressing diverse social categories of citizens in terms of their gender, ethnicity and religion; and fourthly, by using a qualitative and comparative methodology in four European countries, including some of the least researched in this regard.

The focus is on the relations of representation between the 'representors' and the 'represented', exploring firstly how are constituted as a form of interaction and potential mutual feedback loop that could help citizens<sup>iii</sup> and residents feel more recognised and provide representatives with political insights. Secondly, it looks at the way the relationship of representation depends - for it to be a satisfying practice - on who the parliamentarians are and how they operate, by examining a series of key features and social characteristics of ideal political representatives. The needs of citizens to identify with their representatives, whether on the grounds of a gendered, ethnic or religious resemblance (descriptive representation), or the way they embody features and behaviours that help citizens to feel represented, is explored in several ways.

The findings presented here are qualitative, arising from twenty discussion groups involving nearly 160 participants in ten locations in the UK, Spain, Poland and Macedonia. Section 2 reviews the relevant literature, pointing out how it informed the design of this study. Section 3 explains its methods, while Section 4 discusses a significant selection from the extensive findings. Section 5 presents the conclusions, pointing out how relations between citizens and their representatives can be improved with a view to generating feelings of political inclusion within the current formal political representation system.

## **2. Previous research on parliamentarians and constituents, disengagement with politics, and descriptive representation.**

Given the scarcity of studies on what ordinary people want from the representation

system, this literature review acknowledges research that has an indirect bearing on the study in addition to the publications that are closest to its aims. It is structured thematically and chronologically to give shape to the issues. Previous research mainly studied Single Member Plurality/'single-winner' systems typical of Anglo-Saxon countries and France. But as the present study was also conducted in Spain, Poland and Macedonia, it was not geared towards confirming nor disproving existing research on the UK, nor on SMP systems, but towards exploring in a qualitative manner, an under-researched theme common to all countries, namely what makes citizens feel politically represented.

### 2.1. The Roles of Parliamentarians in single-member constituencies<sup>iv</sup>

Relations between representatives and the represented have not been without tensions ever since Edmund Burke made his renowned entreaty for the public to understand that 'Parliament is not a Congress of Ambassadors from different and hostile interests', and to see that MPs must be able to exercise their independent judgement rather than be bound by 'hasty Opinion' made up of the 'local Prejudices' of constituents (Burke 1774). Today the awkward Janus-headed position of Westminster MPs is preserved by the British public's conviction that the most important way MPs should spend their time is 'Representing the views of local people in the House of Commons' (Hansard Society 2010: 5).

Despite this, Manin (1997:194-5) argues that after the rise of mass parties in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, representation was transformed after parliamentarians became 'ordinary citizens' who had become party activists and were governed by an internal party discipline that reduced their independence of judgement to 'partial autonomy'. The mass parties brought representatives 'closer to the grassroots', making it possible to choose 'candidates whose social position, way of life and concerns were close to those of the rank and file' (1997:196). He pointed to the notion of 'resemblance' between governors and governed. In the case where workers fielded their own candidates to represent them, the need for 'resemblance' (whether substantive or only apparent) was understood as a feature that inspired trust, and for decades working class parties flourished on that basis. This is particularly relevant to this study, as the demand for 'resemblance' returned in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century in a more controversial guise when women's equality advocates and

some ethnic minorities demanded parliamentarians with a resemblance to them, leading to the debates over 'descriptive' and 'sociological' representation, discussed later in this article. Ultimately this led to the worldwide implementation of gender quotas that signals the acceptance of the notion that being a reflection of the make-up of society is key to the collective legitimacy of parliaments.

Examination of the relations between parliamentarians and constituents under the SMP single-winner systems of Anglo-Saxon countries and France has produced a contested body of research. Most early work focused on the legislators themselves, particularly their choice of 'representational role'. The labels 'trustee', 'delegate', and 'partisan' - widely discussed in the work of Pitkin (1967, 1969) - were repeatedly applied (see Jewell 1983 for a review). Fenno (1978) examined what US Congressmen did to win and hold support. Eulau and Karpis (1977), and later Jewell (1983: 304) classified what representatives got out of the system, but only one element, 'policy responsiveness', referred to the actual interactions of the representative and the represented. Crewe (1984) and Bogdanor (1985) examined how dense such interactions were in the UK and other European states. Crewe found that the British belief in the value of strong constituency links was based more on sentiment than evidence since it was not the case that only small, compact, single-winner districts could allow for such links to develop, and he noted this system malfunctioned in several ways. Crewe's most germane argument for the present study was that constituents prefer MPs to reflect local opinion rather than the MPs own or the party's position, and to devote more time to the constituency than to the country's problems (Crewe 1984: 9-10). In 2010, 46% of the public still believed this is what MPs should do, but only 10% thought it was what they actually did (Hansard Society 2010: 93, Fig.31) thus creating a satisfaction gap.

And despite MPs' extraordinary efforts (handling thousands of personal cases), surveys showed it was impossible for any MP to reach all local residents with the means available. In the 1980s, over half of residents had never seen the MP in person and nearly half were unaware of the MP's name. By 2010, there was no improvement: only 44% were able to accurately name their own MP (Hansard Society 2010: 6). In the 1980s, three-quarters of British electors were unable to mention anything done by their MP in parliament; and four out of five were unable to mention anything he or she had done for the constituency (Crewe 1984:13). If the majority of residents nonetheless thought their MP did a good or

fair job in 1983 (Crewe 1984 Table 4 p.23), such satisfaction stagnated at 42-43% through the 1990s up to 2001 (Norton 2002: pp.38-9, tables 2.6, 2.7), then declined to 41% in 2004 and 2007, and to 38% in 2010 (Hansard Society 2010:88), a worsening satisfaction gap.

In addition, various sources reported that the demands of constituents on representatives were increasing quantitatively in the UK and elsewhere (Norton 1990:199, Norton & Wood 1993: 42-3, Dogan 2007: 454, House of Commons 2007: 6). Carman (2006:105) reasons that 'as constituents see MPs doing more for the constituency, they come to expect more', which points to the way MPs can never satisfy the public however hard they try.

Significantly, a large amount of constituents' claims needed to be referred back to the local authority (Norton & Wood 1993: 43), showing that they did not raise their issues at the right level and lacked information about the division of institutional responsibilities.

As to how MPs in Britain saw their representational roles, an exhaustive study by Searing (1994) interviewed hundreds of British MPs, finding their activities and priorities could be classified into 8 roles. Only one of these, the 'Constituency Member' role, indicated a prime focus on constituents - though many MPs did some constituency work. Over three-quarters of constituencies were represented by MPs who did not prioritise the needs of their residents but preferred policy advocacy, or were status seekers with ministerial aspirations (1994: 33). Only backbenchers, not parliamentary leaders, were 'Constituency members'<sup>v</sup>. Searing also showed that 'constituency work' consisted mainly of the redress of grievances reminiscent of ancient petitioning for favours and righting of wrongs, but thought that even trivial grievances could show up areas where policy is wrong (1994:122). Most MPs did not believe in articulating the political opinions of their constituents, because, as one MP put it with Burkean echoes: 'There's the matter of exercising my judgment' (Searing 1994: 154-5). MPs recognised this lack of substantive political communication, but believed constituents did not want to hear about policy, preferring to have somebody who will 'shout for them' when something goes wrong (Searing 1994:155).

By contrast, 'most foreigners would associate representation mainly with political opinions' (1994:159). In this regard, Bianco (1994:50) studied policy-oriented interactions between legislators and constituents, reporting that US legislators were sceptical of the whole idea of explaining or trying to persuade their constituents (numbering as much as half a million

each, often spread over a wide area), as these would be reluctant to accept their representative's explanations for actions taken in Washington. Yet giving explanations was not pointless, there where it was consistent with legislators making themselves accessible. If a representative cast a controversial vote, previous contact was helpful, because electors would then accept a rational and reasonable answer even if they disagreed with it (Bianco 1994: 53). Meeting and having contact with legislators increased trust and led to greater acceptance of their policy decisions. In addition Rose (1986:21) made the unusual point that having an active constituency presence can be flattering for MPs who enjoy being 'a big fish' locally when they are only a small one in the big Westminster pond. Suleiman (1986:90) also saw French deputies as deriving more satisfaction from their *local* role, since they were so circumscribed by the party at national level. In this way, MPs increased their chances of being trusted.

The limits to effective communication based on servicing constituents in France, Britain and the US was highlighted by Dogan (2007), who called such work 'local servitudes' performed by 'errand boys', painting a detailed picture of harried French representatives clutching many dossiers tirelessly making the rounds of the ministries to solve constituency demands, and then emphasising their devotion to their locality upon seeking re-election. After reviewing the repetitive nature of the exchanges between constituents and their parliamentarian across decades and dozens of locations, Dogan concluded this 'errand-boy' role detracted from parliamentarians' work as national legislators, for everywhere complaints and requests figured prominently, while policy issues remained virtually absent. The work of Searing, Bianco and Dogan implies that the political versus practical nature of communications between representatives and constituents is an important question for understanding the purpose and effect of constituency links, and worthy of investigation in greater depth. From a different angle (Norton and Wood 1993: 44-50) traced the vast amount of work that the more substantive complaints and requests cause to MPs and ministerial departments in the UK, but believed that dealing with these would lead to satisfaction and political benefits to both sides.

The present study therefore explores how diverse citizens would like to engage with this two-way process in other European countries where there is no such tradition.



## 2.2. Constituency links in multi-member proportional systems

Already in 1985 Bogdanor found that there was insufficient evidence to sustain the assumption that the role of the electoral system determined the type of representational relations; nor was the view that single-winner constituencies provided for closer links (because they were smaller than multi-member constituencies, deemed too large) sustainable after closer investigation. Comparing European countries highlighted the ubiquitous presence of parties in party democracies with party parliaments, which meant that all 20<sup>th</sup> century MPs focused on nationwide clienteles that were non-geographical, clustering around specific interest groups such as class. The Westminster system was therefore not naturally superior to proportional representation in terms of fostering closer links with electoral districts.

An example is the extensive casework and constituency activities undertaken by deputies under Belgium's multi-member PR list system. Despite deputies' attentiveness, their media image was of 'an errand boy fixing matters in illegal and unfair ways' (De Winter 2002: 104) – a wholly subverted view of the deputies' efforts, compounded by their concomitant absences from parliament. Another example is that under Germany's dual proportional and single-winner system, 46% of residents knew the name of their deputy in the 1980s (Von Beyme 1986: 166) - not substantially different from Britain. Burkett (1985) found that Germany's 248 single-winner deputies had little incentive to develop a 'conscientious concern for constituents' problems' because in a Federal state, local problems were a matter for the Land minister and assembly, so deputies were unable to do much to solve them. As the system encouraged a vote on party-political grounds (Burkett 1985: 121, 124) individuals could not counter any national or regional political swings and there was no personal vote effect. Instead, there were nationwide official channels for grievances that invalidated what a parliamentarian could do, as well as the parliamentary Petitions Committee for citizens' complaints and proposals that handled up to 2000 petitions per month in the mid 1990s (Saafeld 2002: 49, Fig.3.1). But Von Beyme (1986: 166) using 1969 data found that the function of representing the constituency did rank high for parliamentarians, though it *brought no rewards* in political or parliamentary terms. Klingemann & Wessels (1999: 12 Table 1) found that both German single-member and party list deputies thought their performance in constituency service was very important in the 1990s, and a large majority believed they should have weekly contact with ordinary

citizens and represent the residents of their constituency (1999:14-15). By contrast, Saafeld found that few Bavarian deputies thought their emphasis should be on constituency work (2002:53-4).

In the case of the Netherlands the whole country was one constituency (Gladdish 1985), so citizens had no locality relationships with MPs and 'there is no requirement that candidates live in the district or have any relationship with the district' (Beun & Irwin 1997). Despite this, the Dutch and German publics were more interested in politics than the British and discussed it more with their friends (European Values Survey 2005: p.11 (Table 1E), p.13 (Table 2). In Italy, deputies did not hold constituency 'surgeries' yet used the fact that they could ask a question in parliament on behalf of their district to return to it with evidence that they had raised the issue (Della Sala 2002: 82-3) though not solved it. Portugal was a case where the need to strengthen the ties between deputies and citizens was a recurrent theme in political discourse (Leston Bandeira 2002:138)

In the case of Spain, constituency links have hardly been studied. Méndez-Lago and Martínez (2002: 70, Fig. 1) reported that 40% of both citizens and of deputies to the Spanish Congress perceived the focus of parliamentarians' attentions should be 'representing all Spaniards' rather than constituents. And while citizens also believed deputies represented their party as a second priority, the deputies themselves claimed it was 'all my constituents'. By contrast, less than 5% of constituents felt the focus of representation was on them. This gap in perceptions was reinforced by the fact that *constituents* actually thought defending the interests of their party was the most important task of deputies, whereas the deputies themselves claimed it was 'representing the interests of my province/region' and 'solving the problems of the country' (2002: 70 Fig.2). The gap in perceptions was even wider using 2004 data (Méndez 2006: 121-3, Graph 5.1, 5.2, and Table 5.1). So at first glance Spanish citizens appear less demanding than other Europeans. Yet deputies also claimed to have frequent contacts with voters and various local groups (Méndez Lago and Martínez 2002: 82, Fig.11) with 99% reporting contact 'in the last month' (Méndez Lago 2006: 137), but even this could not hope to cover the major part of the constituency: only 5% of voters reported having contacted a deputy. López-Nieto (2000: 26) found that deputies, while professing opinions aligned to those of their party, still claimed that every week brought contacts with constituents and that they considered these 'crucial for their parliamentary work'. Much of this was resolved by phone

or email rather than by trips to the constituency. Montero (2008:70) also reported that local offices of the large parties coordinated weekly visits by most deputies and transmitted concerns back to the national party office in an effort to strengthen constituency links. Furthermore at the local government level, López Nieto (2000: 14-15) found a far greater devotion of mayors and councillors to servicing the local district as part of their re-election plans.

The conclusion is that through personal contact, deputies can reach a rather small number of citizens, as Crewe 1984 reported for Britain. And significantly, only a small minority of Spanish citizens reported having even thought of having any contact. Their satisfaction with the representation system in terms of trust in parliamentarians was low in the 1990s (Delgado, Martínez and Oñate 1998:49, Table 23), yet satisfaction with the work of parliamentarians had reached 41% by 2004, similar to the UK, but still left 44% dissatisfied (Méndez Lago 2006:139, Table 5.8). An issue for representatives wishing to build links with their district in the Spanish and Portuguese systems was the high turnover of deputies from one legislature to another (López Nieto 2000, Leston Bandeira 2002: 135) which undermined any continuity of service to the area.

### 2.3. The Personal Vote

Other studies discuss the existence or otherwise of a 'personal vote', in which representatives seek to gain a personal following independently of their party's popularity, to help them become re-elected. Their focus on the advantages of incumbency rather than on the nature of constituency links themselves. In the UK the 'personal vote' phenomenon had been found to exist in the 1970s, but not to be of great magnitude: only in a few cases had it led to major deviations in the swing (Steed 1975: 342-45). If a party lost popularity, it was difficult for individual candidates to stem the loss of votes. For Canada, Irvine found that while representatives were virtually unanimous (90%) in claiming that constituency work was very important, this was unrelated to success: 'the disjuncture between electoral marginality and constituency service is striking' (Irvine 1982: 759). Neither did Congressmen and women in the US seem to become better known or more highly evaluated as a result of constituency work (Irvine 1982: 760). Regarding what swayed voters the most - candidate or party - the salience of the candidate was receding over time as the party or party leader was mostly responsible for an incumbent's reelection - the

candidate's own efforts seeming 'relatively futile' (Irvine 1992: 761, 771, 772). Studlar and McAllister (1996:69) for Australia found no personal vote effect either. On the contrary, dealing with constituents' grievances arguably *reduced* a legislator's vote, mainly because it displaced more party-focused activities that were more advantageous in electoral terms.

Yet Cain, Ferejohn and Fiorina found that individual MPs (90% of MPs of whom held surgeries once a month, 60% every two weeks) could affect their re-election in Britain but to a much weaker extent than in the US where 'constituency service appears to be an important component of success' (1984: 110, 62). Later Norton (1990) set out to systematically prove the personal vote effect and found some limited evidence for it, but warned that it was extremely complicated to calculate accurately. How a representative generates a personal following or why s/he becomes popular is not well known. Dalton recognised the component of 'affective feelings' (2007:8) in the public's reactions, supporting Hardin (1998, 2002) who also maintained that trust in politicians could arise only when residents know them, in agreement with the findings on 'contact' mentioned above. For the purposes of the present study the possibility that constituents might strongly approve of one or more of their representatives is assumed to contribute to their feeling politically represented. Researching citizen preferences and their ideal features for their representational relationship give pointers for parliamentarians to understand what helps different categories of people feel included.

Studies emphasising the limited relevance of constituency work include Mitchell (2000: 348) who argued that the typical western European party-centred systems gave parliamentarians little incentive to seek a personal vote, as success was derived from parties offering voters their 'brand identity'. From a principal-agent perspective, constituents were 'principals' who lacked information in comparison to their agents, the representatives, and so experienced difficulties holding them to account. Parliamentarians who did not give satisfaction from the electors' perspective could still keep intact their credentials with the party and reappear as candidates at the next election, because only parties, not voters, were able to police their parliamentarians. Manin (1997: 208) reinforced the point adding that the parties' electoral stability, despite a turnover among their candidates, was significant evidence that in party democracies electors vote for a party rather than a person. But he conceded that the last decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century had seen a new development, with voters tending to vote more for candidates that appealed to them as individuals and less so for the party they stood for (Manin1997: 219). The design

of the present study therefore explored citizen preferences around the party allegiance of their preferred representatives as well as personal characteristics.

#### 2.4. Constituents' views and feelings about on their own representation

As seen above, the main literature on constituency relations has not investigated the preferences of citizens themselves, except to note that they want their MPs to be focused on their local area. Constituents' lack of interest and dissatisfaction were noted, as were the poor return on parliamentarians' investment of time spent in their district. Only a reduced number of studies directly interrogate citizens' preferences for how they wish to be politically represented. Though Pitkin (1967:10) advanced the notion that a psychological feeling of being represented could exist, whether objectively verifiable or illusory, forty years later, Rohrschneider (2005:851) claimed 'we know little about how mass publics in advanced democracies view the representative process'. Carman (2006: 105-6) holds that study of political representation in the UK had been dominated by the parties' perspective, and that the citizens' perspective has received only 'sporadic attention'.

Carman's study examined the representational relationship directly, calling it an 'empirical puzzle', and finding for the UK that individuals had meaningful preferences for a relationship with their MP, and for his/her representational orientations. They minded whether s/he voted in parliament for the constituency's view, for the party's policy or according to their own judgement. Carman found that 'citizen activists' wanted MPs to be independent from parties; 'party supporters' wanted the opposite; and people with a high sense of political efficacy tended towards the 'anything but the constituents' opinion'. The Scots were more party-oriented than non-Scots, and those with university orientation favoured MPs using their best judgement (2006: 115-116). In addition Carman (2003, cited in Carman 2006) found that in the US race, gender and education were significant predictors of preferences regarding the representative's role, while Barker & Carman (2009) found the same for church attendance and regional factors in the US. Nonetheless, other citizen preferences were not explored.

Finally, Rohrschneider (2005: 853) looked directly at citizens' feelings of being well-represented, finding that 'arbitrating institutions' such as 'bureaucracies' and 'judiciaries')

were the source of such feelings – but only as long as 'contacts involving personal matters' had taken place. He concluded (p.865) 'impartial bureaucracies and judiciaries increase citizens' confidence in the representational capacity of parliaments and governments'. But he did not study parliaments or legislators, so this study opens the way to an examination of citizens' feelings of representation by elected representatives at local and national levels.

### 2.5. 'Descriptive' or 'resemblance' representation: working class men, women, and ethnic minorities

Jeremy Bentham, earnestly wishing to 'maximise the happiness of the population as a whole', believed 'there should be *manhood* suffrage [emphasis added] ... because only in this way would the personal interests of the *whole* population [ditto] be reflected in the legislature' (cited by Birch 1971:54). This traditional gender-blindness of representation theory has been challenged in the literature around 'group', 'descriptive', sometimes 'sociological' representation, and by feminist movements claiming women need to be represented by women. In fact, the universal male suffrage advocated by Bentham allowed the emergence of arguably the first form of 'descriptive' representation through working-class parties that sponsored their own parliamentary candidates. Feminist demands for greater presence of women in public office, to be assured via a gender balance of between 40% and 60% of candidates of either sex, became widespread in the 1990s, and by 2010 was being adopted worldwide with marked results (Dahlerup 2006, Krook 2009, see the Inter-Parliamentary Union's annually updated count).

Arguably, 50-50 or 60-40 gender parity representation mirrors 100% of the population as it includes men. But as the categories woman and man are cross-cut by class and race, as established in the arguments about difference among women first raised in the UK by Black feminist thought in the early 1980s (Bhavnani, Lewis) and later theorised by Collins (1990), and Young (1990). Thus, demands for the descriptive political representation of women can be echoed by claims to ethnic representation, with both historic and 21st century ethnic minorities demanding to have a presence in national parliaments (Swain 1993)<sup>vi</sup>. Advocates for descriptive representation of minorities who are interested in constituency relations include Fenno (1978), Mansbridge (1999) and Banducci, Donovan and Karp (2004), while others focus on the performance of minority legislators, both

women and men, such as Hardy-Fanta (2008). The question of a possible separate representation among ethnic minority *women* also requires investigation, in line with theories on the continuous intersections of class, gender and race, not to mention other categories. Yet intersectionality as a theory and a method has hardly been applied to political representation. Williams (2000:24-5) argues that the problem of identifying the politically relevant groups that are to be represented is key, as is the question of whether representatives have any obligations towards the minorities in their district; and *who* receives representation is a political issue because it cannot be simply individual inhabitants. For Williams (2000:25-26) these can only be represented in so far as they have identifiable interests, which must be group interests or communities of interests, expressed by pressure groups, trade unions, sub-national (ethnic) groups characterised by having a minority language or religion, and even ideological aggregates with allegiances to a party. For these Williams raises the merits of 'like representing like'. It is worth bearing in mind that Shephard, McGarvey and Cavanagh (2001) saw that achieving one kind of descriptive representation could eclipse another: the first elections to the Scottish parliament, the alleged start of a 'new politics', produced an Assembly with a historic 48 women MSPs (37.5%), but out of 81 male MSPs, none was from an ethnic minority<sup>vii</sup> and only 2 had a 'blue collar/industrial' background. Yet a majority (46 of the 81 males) were trade union members (Shepherd, Garvey and Cavanagh 2001: 94).

As the principles of gender parity representation are well established, this study chose instead to explore grass-roots public understandings of the notion of women representing women and extended it to sub-categories of women, those belonging to minority ethnicities and the minority religion of Islam in each country studied, with a view to exploring the demand for representation through likeness or personal resemblance with representors. It was not able to additionally cover the representation of working-class people, those facing disabilities, nor those with a gay or lesbian sexual orientation.

As this literature review has shown, public preferences for political representation are an 'overlooked component' in advancing models of public support for politicians and governing institutions (Carman 2006: 103), and too little is known about what kind of representatives and what kind of interaction with them European citizens might want in order to feel represented. The present study contributes to filling this key gap in the literature and adopts a hitherto unused qualitative approach to explore the sources

satisfaction with their political representation of diverse citizens and residents living in ten cities across Macedonia, Poland, Spain and the UK.

### **3. The study: design and specific methods**

All European democracies maintain dense, multi-level systems of elected representatives, with around 100-130,000 residents per parliamentarian, and make periodic calls to renew their mandates and change the local, regional and national governments of the day, with the European Parliament adding a further tier. Arguably, such systems ought to be able to generate in constituents some feeling of being represented, since they have up to 4 sets of representatives each, irrespective of whether they are voters or activists, long-standing or new residents. The study set out to investigate the assumption that having representatives should be linked with feeling represented, and if not, how it could be so, using the qualitative method of the discussion group in an inductive rather than deductive research design. Further initial assumptions were: a) that assembling discussion groups<sup>viii</sup> on the topic of political representation would be viable after a profile triage of participants but with no prior screening for verbal ability nor political knowledge; in other words, that people in general with their varying levels of education and social status would be able to talk with sufficient ease and fluency to sustain an in-depth two-hour conversation; b) that quantitative research could not explore people's feelings and opinions adequately in comparison; and c) that the discussion group method was preferable to the in-depth individual interview because this topic was considered by social research professionals to be unfamiliar, inviting the likelihood that, interviewed alone, people would feel intimidated and find little to say. Instead, group discussions give participants safety in numbers and the chance to be stimulated by each other and by the moderator's questions, while not being obliged to answer all of them.<sup>ix</sup>

#### **3.1. Participants and locations**

Over 200 people were recruited by established social research organisations in the UK, Poland, Spain and Macedonia, selected according to profiles, structured by gender, ethnicity and religion, and aged between 25 and 60, obtaining the final presence of 159 people.<sup>x</sup> Five group discussions per country were held in 10 locations, 20 discussions in all, consisting of: 1) White ethnic majority women nationals residing in Madrid, London,



Warsaw and Skopje); 2) White ethnic majority men nationals residing in Glasgow, Bilbao, Gdansk and Skopje; 3) Muslim women nationals and non-nationals residing in Leicester, Barcelona, Bialystok and Skopje. 4) Ethnic minority female and male nationals and non-national residents of London, Madrid, Warsaw and Skopje. 5) 'Second-country' EU nationals with limited voting rights, residing in London, Barcelona, Warsaw and Skopje. The countries were chosen according to the following criteria: one West, one East-Central, one South European member-state of the EU, plus one Non-EU country (Macedonia); two countries with gender quota representation (Spain, Macedonia) and two without (UK, Poland); countries with a variety of class-based, values-based or ethnicity-based parties (hence Macedonia); countries with single member and proportional representation electoral systems. Within countries, three port cities with a former or declining shipbuilding industry and a history of industrial conflict were selected as a setting for the men's groups in order to maximise the chances of finding participants with higher levels of interest in politics; large or capital cities were chosen in order to maximise the likelihood of finding participants from ethnic minorities and European non-nationals; and three non-capital cities were chosen for the presence of communities of Muslim women.

### 3.2. Topics of the discussion groups

The group discussion was moderated following a uniform content guide with adaptations for each country, which covered three main themes: 1] the amount and type of desirable contacts and interaction that participants would prefer to have with their representatives; 2] the types and styles of political representation, summarised as: a) Mandating: informing/pressuring an MP to act as a delegate; b) Interacting: exchanging views with a 'listening' MP, who nevertheless has the right to decide which way to vote in parliament; c) Trusting the MP to decide without you, and get on with the job; d) Using an MP as a resource and helper for your problems; and 3] preferences around being represented by someone 'Like me or different from me', or 'close to me' or 'distant from me'. 'Likeness' was examined in terms of similar background, political identification (priorities or values associated to a party), gender, ethnicity, religion, nationality, and migration status. The 'distance' of the representatives was expressed in terms of their higher education levels, greater knowledge (of world or national problems), greater experience and training than the participant. Gender preferences explored the acceptability or otherwise of gender imbalance in parliaments, and the practice of party or legal gender quotas. Discussion of

representation according to race and ethnicity included the possibility of quotas or reserved seats in parliament for ethnic minorities. The limited political representation of European free-movers was explored including an alternative form of group representation via a reserved seat.

This moderated oral discussion was complemented by: a) an aide-memoire consisting of a list of names of parliamentarians for the locality of the specific participants to aid identification of those they knew of; b) a paper exercise for each participant, who was given a sheet with 30 box options featuring key elements of the discussion, organised along 8 aspects of representation (covering personal and political features of ideal representatives and representation systems) with 4 choices within each aspect (see Appendix). Each participant defined her/his preferences by choosing a preferred option from each of the 8 aspects. Faced with their 8 preferred features, each participant ranked them in descending order of importance from 8 to 1. This exercise was designed to sharpen up each participant's preferences into specific choices and to allow researchers to aggregate the post-discussion preferences of participants into a numerical result, despite the qualitative nature of the previous discussion. This also facilitated aggregating and comparing each group's preferences either within countries, or within similar groups aggregated across countries. The aim was not to transform a qualitative discussion into a quantitative one, but to be able to weight participants' responses at the end of a relatively free-ranging discussion and aid the interpretation of it. c) The final complement to the discussion was giving each participant the opportunity of writing an individual freestyle response to the oral question: "Of all the features of the representation system and characteristics of your ideal representatives that we have discussed, what single 'thing' (feature, characteristic, issue, behaviour etc) would help you feel politically represented?"<sup>xi</sup>.

#### **4. Preliminary results**

The results offered here are partial due to lack of space and the potential for further analysis of the materials collected. The key first result was that the group discussion format lived up to other reported experiences (see Cameron 2005) of genuine interest for the moderator, enjoyable for the participants, able to generate productive interaction,

insights, and nuances. It allowed people to explore their feelings and to imagine the ideal representative that would make them feel represented and politically included. Levels of fluency and interaction between participants were moderately or very high in all groups. Despite the anticipated hesitancy regarding political discussions, none of the 20 groups failed to speak meaningfully on the list of topics, nor dried up before two hours were over, nor failed to finish the multiple choice exercise at the end, though with some errors. This lack of technical and procedural difficulties, together with the positive comments on the experience expressed aloud by some participants, can be taken as an indication that a wide range of people can with modest encouragement quickly become stimulated to discuss politics constructively.

#### 4.1. Overall tenor of feelings and preferences arising out of the discussions

With very few exceptions, participants used the initial 'icebreaker' free discussion on what they associated with being represented by parliamentarians, councillors and MEPs for declaring that most politicians were in it for themselves, untrustworthy if not corrupt; that they only appeared at election time; that all parties were the same; and that they did not feel represented by anyone. The striking fact was the similarity of these expressions in all 10 locations stretching from Glasgow to eastern Poland irrespective of gender, religion, or ethnicity.<sup>xii</sup> Less than a handful started off by stating they felt in any way represented by the political system and the only enthusiastically stated expression of feeling politically represented came from a Spanish-Moroccan woman who felt well represented by Prime Minister José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero and the policies of the Socialist party.

Yet as soon as the moderator invited participants to imagine or visualise, systematically, what they would ideally like as an alternative, the critical and dismissive tone changed to one of interest and thoughtfulness. In fact all but 4 of 159 participants were willing and able to think through their ideals, express detailed preferences, and make suggestions about improvements to the representation system. Many expressed awareness that other people's preferences might differ from their own, and were quite often self-reflexive about being insufficiently aware of what was on offer in terms of opportunities to elect representatives, to participate in politics, and to receive policy information. Some expressed self-criticism of making excessive demands of politicians without offering to be pro-active themselves.

Revealingly, after the possibilities of interaction with parliamentarians had been discussed, most participants - when faced with four options in the box-matrix exercise - chose a high degree of contact with their political representatives. This is striking given the background contexts, with participants mainly unaware of either, having any representatives, or the name of any for their district, or how to find out their names, or how to contact them. Figure 1 below sets out the rankings of options for contact chosen by participants in the box-matrix (see Appendix).<sup>xiii</sup>

*Figure 1. Choice of ideal type and frequency of contacts with political representatives*

Question: What TYPE OF CONTACT is best for you?	
Contact options: most <-> least frequent	Ranking of options and comments
'Frequent contact: my representative(s) should behave as if s/he were my delegate' <sup>xiv</sup>	<u>Third preference.</u> Even though not offered to Bilbao men's group, the men expressed strong opinions on mandating and holding representatives to account.
'Periodic/Regular: I would like to communicate my views and receive regular information from them by post or email' <sup>xv</sup>	Clear <u>first preference</u> of most participants. Option not offered to any group in Spain, though discussion suggests this would have been popular.
'Intermittent/irregular: I would like to have contact only when I need it, eg. by accessing their webpage' <sup>xvi</sup>	Clear <u>second preference</u> of participants. Not offered to Bilbao men.
'Infrequent contact: I trust the representative(s) to legislate on my behalf as they think fit'. <sup>xvii</sup>	<u>Fourth preference.</u> Only minor interest in this option. Not offered to Bilbao men.

Note: The box-matrix multiple-choice exercise was developed during the discussions in Spain, so not all options were offered to the Spanish groups at the start. This ranking of preferences is derived from aggregating the points that the participants allocated to their choices, as explained in the Methods section.

Clearly, the options implying greater interaction (Frequent and Periodic/regular) were chosen as first and second preference. This result is not what would be predicted from people whose first reaction was to say they have little interest in politics and do not feel represented. The intervening discussion could have resulted in participants confirming their disinterest or becoming interested, and the latter was the case. Many participants in Poland, Spain and Macedonia had not heard that such contacts with representatives could take place and were convinced their deputies were unlikely ever to offer them, so they viewed an email, or an accessible website report as a considerable step towards 'inclusion'. Yet few warmed to the idea of having their individual problems serviced by their representatives, viewing it as an imposition on, or waste of, the representatives' time, given the burden of their parliamentary work, which they anyway needed to perform better. But engaging in a dialogue with parliamentarians about problems or policy issues - or with local councillors about things that were dysfunctional or lacking locally - was considered

appropriate, though many doubted they would initiate it themselves. Several highlighted the sense of being noticed that they would feel if they were to receive an answer to a letter. Those who had already written to someone in the past reported being disappointed when they received no reply. And most of those who had received an unsolicited communication, such as an election leaflet, expressed a feeling of being taken into account, though the handful of disaffected participants<sup>xviii</sup> reported ignoring the leaflets. Finally, participants were frequently critical of representatives who were said to appear before elections, but 'disappear' afterwards.

From this one can deduce that there is a latent or underlying demand for an interactive type of political representation that people do not voice until they are offered the possibility in a confidence-building setting. The finding was consistent across the 16 groups of women, men, ethnic minorities and Muslim women, even between the Roma of Macedonia. Yet this type of interaction is not regularly on offer in the countries studied - not even in the UK where MPs do not send out activity reports. As previous studies showed, the culture of constituency service by MPs involves individual problem solving rather than policy issues. And when a recent poll (Hansard Society 2010: 81, Fig.24) asked people whether they had 'contacted/presented my views to a local councillor or MP' – the word 'views' suggesting opinions aired rather than problems raised - only 17% of UK respondents said they had.

#### 4.2. Preferences by social groups: who should represent whom?

Over all the 20 group discussions the one major characteristic of the person most likely to make people feel politically represented was someone who is very 'knowledgeable, experienced and well-trained'. Participants saw politics as a difficult business requiring political management skills and learning (such as via higher education) to inspire confidence. By contrast, less than a handful of participants declared they would feel represented by the near-charismatic option of 'someone who is appealing and communicates well, even if not very experienced'. Notable in this rationalist emphasis is the distance between the quasi Nietzsche-an superior person and the average participant. It implies that being close to the represented, or resembling them (descriptive representation) was mostly not perceived as the main answer to the problem of generating feelings of being adequately represented, although for some it was important, as shown in

Figure 2 below.

Findings on the question of 'who should represent whom' are presented below, derived from analysing 12 discussions (4 each of white ethnic majority men from former shipyard towns, white ethnic majority women from capital cities, and Muslim women from four different locations) together with their written preferences given in the box matrix group exercise (Appendix 1). Figure 2 presents the top four characteristics of the person/s, leaving out preferences for how to interact with them, in order to focus on the 'who should represent whom' question.

Figure 2. Top Four Ideal Features of Elected Representatives

<b>Ethnic majority former shipyard city men</b>				
UK Glasgow	Local level	Single representative	should have their own independent views and be willing to dissent from their party	understand the life of people like me even though their background is different
Macedonia Skopje	very knowledgeable, experienced, and well-trained	Local level	Several representatives	express ideas of their party but be flexible when implementing them in practise
Poland Gdansk	Very knowledgeable, experienced, and well-trained	express ideas of their party but be flexible when implementing them in practise	Several representatives	-- (various characteristics ranked much lower)
Spain Bilbao	Should be 'reasoners' (1)	express ideas of their party but be flexible when implementing them in practise	Spanish or naturalised foreigner makes no difference (1)	No religion
<b>Ethnic majority capital city women</b>				
UK London	Understand the life of people like me even though their background is different =>	<=Local level	1 male + 1 female representative	-- (other features ranked much lower)
Macedonia Skopje	very knowledgeable, experienced, and well-trained	Macedonian	Orthodox = >>	<< =National level
Poland Warsaw	Very knowledgeable, experienced, and well-trained	express ideas of their party but be flexible when implementing them in practise	Polish	-- (other features ranked much lower)
Spain Madrid	Several representatives	express ideas of their party but be flexible when implementing them in practise	Spanish (as opposed to Catalan) (2)	very knowledgeable, experienced, and well-trained
<b>Ethnic minority Muslim women</b>				
UK Leicester	Understand the life of people like me even though their background is different	Be a Muslim	national level	male
Macedonia Skopje	very knowledgeable, experienced, and well-trained	Several representatives	a Muslim = >>	<< = a woman if forced to choose between the two
Poland Bialystok	Be a Tatar	Muslim	national level	very knowledgeable, experienced, and well-trained
Spain Barcelona	Muslim	Several representatives	European level	express ideas of their party but be flexible when implementing them in practise

Key: => <= indicates equal strength of preference in 2 options. Notes: (1) Groups in Spain being the first country of fieldwork saw a different version of this matrix of options; it was modified after listening to several group discussions. (2) As interviews had been held in Barcelona, this option was also on the form, but no other regional option was offered. It was unintended that participants should come out emphasising Spanish nationality (which might otherwise not have been so prominent a preference), but the response reflect a widespread observation of Spanish political analysts that *Madrileños* prefer not to be represented by Catalans.

Looking at the set of breakdowns involving only majority men, majority women and minority Muslim women in Figure 2, it is worth noting the concentration on certain preferred features, with some groups hardly having a third priority. Regarding the phenomenon that participants preferred above all 'very knowledgeable, experienced and well-trained' representatives, it is interesting to note the UK is the exception, as none of the 3 groups chose it as a priority. By contrast, all three Macedonian groups ranked this first. Instead, UK groups, especially majority women and Muslim women, preferred a representative 'who understands the life of people like me even though their background is different'. UK participants did not rank the full resemblance representation option highly ('Someone like me, with the same background as me') choosing the nearest alternative that implied some form of closeness (being 'understood' by someone different).

A second frequently preferred feature of the ideal representative was someone who 'expresses the ideas of a party but is flexible when implementing them in practice'. Although the exact wording could sound like someone who is all mouth and no action, the discourse emerging from the groups identified someone who was principled but not rigid and had the flexibility not to impose something against strong opposition, in the context of the significant disinterest of all groups in a person who is 'not aligned to a party and responds to the moment' or who is 'appealing and communicates well even if not very experienced'. Charismatic newcomers gained no traction.

A third feature that ranked quite highly across these groups is the number of representatives preferred by participants. While in the UK case the white men's preference for one representative seemed related to the single-member system they were familiar with, the priority given to 'several representatives' in Poland and Macedonia and Spain seemed to arise additionally from a preoccupation with pluralism as part of democratic practice, and an awareness of multiple disagreements that needed to be reconciled via a spread of representatives.

A fourth feature that was important precisely because it was not ranked among the top 4 priorities (so not included in Figure 2) was participants' overall preference - as a low priority - for their ideal representative *not* to manifest any religious attachment even if they had one. This can be related to the fact that the locations of some groups had experience



of previous religious strife (such as Communist/Catholic in Poland, Protestant/Catholic in Glasgow, Orthodox/Muslim in Skopje; and Catholic/non-believer in Spain) and can be interpreted as a desire to avoid divisive issues. It is therefore coherent with the rationalist preference for technical expertise against 'one of us' religious identity, and contrasts with the exceptions, namely the Muslim women groups discussed below.

Turning to the men's groups, the features signifying 'closeness/resemblance' of ideal representatives were given low rankings except in the UK/Glasgow, where local councillors appeared as people who were 'close' and 'one of us' in terms of locality, even though group participants criticised the Scottish nationalists. In Spain/Bilbao there was also a clear rejection during the discussion of 'closeness' and 'being one of us' with reference to regional (Basque) nationalism. This was probably related to the group's composition, which lacked outspoken nationalists but was politically articulate<sup>xix</sup>. These white male, non-religious participants spoke of gender and race equality as part of rational arguments for tolerance and diversity, but also considered gender, religion and race to be unimportant considerations for them in choosing representatives.

As to the majority white women from capital cities, composed of homemakers, employees, and professionals, they shared several preferences with the majority men, but also expressing preferences on national and religious grounds in three countries: the representatives should be Polish/Macedonian-Orthodox/Spanish. This was probably a reflection of the fact that these were majority women, ie *not* members of the Muslim Albanian population of Macedonia and in the case of Madrid, *not* Catalans, and were virtually the only examples of a minor level of 'resemblance' representation expressed by majority white women in those countries. Otherwise hardly any wanted to be represented by someone close to her own profile (option 'someone like me, with the same background as me'). But the UK white women did prefer someone who 'understands the life of people like me, even if their background is different' over the other options. UK/London women also stood out from the others for being the only ones to like a dual system of representation with one male and one female MP for each constituency, and to prefer female to male representatives at a rate of 3:1 (though this did not rank high enough among their priorities to be in Figure 1). London women were equally unusual for preferring representatives to be from mixed backgrounds rather than (historically) British in terms of ethnic origin. In other words, London women did warm to aspects of descriptive

representation on gender grounds, and showed an awareness of the multi-ethnicity of their city (currently consisting of 30% racial minorities and 12% white foreigners) but they did so without wanting a 'mirror' representative from their own social background or their own ethnicity. This could be interpreted as a different order of responses altogether, from people who looked beyond themselves and perceived the needs of others to be included.

When analysing the four groups of Muslim women, consideration must be given to their different situations and heritages. Muslims in Macedonia and Poland are indigenous to the country and wholly unconnected to current waves of migration.<sup>xx</sup> The groups from Leicester and Barcelona, respectively British by birth and Spanish by naturalisation, were familiar with the Islam of migrants from earlier (South East Asian) and current (Moroccan) migrations, respectively. Yet in aggregate, these Muslim women were the only participants to highly rank the Muslim faith as the chief characteristic of anyone who could make them feel represented. Being a Muslim was significantly more important to those from Leicester, Bialystok and Barcelona than having a knowledgeable and well-trained representative, who, by contrast was the priority among Macedonian Muslims. And all the Leicester Muslim women preferred being represented by a man, in contrast both to the Skopje Muslim women who preferred to be represented by a woman (though not as a high priority) and to the London women, who preferred a gender balance.

Finally, it was notable that the religion of an ideal representative was much more important than his or her ethnic origin for Muslim women in Skopje, Barcelona and Leicester, but not for the Polish Tatars in Bialystok, for whom a Tatar representative was their top preferred characteristic and a Muslim their second. In sum, although there were clear contrasts to be found among Muslim women within their general preference for 'closeness' and 'resemblance' representation, in aggregate Muslim women ranked descriptive representation, mirroring their own religion, their ethnic origin or their gender, the highest.

## **5. Conclusions**

The present study fills a gap in the literature on political representation, particularly in the sub-field devoted to examining the relations between elected parliamentarians and the citizens of their districts. Specifically, the literature review found that the citizen's perspective on such relations and links was a neglected field of study because most research focuses on parliamentarians, not the represented. Only Carman and Baxter

looked at constituents' preferences, but in terms of whether they expect an MP to represent their constituency, their party, or all voters, which is not the subject of the present study.

By applying the qualitative methods of the discussion group, combined with a paper exercise allowing individuals to express firm preferences from among a set of options reflecting the themes discussed previously, the present study was able to gather a large new data set with complex information on citizens' ideals for their representation with some rich information about the different preferences along gender, ethnicity and religious lines. Additionally the study introduces a comparative perspective covering four countries. The goal of uncovering citizens' and residents' feelings in relation to their political representation thus proved feasible and fruitful.

The qualitative method of discussion groups was able to reveal how citizens employ two voices to discuss politics. The first voice is an unprompted, apparently spontaneous one, homogeneous across Europe, with which all politicians, parties and politics are criticised in virtually identical terms. Yet despite their readiness to dismiss or condemn, the surprise of this study was to hear participants' equal readiness to be thoughtful and their ability to voice constructive views.<sup>xxi</sup> This second voice warms to the possibility of having more contact with their representatives and of becoming better informed, with many welcoming the chance of having a two-way conversation about policies and public matters of concern to them. Explaining the initial homogeneity and questioning the apparent spontaneity of what one could call the 'front' or 'front-of-house' voice versus a 'latent' or 'off-stage' voice is an interesting issue for further research.

The message of the 'latent' or 'off-stage' voice is that current legislators in the countries of the study are not seen to be acting as representatives, being mostly nameless and invisible. For citizens to feel represented, they would have to perform as representatives and legislators in inclusive, informative and transparent ways. More, and different, forms of interaction are the demand of the latent voice. New methods of representing constituents are called for, with parliamentarians providing regular brief reports on their parliamentary activity to those who want them, so as to justify their elected and salaried positions; encouraging large-scale individual<sup>xxii</sup> constituents' discursive engagement with public problems via email or websites; and creating a greater visual presence for themselves in their district by instituting a system of public notices with their photograph and website

details. These are the sorts of actions and interactions that would help people feel represented, underlining the point made in other studies mentioned above, that personal exchanges with constituents, even once, makes them feel more included.

As to the question of who should represent whom in order for citizens to feel represented, the analysis presented here (involving mainly the majority men's, majority women's, and Muslim women's groups) revealed a lesser attachment to descriptive or 'resemblance' representation than could have been predicted. Overall, participants eschewed a 'same as me' resemblance in their ideal representatives, though it was not unimportant for Muslim women and for the mixed ethnic minority groups in aggregate (not analysed in depth here). Furthermore, it was revealing to hear how a sense of personal efficacy could be gained among majority men and women by dealing with a local councillor or with local problems, coupled with the satisfaction of being able to actually observe, or note the absence of, local improvements. It raises the issue of whether such 'nearness' is a substitute for 'resemblance' as spatial proximity could also generate feelings of inclusion by making the local representative appear 'one of us'. Such questions need to be revisited with use of quantitative data.

Does this imply that the British model of MPs performing constituency work is one that should be exported to Spain, Macedonia or Poland? At first glance it does. Residents in countries where elected representatives feel no obligation to visit their district or take up issues on behalf of individuals are highly critical and disappointed with their politicians. Gaining their approval would require a change of behaviour among many Polish, Macedonian and Spanish elected representatives at regional and national level, despite some indications that this has already started. This is also the belief of the US Democratic Party, whose National Democracy Institute in Macedonia is provisioning parliamentarians of all political parties with a planned 75 offices spread across all regions, so as to persuade them to travel there and meet with residents and voters (Henshaw 2008 interview).

But this study also revealed that participants did not seize the idea of being *serviced* by legislators, with some considering it an inappropriate waste of their time. They envisaged that even councillors would attend to neighbourhood problems rather than individual ones. The issue raised therefore is whether in an age of extended higher education and almost

cost-free electronic communications, the representational relationship needs to be created, expanded and strengthened. For this to be possible without overloading the deputies with work, individual servicing would have to be reduced, moving from representation based on client-helper relations to policy-advocacy relations. The increased presence of experienced and regulated local authority departments and specialist voluntary bodies, together with national and regional figures of the Ombudsperson/Defender of the People, parliamentary complaints commissions, and citizens' advice bureaux, could all substitute parliamentarians from much servicing work. Furthermore, previous studies also showed that the constituency service model had flaws: representatives with heavy caseloads were burdened; cases too often contained no politics or representation issues; and British MPs still failed to reach half of their district residents, let alone to satisfy them, despite their best efforts.

The present study provides qualitative evidence for the desirability of exporting the concept of parliamentarians' accountability and local presence found in single-member systems to PR systems, where this is not in place. But it also suggests reforming it so that developing relations between 'representor' and 'representee' become part of the wider efforts to engage citizens in politics and policymaking. Such closer interaction could generate trust and be an antidote to the problem of disaffection with the political class, for, as Dalton (2007: Ch.9) claims, relatively educated and affluent citizens whose values have become more post-material and whose scepticism about their government has risen, still remain attached to democratic norms. Reinforcing the feeling among citizens that they have representatives is once such norm.

## Appendix

YOUR IDEAL POLITICAL REPRESENTATIVE: the most important factors and characteristics that will make you feel more represented politically.

1. Read each HORIZONTAL line of boxes > TICK ONE box, the one that is most important to you

2. Then look at all your ticked boxes and order them from 8 (top priority) 8, 7, 6, 5, 4, 3, 2, to 1 (lowest priority) IN ORDER OF IMPORTANCE TO YOU

What NUMBER of representatives is best for you?	One single representative per constituency (eg. UK)	One single representative, but 2 rounds of voting (a second chance to choose, eg France)	Several representatives in each constituency (eg. many other EU countries)	One MALE and one FEMALE representative
What GEOGRAPHICAL LEVEL is most important for you?	Local: Councillor	Regional:	National:	European Parliament MEP
What TYPE OF CONTACT is best for you?	Frequent contact: my representative should behave as if s/he were my delegate	Periodic/regular: I would like to comunicate my views + receive regular information from them by post or email	Intermittent/irregular: I would like to have contact only when I need it, eg by accessing their webpage	Infrequent: I trust the representative to legislate on my behalf as they think fit
What kind of IDEAS AND POLICIES would your ideal representative have?	Should be strictly committed to those of the party she or he belongs to	Should express those of their party but be flexible when implementing them in practise	Should have their own independent views and be willing to dissent from their party	Should not be aligned to a party or ideology, and be able to decide on policies as needed.
What KIND OF PERSON would you feel most represented by?	Someone like me, with the same background as me	Someone who understands the life of people like me even if their background is different	Someone who is very knowledgeable, experienced and well-trained	Someone who is appealing, +communicates well even if not very experienced
The Ethnic ORIGIN of the representative you prefer?	Fully English	Your background or ethnic origin (specify)	Another background or ethnic origin (specify)	A mixed background or ethnic origin (specify?)
The RELIGION of the representative you would prefer	Protestant	Muslim	Another religion eg Catholic	No religion
The GENDER of your preferred representative, if forced to choose, e.g. between two equally good candidates		Female	Male	

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<sup>i</sup> When their district is far from Westminster, financial compensation encourages MPs to rent or buy a second home in the constituency to maximise their presence there.

<sup>ii</sup> Such as the indicators used in Hansard Society's annual *Audit of Political Engagement* that explore (e.g. 2005 version, p. 7, Figure 1) knowledge of and interest in politics, behaviour (activism, voting), and confidence in the system.

<sup>iii</sup> The term citizens is used in preference to voters in order to de-emphasise their voting function, but participants included some ethnic minority non-nationals and nationals of other EU countries.

<sup>iv</sup> The term 'representative' is used to refer to the person whom citizens understand to have been elected for their district, 'legislator' is used when referring to parliamentary activity, 'parliamentarian' for either function, MP for the UK, and deputy for Spain, Poland and Macedonia.

<sup>v</sup> Of the 329 backbenchers interviewed that he was able to classify as playing a typical role, only 81 - just under a quarter - ended up classified as clearly 'Constituency MPs' (Searing 1994:144), though most others did some constituency work.

<sup>vi</sup> See for instance Operation Black Vote in the UK.

<sup>vii</sup> Seven candidates were placed too low on their list or in un-winnable seats (Shepherd, Garvey and Cavanagh 2001: 92).

<sup>viii</sup> Participants in discussion groups are chosen to have similar but slightly different profiles and provide a way of discovering new preferences. These may happen to reflect those of the bulk of the population, or of a substantial minority, or of very few, but this would not be known until a sample survey had been carried out. Discussion groups or focus groups are considered to reveal more information about an issue than surveys, while the latter tell us more about the information's quantitative distribution across populations.

<sup>ix</sup> The style of moderation was chosen to encourage all to speak and to engender creative thinking in a deliberative style while keeping to the topic guide throughout. Digression was discouraged after an initial warm-up so that all 20 groups of 8 people covered the whole range of set topics in a comparable way for two hours each.

<sup>x</sup> The study did not attempt to investigate difference by age, given the groups' overall high levels of diversity.

<sup>xi</sup> For reasons of space, these are not included in the analysis.

<sup>xii</sup> The reasons for such *homogeneity* of unprompted expression is in itself worthy of investigation, a task beyond the scope of the present study.

<sup>xiii</sup> The wording of the options in the box-matrix was developed according to the participants' understanding of the alternatives facing them, so participants were offered variations on a theme

<sup>xiv</sup> Discussed in terms of an interaction where the emphasis was on district residents actively urging their representative(s) to vote a certain way on specific legislation in national, regional or local assemblies, ideally in a system where s/he would be forced to vote according to constituents' views.

<sup>xv</sup> Discussed as a two-way interaction or dialogue on issues and policies, in which it was accepted that the representatives were ultimately free to decide in the legislative assembly which policy was best.

<sup>xvi</sup> Discussed as what happens and is acceptable in practice because they only exceptionally have strong opinions on something; and as the option for those who would only contact a representative if they had a serious problem.

<sup>xvii</sup> Discussed as the option for those who are not very interested in having contact and wanted the representatives to just do their job.

<sup>xviii</sup> Probably disaffected people would not have agreed to participate, reflecting a comparable problem to survey respondents who 'don't know'/'no answer'. Recruiters were instructed to invite voters (one-off or regular) and non-voters who nevertheless were interested in politics to participate, as the study was not analysing the reasons for non-engagement. Some participants did find it difficult to engage, but only 4 were unable to contribute meaningfully.

<sup>xix</sup> Participants were not screened for their political views as it was not feasible to apply uniform criteria in all countries.

<sup>xx</sup> Muslim participants from Leicester and Barcelona were familiar with the Islam of migrants from earlier (South East Asian) or current (Moroccan) migrations, respectively. All had British and Spanish nationality and the right to vote. Those from Skopje and Bialystok are indigenous European Muslims representing respectively a historic population of ethnic Albanians with place-specific identities within the territory of FYR Macedonia, and a small community of Lipka Tatars who settled in what was the Polish Lithuanian Commonwealth of the 16-17<sup>th</sup> centuries.

<sup>xxi</sup> This is comparable to the 'deliberative democracy' method of information-building sessions with groups of 20 or more, where one Canadian Government report states: 'The deliberative democracy sessions yielded more insightful and considered opinions from the public compared to the data obtained through the national survey' (Transport Canada 2003)

<sup>xxii</sup> The *individual* is stressed because participants did not see themselves as members of pressure groups, and parliamentarians' dialogue with these is already established in all countries.