



D1.3: The forms and dimensions of the “representative disconnect”

WP1 Analytical framework: The system of democratic representation – its ecology and forms of disconnect

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1 Introduction

As said in WP1's previous reports, this Work Package aims to offer an analytical and theoretical framework for our REDIRECT research project. The first two reports (D1.1 and D1.2) addressed Objective 1 and Task 1 of WP1. They were the results of our first year of research, discussions within the REDIRECT research group, and engagement with the larger community of experts and scholars working in this area. Those included in our SAB and others with whom we have been involved in several workshops and other scientific dissemination activities. D1.1 offered a general stylised view of the main object of our study (representative democracy and its status of "flux"), while D1.2 elaborated upon an important element of our approach, namely the view that the mechanisms and processes of democratic representation need to be looked at from a more systemic perspective, as an "ecology" and not as a simple binary relationship¹

D1.3 is central to our second year of research. It directly addresses Objective 1.2 and Task 1.2 of WP1: to try to make sense of what we call the "representative disconnect", as well as to offer a first analytical view of its characters and dimensions. This task has proved more difficult and time-consuming than originally thought. As we readily admit, these unforeseen difficulties result from an over-optimistic view (mainly of WP1's lead researcher) concerning the possibility of clearly and quickly identifying the aspects of the disconnect, given the widely shared diagnoses to be found in much of the specialised literature. Such optimism underestimated the intricate way in which various elements of the disconnect feed into each other and how the working of institutions, in determined socio-historical conditions, interact with shared social expectations and symbolic meanings. Unpacking the complex patchwork of processes and transformations—social, cultural, ideational, organisational, and institutional—characterising the "representative disconnect" has proved to be a longer-term job than anticipated. A further difficulty arose from our underestimation of being able to provide a theoretical and analytical view of the disconnect without, at the same time, engaging in the empirical and applied part of the research. Understanding the nature of the disconnect depends as much on identifying its nature and manifestation as on the strategies of "reconnection" and "redirection". In other words, describing and analysing the "disconnect" in purely theoretical and analytical terms runs the risk of presenting it as a "vacuum" in social, political, and institutional relations. Like in nature, there is no real vacuum in social life. If there is, it is exceptional and strictly circumscribed, irrelevant from a practical perspective, and of minimal theoretical value.

More than in the case of the previous reports, this is very much a work-in-progress report. Nonetheless, despite the difficulties mentioned above and our underestimation of them, this report tries to offer a preliminary assessment of the representative disconnect and unpack its main features. It does so by providing more than one perspective from which to analyse it, aware as we are that the manifestation of the disconnect looks like a patchwork of complex processes and transformations impinging on the working of representative democracy as an institutional system and on democratic representation as a socio-political ecology (for this distinction, see D1.2). Reflecting its work-in-progress fashion, the report may look like a list of empirical phe-

¹On the notion of representative ecology, see Castiglione and Warren (2013; 2019). A more detailed account of this theoretical ground has already been presented in the previous REDIRECT (WP1) deliverables.

nomena and normative problems. We hope, however, that the analytical lenses from which we look at them and the normative framework within which we analyse them may give sense to the list. We aim to offer ways in which this list may serve as a helpful starting point for our empirical and applied research, as well as for suggesting several re-connection and re-direction strategies.

Before we start with our analysis, we would like to say something about our initial intuition on the “representative disconnect”, what we mean by it, how it links to our views of representative democracy and democratic representation outlined in D1.1 and D1.2, and how distinctive we think such views are. In designing our project, we defined the “representative disconnect” as:

“A multidimensional phenomenon of regression of the demos-kratos linkage involving institutional, behavioural and affective components, which risks undermining the trust in and legitimacy of the overall system of democratic representation.”

Besides stressing the weakening of such linkage and how this undermined both social trust and political legitimacy (meant as both consent and assent), we emphasised that, at the core of democratic representation, there is an interactive conception of the:

“linking of citizens and governing elites [...] in a two-directional way. Without such a connection, political representation is not democratic.”

We went on to argue that a series of changes and transformations in the political, communicative, and social environments, as well as the scale of political problems in modern societies, were affecting that interactive linkage. This ended up creating:

“a palpable disconnect between the governing capacity of the institutions and the political elites, on the one hand, and the opinion formation and consent-building processes involving the citizens, on the other hand.”

The most obvious manifestation of the disconnect is the weakening of the links between citizens and representatives or the political class at large. However, as already remarked, the conviction underlying our research project is—first and foremost—that the representative links need to be seen as a complex ecosystem. Second, the causes and manifestations of the disconnect are not exclusively to be found in this process of intermediation—intermediation disconnect: functioning of electoral and representative institutions, organisation and role of parties and party leaderships, political information and communication, political activism and electoral participation. Third, the representative disconnect comprises at least two other dimensions. On the one hand, there is the governance and accountability disconnect, which has to do with the location of political decision-making outside representative institutions, the limited reach of democratic influence and control, and the mechanisms and institutions through which governing is produced and controlled. On the other hand, there exists an affective disconnect, which has to do with the general attitudes towards politics of citizens and political elites, as well as with the way in which citizens, groups, and parties develop affective allegiances or political identities in function—or sometimes against—the democratic community and its *modus operandi*.

The three dimensions of the disconnect are not entirely separate. Often, they are equally affected by the same kind of social, cultural, or institutional transformations. Moreover, changes in another dimension also affect one dimension of the disconnect. Despite such interrelation between them, we shall discuss them separately in the rest of this report, highlighting, however, when and how they seem to either meet or influence each other.

2 Two premises to start with

We start our analysis of the disconnect dimensions by making two premises, which may help clarify the scope and extent of our analysis and what we aim to achieve in our project. In D1.1 and D1.2, we argued that the working of representative democracy—and more generally of the ecology of democratic representation—need to be seen within their socio-historical context. This can also vary according to national and cultural contexts, so we should preferably talk of representative democracies in the plural. However, the historical development of a broadly similar set of institutions, practices, and social/institutional imaginaries across several countries—primarily within Europe and more broadly among OECD countries—allows us to define representative democracy as a relatively stable object of study and analysis. This is further reinforced by the set of ideals that both first-order political discourses and scientific reflections attach to it, as well as the (often contested) ideational narratives they weave around its histories. In the previous reports, we also emphasised how the socio-historical contexts have contributed to shaping the institutions and practices of representative democracy and its wider representation ecology. Although some of the macro-aspects of these historical contexts could be said to have had a robust causal influence in the formation and success of representative democracy as a modern form of government², we think of these causal relations as contingent rather than logically and normatively necessary. Also, we see the development and transformation of the institutional architecture of representative democracy as affected by both endogenous and exogenous causes. Some of the current phenomena that may appear as forms of disconnect of the complex link between citizens and representatives may indeed be the result of changing social conditions that had originally contributed to shaping the representative institutions and practices of democratic societies. These social conditions may no longer apply to the contemporary world, something that inevitably reflects on the institutions and practices of the representative ecosystem. If it is impossible to think that we may return to the previous conditions, then the only way forward is to adapt the institutions and practices to the new conditions, maintaining the effectiveness of the ecosystem and its broad legitimacy as much as possible. The continuous transformation of media communication and technology over the last eighty years is perhaps the most obvious case. The important point to take home from this observation is that it is wrong to think of the institutions and practices of the representative system and, more generally, of the ecology of democratic representation in static terms. We need to be sensitive to the fact that this ecosystem is not only evolving but that its capacity to function more or less effectively and legitimately—a kind of general equilibrium within which it operates—depends on both the conditions in which it operates and its inner capacity for producing and reproducing itself. In other

²It is difficult to think of modern representative democracy without considering the formation of the modern state and industrial society, for instance.

words, not every change and transformation in the conditions and operations of the eco-system results in a disconnect or produces a kind of linkage failure or vacuum. New links may appear, and the functional operations of intermediation may adapt to the new background or institutional conditions in which the ecosystem operates. Alternatively, the ecosystem may perhaps find a new and different equilibrium that may satisfy its broad social purpose and some of its core underlying values. It is often assumed in the literature that one of the virtues of modern democratic political systems (which have taken the historical form of representative democracy) is that they have proved to be effective systems of social learning. They demonstrate an ability to learn from policy mistakes, adapt to social and cultural innovation, remain open to criticism and new experiments, and sustain a certain level of popular support over time. Of course, from our perspective, the ecosystem is also subject to malfunctioning, pathologies, or even collapse. Such failures do not spontaneously adjust but need addressing through various means. We refer to these as forms of the “representative disconnect”. However, they are not a disconnect in an ontological sense, so to speak. Instead, they should be understood as a disconnect in the more pragmatist sense of being amenable to processes of re-connection or re-direction (even though there may not be any certainty of success). The fact that they are a form of disconnect also depends on the fact that they can be treated as such: that we can change, adapt, transform, and design new institutions and practices or build them upon new emerging social, cultural, and technological capacities to help the working and legitimacy of the ecosystem of democratic representation.

The second premise concerns how we imagine the disconnect, particularly the intermediation disconnect. Although this may not be so evident in the modern digital world, it is easy to think of disconnection as the missing link in a chain or the lack of a bond between two entities. This image of a material link is evident in the way in which representation is often thought of as a transmission belt, as the simple delegation of a task whose content is well-defined: the passing from one person (the principal) to another (the agent) of a clear wish or opinion, the reflection of a definite identitarian trait, or a clearly understood interest and perspective. As part of our project—and taking on board some of the more constructivist and reflexive literature—we are trying to move away from a mechanical understanding of representation as a transmission belt or reproduction, as well as from a physical understanding of the disconnection as a gap or a missing link. These views of the disconnect tend to imagine citizens and representatives as separate, often framing the political process as based on stark distinctions between input and output or between supply and demand in politics. Although research based on such distinctions and separations may help us analyse how democratic representation works or does not work, they can be partial and misleading. It tends to miss how the transformations of modern politics result from interactive processes between the input and demands of the citizens as the output and supply of the governing elites. As part of our research, we wish to investigate the disconnect in ways that go beyond a more mechanical idea of a failure of connection:

- ways that understand such failures as the dynamic result of the interaction between different mechanisms and causes;
- ways that consider how the “agents” (the citizens, the representatives, the political class,

the media, and civil society organisations) understand and practice their respective roles within the ecosystem of democratic representation;

- ways that map how social, organisational, and technological changes contribute to transforming the political experience or the very idea of doing, participating, and observing politics;
- ways that consider how the complexity of modern society and the increasing interdependence of collective choices across time and space may fail to be reflected in the political division of labour as embodied in the current representative ecosystem;
- ways that pay attention to the very fabric of the ecosystem of democratic representation and its difficulty in providing a decision-making process that reflects its underlying principles of democratic unity (i.e. decisions are directly or somewhat indirectly made by those who are affected by them), and representative diversity (that in making decisions different perspectives, interests, opinions, claims and forms self-identifications are appropriately represented and/or recognised).

The other important way our idea of the disconnect departs from a more mechanical—and narrowly empiricist—understanding of the disconnect is that it sees democratic representation as an inherently (and normatively qualified) interactive process. In our proposal, we referred to the image of the “zone of engagement” used by Peter Mair (2013: 16) to illustrate the process of democratic representation. We understand such a zone of engagement as working vertically and horizontally in society, involving engagement in the institutional system and/or representation ecology. For the various agents to effectively engage, they must acquire certain attitudinal and value presuppositions that the ecosystem should encourage or facilitate them to practice. Moreover, as discussed in D1.2, the zone of engagement requires an institutional mediation system between parties/political institutions and citizens and a wider form of intermediation, contributing to the binding nature of representative politics and a more diffuse trust in politics. Such a conception of the zone of engagement is open to a more constructivist understanding of politics and representation, where the perspectives and identities of the political agents are constructed interactively in the very process of political representation and decision-making and not simply reflected by the representatives or—conversely—imposed by the political class. Therefore, repairing the representative disconnect does not merely mean re-establishing a form of communication and mechanical responsiveness between the masses and the political class. It also entails repairing the “zone of engagement” as a complex ecosystem through which citizens and representatives at different levels can interact to arrive at a considered democratic judgement about the political decisions to be made and the overall political direction of the democratic polity (a direction that, in so far as it is democratic, remains open to change and adaptation in response to new contexts, while ideally remaining responsive to social learning). In representative democracies, such democratic judgement is—by definition—the result of deliberation and political competition. Therefore, the zone of engagement (at least in ideal theory) needs to provide the institutions for both these processes and the conditions in which deliberation and political competition can occur in a spirit of democratic unity and recognition.

3 The intermediation disconnect

Although many theoretical—particularly normative—discussions of political representation normally tend to focus on the role of parliaments and parliamentarians as the main institutions linking citizens to the process of governing, there is no doubt that the main institutions that have played such a role since the 20th century are the parties and the party system. Empirical, more positive, and sociologically-inclined political theory has been more alert to the role of parties in democratic representation. Consequently, an analysis of the intermediation disconnect must perforce focus on the role of the parties. Indeed, as we shall discuss more in a different section, Bernard Manin (1997) has advanced the influential suggestion that the present phase in modern representative government consists of a move from a “party democracy” to an “audience democracy”. In the specialised literature and political discourse at large, there is a widespread belief that the present crisis of representation is the consequence of the crisis of parties and party politics. Peter Mair’s (2013) analysis of the “hollowing out of democracy” and of what he describes as the evacuation of the “zone of engagement” is mainly an analysis of how parties and the democratic party system are no longer working as that zone of engagement.

In addition to examining the role of parties, this section shall look at forms of disconnect that may be relevant in other areas of the zone of engagement between citizens and political decision-makers. These areas comprise the main institutions of political representation, which remain (at least nominally) the depository of the legislative power (parliamentary assembly in the first instance, though the situation is more complex in presidential, federal and devolved regimes). Additional areas include the information media and the public sphere in general, the organisations and voluntary associations in civil society, and the mobilisation of public opinion and social movements around particular causes or general issues. But we start with the institution that, as we saw in D1.2, is often put at the centre of representative democracy as the fundamental mechanism for the democratic authorisation of representatives and their accountability to popular opinion: the elections.

3.1 Elections

As part of the zone of engagement, elections can be said to play three main roles: normative, identitarian, and symbolic. These roles can be assessed from the point of view of either their meanings or effectiveness within the ecosystem of representative democracy. We may say something about the normative role later in the section concerning the governing and accountability disconnect. Here, we focus on the other two roles, which are more relevant to how elections engage citizens than their effect on governing. However, there is a more general issue about whether elections are so central to the democratic nature of modern representative democracies, an issue often associated with understanding the relation between democratic procedures and other more substantive or ideal values attributed to democratic regimes: constitutional, liberal, and social. The issue has become central to discussions about post-democracy (Crouch 2004, 2011), technocratic and populist forms of democracy, and (more recently) democratic

backsliding³.

This debate raises the question of the centrality of elections in modern democracy, putting in doubt whether elections are a necessary and sufficient criterion for regimes to be considered democratic. The debate is not new, and there is also an extensive literature on the “quality” of democracy and the “measuring” of democracy (see, for instance, Bågenholm et al. 2021, part III; Diamond & Morlino 2005), which implicitly suggest that elections are necessary but far from sufficient to qualify a regime as a democracy—some talk of electoral autocracy or electoral authoritarianism (Morse 2012). Although important, these debates do not speak directly to the disconnect. They are more about different conceptions of democracy, which we may leave aside in the context of this report.

In terms of identification, elections seem to play two main roles: identification with the logic; rules and underlying values of the democratic game⁴; and identification with the party, movement, ideology or political outlook that voters support in the electoral process. The latter identification is often cited as the solution to the voter paradox, providing expressive and not merely instrumental reasons for voting (Pizzorno 1983). Voters’ identification is like football fans’ identification: with the sport and a team. There may be obvious tensions between these two forms of identification, but they are both important. Voters’ abstention and volatility (for a synthetic assessment of trends, see Mair 2013, 22-34) are often regarded as symptoms of a weakening of the elections’ role in these identification processes: respectively, with the democratic game and with parties. There are complex reasons for electoral volatility and abstention, which may go beyond dissatisfaction with democracy or parties. It is questionable, for instance, that abstention can be simply attributed to general political or civic apathy or lack of civic education. As for volatility, this may be influenced as much by shifts in social attitudes as by political ones, including changes in lifestyle, education, social interaction patterns, and intergenerational relationships. Broadening the spectrum of causes for abstention and volatility has analytical and policy implications for the research on the role that elections play within the zone of engagement of citizens and political decision-makers. It opens questions not only about how to restore the role of elections in fostering political identification but also about whether this role could be fulfilled through alternative channels or if elections might assume a different function altogether. On the other hand, reflecting on the particular role that elections play in supporting the political identity of democratic citizens may also invite us to reflect on whether and how new technology may affect such a role. Such reflection offers a different perspective on whether such technological changes may support the social identification role by facilitating the practice of voting or may indeed jeopardise the identification function by reducing the perceived costs of the election—and, therefore, their “value”. This would make voting a more isolated and routine act, undermining the sense that it is a form of participation in a collective act.

³Literature on technocracy, populism and backsliding is too extensive to mention. However, the conceptual discussion developed here refers to the following works. On the notion of populism, cfr. Mudde (2004); Kaltwasser et. al. 2016; Mudde & Kaltwasser (2017). On the notion of technocracy, see Friedman (2020), Caramani (2017), Bertou & Caramani (2020). On the notion of democratic backsliding and other similar concepts, see Bermeo (2016), Waldner & Lust (2018); Levitsky & Ziblatt (2018), Inglehart & Norris (2019); Wolkenstein (2023).

⁴This is also related to the pacifying function historically played by the elections, which we mentioned in the previous reports.

The last point relates more directly to the symbolic and ceremonial role that elections play in democratic representation, something to be distinguished from its normative role but also from its more strictly identitarian role. Although rituals may sometimes debase the event's value in modern societies, ritualistic practices may serve as public recognition and reinforcement of traditions and the values attached to them. As noted in D1.1, elections' political role and importance is not unchanging but may depend on historical periods and circumstances. Its significance is not unambiguous. As Bernard Manin (1997) pointed out, the underlying principle of selection conveyed by the elections is based on distinction rather than equality. There has indeed been a revival in the idea of sortition and the lottery instrument as a more egalitarian way of selecting political positions (see Sintomer 2023). Apart from other arguments on the advantages and disadvantages of elections over sortition, doing away with elections would mean doing away with the symbolic aspects of elections, how they are a collective ritual in which the whole population participates. Particularly nowadays, after the many struggles for universal suffrage, the ritual of the elections still carries an emancipatory meaning, embodying important symbolic egalitarian and participatory ideals that may not be equally conveyed by sortition. If elections need to be revived as an important moment of the zone of engagement, their symbolism must also be studied and considered.

3.2 Parliaments and other institutions with legislative powers

As already noted, legislative assemblies remain, in political discourse as well as in the social and institutional imaginary, the paradigmatic example of representative democracy. Their role as part of the zone of engagement in the history of modern representative democracy has been plagued by two persistent and interconnected problems. One concerns the nature of the legislative assembly, seen either as a corporate body (or an "organ" of the state, as described in institutionalist Franco-German constitutional theory of the 19th and 20th century) representing the electoral/democratic community (the nation, the people) as a whole or as an aggregation of representatives from separate districts and constituencies coming together to decide matters of general interests. The other related tension is about how representatives are meant to act—to use Hannah Pitkin's (1967) expression—in their role as representatives: as trustees (free mandate in constitutional language) or as delegates (imperative mandate). Historically and constitutionally, particularly within the context of unitary and centralised forms of state, the accepted solution has been to see the assembly as a unified body and the representatives as trustees⁵. In the practice of representation, as well as in the social and institutional imaginary (including citizens' perceptions and representative self-perception), the distinctions remain much less definite, something reflected in the way in which parliamentarians often act or justify their actions and in the way in which citizens judge them. More nuanced distinctions have been introduced in recent literature (Mansbridge 2003), reflecting the complex phenomenology of how citizens may vote or how representatives think they are acting.

Nonetheless, both distinctions are politically and normatively important and have an intrinsic

⁵Burke's famous speech is often cited in support of this view, even though he was repeating a well-established position in the English political debate of the time. At the same time, Bernard Manin (1997) includes the independence of representatives as a defining element of representative government.

analytic logic. Their intrinsic tensions (on the status of parliaments and how parliamentarians should act) and the complications coming from their combination seem unavoidable. As remarked in D1.1 and D1.2, such tensions are further highlighted by the combination of democracy and representation. Such a combination is pulled between the principles of unity in decision and diversity in how different perspectives are brought together.

The ambiguity resulting from these overlapping tensions creates problems at both normative and empirical levels. Some of these are also explored and illuminated through surveys. See, for instance, the analysis of locus and focus in D2.1. More to the point, the discrepancies between a phenomenological assessment of the overlapping representative relationships (citizens/constituencies and parliament/parliamentarians) and the (self-)perceptions of citizens and political decision-makers provide plenty of opportunities for misrecognition and misjudgement. In other words, for a representative disconnect. But there are several new reasons for the disconnect to have recently become more acute. We list them here somewhat schematically:

- The role of parliaments and parliamentarians within the representative system is dominated by a double relationship: with citizens/electors/constituencies on the one hand and with their parties on the other. This complicates both their role (and self-perception of the role), the citizens' perception of what they can demand from their parliaments and parliamentarians, and their awareness of what their representatives are actually meant to do or can do. The relationship between voters and electors also changes in relation to the nature of the electoral system and the party system in place. The problems connected to the parliamentary representatives' dual relationship with the electors and their own parties are also affected by the party's internal transformation, affecting how parliamentarians link with their citizens/electors.
- For a long time, the professionalisation of politics has affected the parliamentarians' selection, status, and incentive structure. In the past decades, however, the professionalisation of politics may have further incentivised what Peter Mair calls the "withdrawal of elites" (2013, 75-98). Even in those cases where politicians' social and educational formation may have been closer to the average electorate or reflected greater social diversity, their socialisation within the political profession has rapidly made them part of the social elite. In a few cases, particularly for people with a more prominent role in politics and government, this also increases the phenomena of the politics of revolving doors, influencing their behaviour through calculative and ex-ante incentives.
- From the point of view of their relationship with the citizens, the transformation of the media environment (particularly with the introduction of social media) has greatly changed the communication environment in which parliamentarians operate. This has created new opportunities for communication with the citizens and their constituency. It has also introduced several new risks and a powerful disincentive to either entering into politics or engaging with the public.
- At a more systemic level, parliaments and parliamentarians are caught in a gap that is

also relevant to the working of parties and, more generally, to the governing disconnect between the world of public opinion and problem-solving (Mair 2012 and Papadopoulos 2010). We shall say more about this in the section on the governance and accountability disconnect.

- Finally, perhaps the most significant problem concerning the role that legislative assemblies play within the institutional system of representation is the draining away of their effective decision-making power and legislative capacity (this may be more so in the European context, though in different degrees). The loss of legislative capacity is more directly due to the increasing power of the executive branch, both in terms of their tendency to legislate by decrees and by their dominance of the agenda of parliamentary legislation. But the loss of parliamentary power in legislation is also due to the expansion of direct and indirect legislation from supra- and sub-national bodies, as well as the increasing importance that administrative discretion has in the application of legislation as the result of how modern legislation takes the form of policy frameworks rather than general legislation. Another cause can be found in the expansion of privatised and delegated forms of power and regulation across services of public relevance, which increases power to the executive vis-à-vis the legislative.

More than ten years ago, David Beetham asked: “Do parliaments have a future?” (2011). His answer was overall optimistic, based partly on a review of the kind of reforms already undertaken by a few parliaments (Beetham 2006) and on several suggestions that he thought would enhance citizens’ engagement with parliaments, such as integrating deliberative forums, citizen initiative and consultative mechanisms more deeply within the parliamentary process. Suggestions like these pose the question of whether, in the absence of any realistic hope to return parliaments to their old place at the centre of the political will formation process, the best strategies of reconnection are more transversal and more connected to the opinion-formation process and the political direction task. For instance: by promoting citizens’ presence in parliamentary work and processes; using parliaments to discuss more publicly general questions and long-term policies; using parliamentary committees for transparency and public accountability of governments; or for canvassing problem-solving initiatives.

3.3 Parties and party system

As already suggested and as widely recognised in the literature, the transformation of the parties and the party system is central to what is normally referred to as the crisis of representation and representative politics in contemporary democracies. This theme on its own could be the object of the entire research project. In our case, we treat it as part of our more general analysis of the representative disconnect. Therefore, our attention to it can only be limited in scope and partly derivative of the vast literature and empirical research already available. In this section of the report, we offer a brief summary of how parties are central to the representative disconnect, how their changing roles and internal evolution have contributed, and how their transformation relates to other forms and dimensions of the disconnect. Therefore, this overview is necessarily schematic.

We start by using the scholarly debate on party types as a rough guide to our analysis, also referring to the question of partisanship. This theme has recently returned to the attention of normative theorists and is germane to an investigation of party systems. Regarding party types, the introduction of the “cartel party” by Katz & Mair (for more, see Mair 2014, Katz & Mair 2009) is a valuable entry to our understanding of the disconnect. Their approach to the current state of parties rejects the simple idea that they are in crisis, looking instead at their functional and internal transformation as a dynamic process. The disconnect is not the result of the diminished importance of the parties or the decline in citizens’ trust towards them; rather, it stems from complex processes of institutional and functional differentiation, adaptation, and learning, as well as functional substitutions, power dynamics, and unintended consequences. For our purposes, Katz and Mair’s analysis provides a useful framework for at least three accounts:

- Their reconstruction of the emergence and consolidation of the cartel party type offers a dynamic template for how parties have evolved, particularly within the context of modern constitutional democratic regimes. Parties have transitioned from private associations of civil society participating in the institutionalised processes of political representation, legislation, and governance to more definite, often legally recognised and subsidised state-like organisations.
- Their reconstruction is driven not just by the external, so to speak, analysis of the trajectory from civil society to the state but also by an internal analysis of the parties. They are no longer considered a relatively undifferentiated whole or a combination of cadres and leaders but a complex structure comprising three different forms of organisations—three “parties” within the party: the party on the ground, the party central office, and the party in public office. Such a differentiation helps to understand some of the endogenous changes, as these three dimensions of party organisation are not exclusive to cartel parties but are recognisable, to varying extents, in previous party types. More importantly, the distinction between these three dimensions helps us recognise the different logic, opportunity structures, and dynamics that apply to each dimension and how they interact to determine the parties’ role as political agents within the representative system.
- The superimposition of the from-civil-society-to-the-state trajectory, analysing the parties’ organisational dimensions, explains how the party in public office may have gained pre-dominance within cartel parties. This combination, particularly the entrenchment of the party in public office within the logic of state administration and governmental machines, provides important clues on how party systems have evolved and how party competition functions within the political system. It also helps to understand the distinctive logic of “party government” across different electoral and political systems (we shall say more about this in the section on the governance and accountability disconnect).

Keeping in mind the dynamic and organisational framework offered by the cartel party type, we can briefly identify the main features of the representative disconnect in relation to the role of parties, as well as relate them to other aspects and dimensions of the disconnect.

- The general move of parties from their embeddedness in civil society to their being more part of the state signals their societal dislocation and a loss of roots and anchorage in civil society. This has consequences on the status of parties (more and more subject to state regulations) and how they are increasingly perceived as detached state-related organisations and less as voluntary self-organising associations. This social dislocation is further accentuated by internal changes like shifting power and relevance from the party on the ground to the party in public office (with the functional support of the party central office). This leads to a double social dislocation since the personnel of the party in public office is also increasingly detached from the party on the ground. Paradoxically, despite the growing focus on representativeness and the descriptive dimension of representation over the past few decades—and many attempts to mitigate and revert exclusionary biases towards women and cultural minorities—parties appear to have lost rather than gained in social and intersectional representativeness. This trend persists despite what may appear overall and some genuine improvements in specific areas.
- At the same time as marking their social dislocation, the move of the parties towards the state and the shift in their organisational structure in favour of the party in public office signal a change in the purposefulness of parties, making their instrumental function much stronger than their expressive and socialising functions. This weakens their identity-formation capacities and makes them much less like schools of democracy. The shift in purposefulness also affects the capacity of the parties' leadership to either mobilise their members or gain support from them when cooperation across parties or forms of compromise is required. Moreover, the combined effect of social dislocation and the reduced importance of the party on the ground makes party membership less attractive. This comes on top of the negative effect that other more general social phenomena, like increased individualisation, growing negative views of politics, and disenchantment with political activism, have on party membership.
- The more the party in public office acquires ascendancy and holds power over the other party dimensions, the more the party's rationale is based on short-term instrumental calculations. This increasingly makes parties resemble firms and business-like organisations, susceptible to institutional learning more from such types of organisations than from voluntary forms of civil organisation. On the one hand, the party central office risks becoming like a public relations and human resources office. On the other, the logic of internal democracy shifts from a more deliberative and consultative model to one mimicking electoral and plebiscitary forms of democracy, with growing influence from the media and various forms of public opinion surveys. Both these tendencies are accentuated by the shrinking of party membership and the reduced representativeness of the party on the ground. Debates over party democracy and its very practice become polarised between what we can call the civil association and state-organization views. The former looks at the party as the expression of its civil membership, the shared principles and aims of the party on the ground, and the way in which principles and aims are embodied within the history and ideational evolution of the party. The latter looks at the party primarily as the expression of its electoral basis and capacity to win elections and govern, given its increas-

ing material dependence on occupying positions of power, large donations, and various forms of state subsidies. The democratic vision embodied by the more direct link between the party in public office and the potential party electorate, which implies less attention to the grassroots and the territorial base of the party, is based on the idea of the reduced representativeness of the party's members and how the party machinery is more dependent (both ideologically and materially) on its electorate. Of course, intra-party conflicts between leadership and party base, between different factions, and between central office and territorial branches may depend on lots of different aspects and circumstances of internal politics. Still, the conflict between these two views of party democracy has more general significance. It has important consequences for the political identity of parties, which is relevant to how parties connect to society.

- The move of political parties from civil society to the state and their shift to a more instrumental logic, along with the weakening of their socialising and expressive function, also has an effect on the principle of partisanship that normatively underlies the function of parties within the ecosystem of democratic representation. We shall return to the issue of partisanship when we talk about the other dimensions of the disconnect, but this also matters in relation to the intermediation dimension. At both a normative level (as a principle) and at an empirical level (as a mechanism), partisanship as a property of political parties is crucial to representative democracy in so far as this form of government tries to create political unity via the mediating of social diversity using both cooperation and competition. Two main arguments have recently been proposed in the renewed debate on partisanship. One mainly justifies partisanship as a more ideological and epistemic property of party politics, with parties offering political visions that are, in principle, generalisable (White & Ypi 2010, 2011, 2016, 2019). Partisanship is, therefore, a mechanism for reaching a political agreement by arriving at a better argument through ideal competition. The other looks at partisanship from a more organisational perspective, emphasising the kind of institutional and ethical principles that make it a mechanism through which parties in democratic contexts build a particular kind of identity. This enables them to reconcile political loyalty around a vision, which is essential for political mobilisation, with self-restraint and a vision of the more general common good, which is essential for democratic cooperation (Muirhead 2014, 2019; Rosenblum 2008). Given the parties' organisational transformations illustrated above and the effect that these have on the political system, it is more difficult for parties to cultivate the virtue of partisanship either as an epistemic or an ethical virtue. As a result, partisanship tends to result either in instrumental forms of polarization or in the breakdown of the basic shared values and objectives underpinning the politics of democratic representation.
- Finally, the rapid transformation of the media environment in which party politics operates—and how this has contributed to the increasing personalisation of politics—has had a multiplier effect on some of the disconnect processes we noted above. These changes have, for instance, heightened the power and visibility of the party in public office while reducing the other two organisational dimensions to mere supportive roles. Additionally, this shift has debased the internal debate while magnifying the virtues of internal order

and discipline. Such developments have made some of the limits of electoral politics more evident, as this often becomes a context on how to win elections. At the same time, it reveals little about the candidates' capacity to govern.

3.4 Public opinion, media, and the public sphere

The last point, on the way in which the changing media environment affects the relationship between parties and electors, is an example of the crucial role that communication plays within the representative ecosystem. Such a role has long been recognised and has been the focus of empirical studies on the formation of public opinion and the media's role in setting the political agenda and influencing both opinion and will formation. Since Habermas's (1963, see also his recent intervention 2022) influential analysis on the formation of the modern public sphere, it has increasingly become the focus of normative debates on the place of deliberation and consensus-formation in the will formation process.

Politically, the passage from a negative to a more positive conception of "opinion" reflects changing attitudes towards democratic government: from the rule of the mob to the will of the people. However, popular opinion and political communication have remained fraught with tensions and contradictory views. Despite the normative acceptance that democratic decisions need to reflect popular opinion, the latter is often considered as expressing irrational feelings or a passive abeyance to the crowd's opinion. Political communication, on its part, can be seen as a form of rational engagement in the attempt to persuade others and as a more devious form of manipulation through means that may not be violent but use force over people by other means. Recent developments in the communication environment of modern democratic societies highlight once again these tensions, which tend to contribute to the representative disconnect.

Free communication is seen as central to the legitimacy and effectiveness of modern representative democracy in two respects: as a way of ensuring that good information feeds into the governing process (thus counteracting the classical argument that democratic government lacks the required knowledge for the art of governing); and as a way of ensuring that the better argument emerges from open and competitive deliberation in the public arena. Therefore, "good information" and the prevalence of "the better argument" can be considered important aspects of the kind of political communication that representative democracy requires and, at the same time, needs to promote.

The role of the media as part of the ecosystem of democratic representation is crucial in several ways. First, to ensure that political debate is fairly free and that there are no dominant positions based on factors external to the debate itself. Second, the media environment operates in a way that prevents, as much as possible, that particular state or private powers control the political agenda. Third, the media environment should be organised to enable opinion and information campaigns to challenge the views and narratives of established centres of power, whether state- or privately-based. Fourth, the practice of political information and debate in the main media is, as much as possible, integral to providing a free and responsible arena for collective decision-making, remaining independent from other systemic purposes. Fifth, the structure of the main mass media contributing to political and socially relevant forms of communication is organised

in such a way as to perform the function of gatekeepers of the integrity of the system. Therefore, it ought to be socially responsible for the power that comes with such a function, in the same way as other people who perform public roles bear similar responsibilities. The media's failure in each of these functions results in some form of disconnect between the citizenry and those who exercise political power by either weakening or corrupting the communication channels between them.

Without wanting to idealise how the media has performed these functions in the past, it is fairly obvious that the conditions and operations of media and communication in contemporary representative democracies can hardly be described as optimal. The first function of non-dominance is increasingly jeopardised by how money, commercial interests, and often governments dominate the media environment. Regarding the second and third functions, it is often the case that the media may be used to control the agenda rather than keep it open or to support the narratives of those in positions of power rather than challenge them, if not when these become completely discredited. As for the fourth function, it has long been the case that the media has instrumentalised political news and opinions in a way that is functional to their own internal commercial logic, sensationalising or commodifying them. The increasing personalisation and trivialisation of political issues is an example of this reversion of logic, of the media using politics in functions of its own commercial logic rather than providing political debate with a wider forum. As for the gatekeeping function, this has increasingly been challenged by the new social media environment. On the one hand, the apparent democratisation of media production breaks down the distinction between authors and consumers of information and opinions, weakening the mediatory function of responsible professionals. On the other, the growing monopolistic power of prominent social media companies can challenge states' power because of the de-territorialized nature of their enterprises, which also contributes to their social de-responsibilisation. These processes have become more evident and politically concerning in recent decades.

The changing nature of the media environment not only weakens the role that media communication plays in the functioning of representative democracy but also undermines the very legitimacy of the democratic representation itself. It disrupts the connection between the potentially deliberative character of the free public sphere (the opinion formation process) and the will formation process taking place within the institutional system. Even without assuming an idealised view of the public sphere or the Habermasian hypothesis that this operates as a free and rational communicative space where the better arguments can be consensually accepted, it is still possible to assume that the connection between opinion formation and will formation facilitated by the public sphere has contributed significantly to developing important social learning mechanisms and capacities in modern democracies through their ecosystem of representation. Moreover, the role that the public sphere plays both during and between elections reinforces the normative conviction captured by the social imaginary that the representative system offers a form of participation in decision-making to the voters and the citizens. However, suppose reasonable communication and critical debate in the public sphere turns out to be a process characterised by forms of social domination. In that case, the connection between the general will and popular opinion becomes tenuous. In this way, the public sphere loses not only its ver-

tical function to link the process of popular opinion formation to the institutional formation of the general will but also its more horizontal function. This not only consists of the deliberative process between equals to arrive at some agreement or even consensus, but it also encompasses how the processes of public deliberation—as well as competition over ideas, opinions, and long-term political visions—are a way of establishing a common and public domain, contributing to the political identity of a democratic people as an open-ended civil community (see also Eder 2014 and 2022).

3.5 Societal intermediation and voluntary mobilisation

The last point in our discussion of the intermediation disconnect has particular importance within the economy of our project, given the emphasis we put on the ecology of representative democracy (D1.2). In so far as we believe that the functioning of the institutional system and its ability to provide a viable zone of engagement between citizens and political decision-makers depend on the larger ecology of democratic representation in civil society, the way in which civil society operates and its main transformations matter a great deal. Some of these transformations have implicitly emerged in our analysis of the media, the public sphere, and the political institutions of intermediation. Other elements will emerge in the following sections. Here, we concentrate on what is more specific to social intermediation, either through the various organisations of civil society or through social movements and social mobilisation in general.

First, a word about civil society. The debate on the importance of civil society in modern constitutional democracies is an old one, revived particularly in the last two to three decades of the 20th century. There are different definitions of civil society, but there is also a tendency sometimes to identify civil society with non-governmental organisations (NGOs). In the context of this report, we assume a wider definition that includes not only considering NGOs but also other forms of voluntary aggregation and social networking across society. These include groups with an economic purpose or trade, professional and workers' organisations, as well as a number of public and semi-public institutions that may depend on the state but operate at arm's length from it. This capacious definition of civil society tends to overlap with the economic world, public sphere institutions, and social-political movements. Given such capaciousness, the issues we have selected for discussion are more indicative of the kind of problems that the transformation of civil society poses in terms of the representative disconnect than a systematic analysis of them.

- The most important social transformation affecting the functioning of democratic representation as a zone of engagement is undoubtedly the one that comes from the transformation of work and the economic structure in advanced industrial societies. Both from an empirical and theoretical perspective, the organisation of work and political representation of competing economic interests within civil society and the capitalist economy have been central to how representative democracy operated in the 20th century. How interests are identified, how interest groups are formed, and how the political system of representation eventually takes up the demands emerging from these two interacting processes

were central to both the practice and the study of the politics of industrial societies in the second half of the 20th century. It is impossible to rehearse the different phases of this debate. Still, it may be safe to say that neither the view that the political system reflects already formed interests nor the constructivist suggestion that all interests are politically formed captures the complex way in which interests and groups emerge from a combination of social, economic, organisational, and historically contingent conditions and processes. Within this combination of factors, societal intermediation (interest groups) plays a central role. It is not by chance that neo-corporatism theories had great success in the 70s and 80s (Schmitter 1989) before the emergence of neo-liberalism and the great expansion of financial capitalism. The other thing that we may state with some certainty is that, although a plurality of interests and organisations characterise representative democracies in the second half of the 20th century, the interests associated with labour, capital, and the strategies pursued by their respective organisations dominated the landscape of the politics of representation in the industrialised societies of that period (Berger 1981, 13). With the radical transformation of labour conditions and the shift to post-industrial capitalist societies of the last 40-50 years, the relatively stable panorama of societal interests and their organisation around the two main blocs have been upended. This transformation has also affected societal intermediation and how this links to the political world of parties, representative institutions, and government. One major effect of these changes has been the de-territorialisation of politics and representation at social and political levels, affecting less mobile, less educated, and socially disadvantaged groups. This has also increased inequalities, reducing the power of representation of these very groups, whose interests could be more easily aggregated to those of labour in general.

- As more traditional structures of interest organisation and representation in society have weakened, NGOs have acquired some prominence in service organisations or advocacy organisations. The former has effectively sustained a culture of solidarity and propped up social services in a period in which the principles and institutions of the welfare state have been under attack due to the increasing individualisation of lifestyles and the fiscal crisis. They have also played a kind of representative role, particularly in local governance and vis-à-vis state administration on behalf of the most deprived groups in society or the immigrant population. Advocacy groups have often replaced traditional representative institutions and parties, particularly in representing social and environmental issues of general concern or making claims as virtual representatives of the poor and disadvantaged or other similar causes (Montanaro 2018). In the case of service and advocacy NGOs, these organisations have moved from being run mainly by volunteers to professionalising their organisations. Moreover, many of these organisations are not based on members but on supporters, whose main input comes as financial contributions or other occasional kinds of support. The virtual and informal kind of representation of advocacy groups has served as a template for other forms of virtual representation by issue campaigners or celebrities. Although lacking in authorisation, informal representation has captured the public imagination and mobilised others to support their campaign (Castiglione and Warren 2019). Occasionally, it has also been recognised within the representative or administrative sys-

tem by being given a place in consultative processes, particularly at the local level, or in campaigns of social interests.

- As already indicated, another aspect of the transformation of the agents, organisations, and processes of societal representation is that groups with high levels of social capital, or whose social positions guarantee them strong support networks and societal representation, tend to find that their interests and opinions have easier access to the circuit of political representation. These are often better-educated citizens whose political voices are often heard, who may be likely to participate in the elections, or who may have more direct access to people in institutional positions. There is evidence that those who have weaker social and associational links often coincide with those who are more likely to abstain from voting or have fewer opportunities to exercise political influence. For many, social marginalisation also means political exclusion, which makes democratic representation based on exclusion rather than inclusion for those who are weaker and more isolated in society.

4 The governance and accountability disconnect

Although, as mentioned at the start of this report, the most evident part of the representative disconnect is the weakening of the intermediation between society and politics, the hollowing out of the zone of engagement reflects processes taking place at both ends of such intermediation. These include shifts within governance, will formation, and changes at the social level, affecting how citizens and political decision-makers engage with the politics of representation. Therefore, this section and the next one will look at the governance and accountability disconnect and the affective disconnect, respectively. Our treatment will be more compressed because of the many overlaps between these two dimensions with the intermediation disconnect.

From a governance perspective, the most obvious disconnect is what might be termed the effective power disconnect. This has to do with an important element of the democratic representative system that we discussed in D1.2 concerning Merkel's (2004, 2019) analysis of the embeddedness of (representative) democracy within a series of partial overlapping regimes, including what Merkel calls "effective power to govern." As he puts it: "the necessity that the elected representatives are the ones that actually govern" (2004, 41 emphasis added). As we know, the democratic nature of modern political representation rests on the assumption that, in this form of government, democratic power is exercised at once removed. There are both normative and empirical concerns regarding such a possibility and how the logic of political representation can be made to serve democratic principles. In this project, we start from the general assumption that there is no logical incompatibility between democracy and representation; however, both historically and politically, there are tensions between them, forming the basis of permanent political, ideal, and discursive struggles. However, if actual governing starts slipping away from the (elected) representatives, the argument about the undemocratic nature of delegating decisions to a selected few may become compelling. We have already seen such erosion of power in our discussion of the changing roles of parliaments and legislative assemblies. If representative institutions are no longer able to exercise actual power, the argument

that elections represent the democratic moments of popular authorisation and accountability is put into serious question. Moreover, the waning of the power of legislative assemblies is a change in one of the architectonic principles on which representative government historically and conceptually rests: how representative institutions gradually sized the main powers of legislation from absolute monarchs and closed oligarchic structures. The widening of the franchise and the democratisation of societies also meant the slow and not-so-smooth passage from more elitist versions of representative government to more robust forms of representative democracy within the setting of constitutional states. However, the erosion of legislative power in the main representative institutions has taken several forms in the last few decades.

- First, as already remarked, there has been a power shift from the legislative to the executive. From the perspective of the logic of political representation, such a shift was mitigated by the fact that elections became more about electing a government (directly or indirectly) rather than simply selecting members of the legislative assembly. As a collective body, the legislature conferred executive power upon the government and held it accountable, preserving a link between electoral choice and executive authority. Governments also took more and more control of parliaments' legislative agenda and increasingly used forms of emergency powers and legislation that avoided proper parliamentary scrutiny. Governments also have control of state administration and machinery, giving them a great advantage over parliaments and oppositions regarding the knowledge and information required for major decisions and policy-making, besides other tactical advantages.
- Second, there has been a steady creeping of delegated powers from state institutions to (semi-)autonomous and private agencies controlling and regulating services and other economic sectors (see, for instance, Coen & Thatcher 2008).
- Third, and more importantly, from the perspective of the state sovereignty capacity, many legislative and regulative matters have shifted to supra-national bodies (the literature here is too vast to mention even selectively). Such a shift is the inevitable consequence of social and technological internationalisation and globalisation processes, reflecting the fact that only supranational institutions may be able to deal with technical and complex problems involving coordination between different states and legal regimes. However, such a shift still results in a de facto erosion of the power of representative institutions while simultaneously increasing the power of the executive over the legislative and elevating legal decision-making over the political one. Despite this sense of inevitability, it is also true that some of the areas in which supranational entities intervene—particularly regarding macro-economic, financial and monetary decisions—are of strategic importance for the political community. In an unbalanced international context, supranational regulation can easily turn into external domination, the disabling of democratic accountability, and the loss of political legitimacy (Sharpf, 2013). Within the European context, with the emergence of the EU as a kind of inter-state polity with its own juridical and political space, the problem of supra-national governance has raised important issues about the constitutional and democratic nature of the EU, putting the question of how politi-

cal representation works or should work in the EU itself in relation to national levels of representation.

- Finally, the increasing complexity of modern societies, along with the growing interdependence of general legislation and framework policymaking, has made the importance of state administration and the implementation of laws as important as primary legislation-making. This has given greater discretionary powers to both the government and state bureaucracy, extending—and therefore weakening—the chain of delegation from citizens to decision-makers: the crucial points of decision-making in such a chain have become less clear; the process of delegation of powers less transparent; and the accountability of decision-makers less certain. There has indeed been an increase in formal consultation of citizens and civil society organisations and their involvement in some moments of the deliberative process. Still, many of these consultative and deliberative initiatives often have a casual origin and are not always effective in mitigating administrative discretion.

Citizens are not unaware of these responsibility shifts, and there are ways in which they adapt their expectations, political demands, and normative judgements to support this shifting institutional scenario and the different levels of governance. It is possible to gather citizens' perceptions and their differentiated assessment of—and satisfaction with—different democratic pillars as in WP2 (see D2.1). Citizens' perceptions cannot always appreciate the full extent of the shift in decision-making, which we also hope to assess through the research conducted in other Work Packages (WP3, WP4, and WP5) using experiments, audits, and other tools besides surveys.

Suppose we assume that legislation is now mainly in the hands of governments (and presidents in presidential and semi-presidential systems). Another kind of disconnect appears, raising concerns about elections in the authorisation chain and the accountability process. One way of looking at this disconnect is by examining the distinction between “responsiveness” and “responsibility” in the way in which it applies to representative government, a theme more recently elaborated by the late Peter Mair (2013, 2014 [2009]). As discussed in D1.2, the idea of responsiveness is often considered coextensive with representation and representativity. This is reinforced by the rather obvious consideration that, to be both representative and democratic, the action of governments and representatives must be “in a way” responsive to the interests and judgement of the citizens/electors, as Pitkin (1967) says in her classical work on the concept of representation. The test of such responsiveness is often considered to lie in congruence between the electorate's policy preferences and the representatives' policy decisions.

There are several logical, empirical, and normative difficulties in the ideas of representation as simple responsiveness and congruence. These include: (a) the collective nature of the “principal” in politics (how to aggregate their wills and interests so as to provide a clear form of authorisation?); (b) The dual role of representatives—as both products of the electoral system, accountable to their own constituencies, and as members of a legislative assembly meant to represent the broader community—creates an inherent tension only partially resolved by shifting focus to the government rather than the legislative assembly, since governments (in both centralized and decentralized systems) must still balance the diverse interests of localities with those

of the community as a whole; and finally (c) the difficulties in making sense of the terms and modes of accountability. This last point is partly due to the problems connected to (a) and (b) (responsiveness to whom/what?), the bluntness of the electoral process as an accountability mechanism (forward-looking or backwards-looking?), and the temporal disjunction between elections and governing decisions, with the inevitable change of political circumstances (how to ensure congruence over time?).

Despite the overwhelming nature of these difficulties, the problem of responsiveness in democratic representation remains crucial. This is partly due to the normative reasons captured by Pitkin's "in some way", suggesting that there must be some correspondence or link between the represented and the representative for the idea and practice of representation to have meaning. This argument is further strengthened by the fact that the concept of responsiveness is deeply embedded in the social imaginary of democratic societies, playing an obvious role in the perceptions of the citizens/electors and in their assessment of the effectiveness and legitimacy of political representation itself. These convictions are widely reflected (sometimes uncritically) in the empirical and theoretical literature even though, as suggested in D1.2, they are increasingly challenged from a constructivist perspective.

However, thinking of responsiveness and responsibility as two possible ways of interpreting the action of representation may capture the present dilemmas of democratic representation better than equating representation with responsiveness. The distinction between responsiveness and responsibility conveys some of the issues involved in the historical debate on representation as delegation or entrustment, a debate that, though perhaps settled constitutionally, is always open in practical politics. These two conceptions cannot be easily separated, as it would seem, from an analytical and conceptual perspective. Recently, new and more nuanced distinctions have emerged to capture how the represented perceive their representatives. These distinctions explore how citizens see their interests and perspectives reflected in representatives' actions and decisions, as well as the extent to which they can influence those actions and decisions (see, for instance, Mansbridge 2003, 2009)⁶. Responsiveness and responsibility are intrinsically connected in modern politics, as shown by how contemporary representative democracies fluctuate between the demands of "technocratic" and "populist" government, which can be seen as an extension of Robert Dahl's (1969) older distinction between "Madisonian" and "popular" democracy.

The question is, as Peter Mair (2013: 159-162) argues, the tension and gaps between responsive and responsible government are increasing. There are many reasons for this: parties find it increasingly difficult to identify genuine electoral demands due to their detachment from civil society; they also find it difficult to aggregate them because they attempt to serve a variety of competing interests and ideological perspectives; once in government, they operate under increasing institutional, economic, and international constraints. Moreover, the temporal dimension of governing is made harder by the complexities of modern societies: policies require time to be introduced and implemented; their effects extend beyond every single government; major policies or framework legislation cannot be easily changed from one day to the next without

⁶Mansbridge mainly talks of individual representatives, but her analysis can be extended to governments.

causing considerable social and administrative upheavals.

Modern party politics encourages parties and governments to adopt “responsive” and “responsible” attitudes instrumentally for electoral purposes by following public opinion trends or cultivating a particular electoral image. This has encouraged a new populist wave, particularly in parties who want to challenge the status quo. On the one hand, they are prone to disregard the practical difficulties of governing complex societies within a more globalised socio-economic context. On the other, they may pay scant attention to the responsibility that comes with government, political leadership, and long-term considerations. Conversely, mainstream and more established parties of government tend to act as a cartel, often uncritically defending the political status quo or technocratic government by branding any alternative as irresponsible politics without engaging in proper policy discussion or democratic debate of substantive issues. The divarication of responsive and responsible considerations in the politics of parties and governments has contributed to the crescent polarisation of the political system, reducing the space for proper democratic debate, thus undermining both the vertical and horizontal dimensions of the zone of engagement between citizens and governing elites and adding to the malaises of representative politics.

The final element in this section is what we could call the governing capacity disconnect. This mainly concerns how the governing resources are formed in representative democracies. Within the context of democratic representation, two main resources must be considered. The first is how knowledge relevant to governing modern complex societies is produced and how such knowledge can be gathered and made available and relevant to political decision-making in ways that reflect the principles and logic of democratic representation. The second resource concerns the character and qualities of political leadership within the context of democratic representation. These are extremely complex problems but are crucial to assessing the zone of engagement’s efficacy in input, throughput, and output.

In terms of knowledge, the production of most of it escapes both the political and representative process, being located in the society at large. Some of the technical and organisational knowledge required for political decisions depends on the state’s capacity as an administrative structure to channel that knowledge in a way that becomes functional to both the deliberative and the decision-making processes. Although politics is also relevant to how the state machinery is organised and works, there is no easy way to precisely establish how the ecosystem of democratic representation can contribute to this. Nonetheless, in so far as information-related and knowledge-related institutions are an important part of power relations and power distribution within society, democratic and representative principles can also apply, particularly when this knowledge becomes relevant to major political decisions in areas such as health, environment, education, urban development, security, work organisation, food production, transport, scientific research, and more. Openness to civil society, the diversity of perspectives, the rigour of scrutiny, the evaluation of social and individual risks, and transparency (to name a few) are important principles that need to be entrenched in the relationship between socially available knowledge and political decision-making. Because of many of the disconnects we have already identified in the intermediation and governance dimension, this relationship has become, if

anything, murkier in the last few decades. Economic, corporative, and sometimes narrow professional interests often dominate this relationship when this is not affected by corrupting influences. A related issue comes from balancing public and private contributions to knowledge production in advanced scientific research. Public bodies often fund and conduct foundational research, which private firms then leverage for advanced research, generating substantial profits without compensating the public for its initial investment (Florio 2021). Apart from the economic aspect, this creates positions of political power and influence that the private can use to affect all sorts of collective decisions.

The other aspect of the governing capacity disconnect has more to do with humans rather than knowledge resources. It could also be presented as the problem of democratic leadership and the associated problem of the social perception and self-perception of the role and the motivations of political professionals. Democratic leadership is often considered a paradox (Hendriks & Karsten 2014; Hart & Rhodes 2014). This is partly because leadership is taken as inherently associated with hierarchical and non-egalitarian relationships in direct opposition to democratic equality. Suppose we start from the empirical fact that, even in assembly-style democracies, certain individuals often take the lead in introducing arguments, more readily persuade others, or play a key role in facilitating agreement. In that case, we can conclude that forms of leadership naturally arise within democratic settings. Ideas of representative democracy and democratic representation are also premised on separating roles. As we previously suggested, one of our presuppositions is that there is no logical incompatibility between political representation and a democratic government in general. Unless one starts from a definition of democracy as a form of government where everyone has absolute equality in decision-making (perhaps by simply having equal rights in voting for an issue without discussing it—but then who decides what the issues to vote on?), there must be some space for thinking of the kind of leadership that is appropriate for a democratic context, or more particularly for representative democracy.

Much discussion about political leaders in democracy often concerns the question of corruption. This is an important issue that arises in modern politics in connection with the professionalisation of politics. However, corruption based on greed, love of power, and favouritism is probably as old as politics. But in modern societies, the professionalisation of politics greatly accentuates the difference of roles between rulers and ruled. In ideal terms, democratic discourse wishes to abolish corruption—or at least render it more manageable by some form of rotation or authorisation and control chains. However, the professionalisation of politics creates an incentive for professional politicians that sets them apart from ordinary citizens. Even if they may not take advantage of the opportunities provided by their position of power through corrupted methods, a professional politician can still legally exploit such opportunities for their own selfish advantage. At the same time, the professionalisation of politics contributes to a particular form of socialisation that, as we have already observed, makes professional politicians part of a larger social and professional elite, which may also influence their lifestyle. This may contribute to what Peter Mair has called the “withdrawal of the elites” (2013, 75-88) and make citizens increasingly suspicious and distrustful of politicians’ intentions and politics in general (an issue reflected in longitudinal survey studies), even beyond that healthy level of mistrust that is inherent in democratic ideas of division and balance of power.

Returning to the broader question of leadership in democracies—beyond issues of corruption and self-interested motivations among politicians—there is another perspective to consider. This viewpoint may also be linked to recent transformations in the political system, particularly in the evolution of political parties. Namely, the kind of authority that is more appropriate in the context of democratic representation and how leadership may operate within the ecosystem of democratic representation, not as the result of the capacity of individual leaders but as a more collective process. If it is indeed possible to imagine a conception of authority that applies to people who have equal status, it may also be possible to think of leadership in a more democratic context. Richard Sennet (1980) suggests that such kind of authority is possible and not exceptional, based on a social and emotional bond between those with a leadership position and other group members. This form of authority is perhaps not very different from the one assumed by the social identity approach in psychology, where it is stressed that “leaders are never just leaders [...] leaders are always the leaders of a particular social group.” (Reicher et al. 2014, 153). In this sense, it is possible to think of democratic leaders as those who can also contribute and manage the social identity of a group. Indeed, this is very often what the leadership of a party was able to do. So, there may be a way of suggesting that mass parties were more conducive to democratic leadership than cartel parties. However, parties were not the only places where democratic leadership emerged and was exercised. This was also a characteristic of other voluntary organisations closely connected to the political system (trade unions, for instance) or part of civil society. This kind of more diffuse democratic leadership aligns closely with what Alessandro Pizzorno refers to as the “public class” (2002, 8-9), which he defines as those “individual and collective subjects of action, which lead to public choice, via compromise, control of the agenda, persuasion and propaganda” (ibid. 9). Pizzorno suggests that the role of this public class is neither aggregative nor, in the Habermasian sense, one that produces public reason. Instead, it is one that produces agreement and collective decisions by also forming identities and sub-identities. Without wanting to idealise the democracy of parties in the past and without suggesting that these forms of democratic authority and leadership do not happen in other contexts, the question is that contemporary democracies do not seem able to generate a public class that operates across the ecosystem of democratic representation.

5 The affective disconnect

We refer to this final aspect of the representative disconnect as the “affective disconnect.” It is possible to read it in two distinct but complementary ways. The first understanding points to a disconnection between citizens and political representatives at an affective level: an emotional gap marked by different ways of living the experience of democratic representation or an incapacity of these two groups to connect emotionally. The second understanding suggests that the traditional language and practices of democratic representation tend to miss the significance of the affective dimension in politics. We shall discuss the manifestations of the affective disconnect to bridge these two understandings of the disconnect. More generally, the affective disconnect raises the question of whether the malaises of modern democratic representation come from a dissatisfaction with politics, particularly of the younger generations. We investi-

gate this question in particular through the WP8. In the rest of this section, we offer a list of more specific manifestations of the affective disconnect.

- We start by observing that the transformation of parties we discussed under the intermediation disconnect, particularly the waning of their expressive function, creates a situation of “no parties for young (and indeed old) citizens”. Since the 1990s, there seems to have been a dramatic decline in party membership (van Biezen et al. 2012, Scarrow 2000, Mair 2013), with only occasional and limited instances of increase or temporary reversal. One general explanation links the decline in membership with the spread of more individualistic sets of values and lifestyles. However, these causes may also be exacerbated by the fact that parties’ attraction has fallen because they no longer offer the kind of affective attachments that citizens seek in their civic engagement. At the same time, they may find more effective satisfaction in other forms of civic engagement and participation. Moreover, it is also possible that the decline in party membership results from dissatisfaction with the image and practice of collective pursuits provided by parties (and party politics). In other words, parties may not engage citizens emotionally enough. Consequently, their approach to collective engagement may resemble individualistic forms of involvement, making them less appealing by comparison.
- Another way the affective disconnect is related to the transformation of parties and the influence this has on electoral politics is the rise of “negative” politics. This term means several things. On the one hand, there has been a rise in personal negative campaigning, which tends to be more effective when messages about political views and policy issues are harder to communicate. Negative campaigning may also stem from heightened political polarisation, which pushes the boundaries of democratic consensus to the breaking point⁷. On the other hand, there is a weakening of electors’ “positive” attachment to particular parties or definite ideological positions, leading them to vote more often against other political views or to punish a party in power rather than in support of a party or a political view. It is also true that the expression of a negative view is part of a conception of electoral accountability based on ex-post sanctioning, so there is nothing exceptional in “negative” politics itself. Nonetheless, the overall results of the increasing importance of negative politics may also be that citizens see politics as destructive and conflictual rather than a constructive and cooperative game. The same can be said of the political class, who may conclude that negative politics pays better than politics based on political visions and forms of democratic compromise.
- The increase in negative politics can also be seen as part of turning politics into spectacle. This latter process is probably the combined effect of the influence of visual media and personalisation in modern politics, which has profoundly affected how citizens and the political class view politics. These processes are well-known and have been central to many studies. Their effects on politics are multiple and extensive, and there is no space in this report to engage with them in any detail. As it has been suggested, the main point

⁷The development of a strong linkage between affective disconnect and polarisation represents another relevant nexus which has been recently explored even in empirical terms. See, in particular, the contributions by Garzia et al. (2023) and Reiljan et al. (2024).

here is to consider whether politics as spectacle signals a fundamental shift in political representation—from a system where democratic legitimacy is primarily achieved through authorisation via citizens' consent (or denial of consent) in elections, to one focused on the accountability and control of political representatives. Therefore, citizens act more as an audience of the political spectacle rather than direct participants. Pierre Manin (1997) has called this the passage from a party-based to an audience-based form of democracy. Indeed, accountability can still be connected to the electoral moment. Citizens still have a voice in this process, though more in an ex-post rather than ex-ante form. Many proponents of democratic representation, who emphasise accountability over authorisation, argue that elections serve only a relatively minor function as a tool for holding representatives accountable. At the same time, this is the product of a horizontal structure of accountability, with the media, civil society organisations, judges and constitutional courts, regulatory bodies, etc., performing such a role, rather than the electors (see Rosanvallon 2008, Keane 2011). Although there is value in this perspective, and this is certainly something that our research (WP7 and WP8) will aim to investigate as part of our research on the strategies of redirection, the shift to an audience—especially if the audience is viewed as mere spectators of the political process—risks fostering an even more disengaged form of citizenship. This shift could lead to a more negative perception of politics as inherently untrustworthy and needing constant external oversight (see Mansbridge 2009 for a different view on the sanctioning model of representation). This inevitably increases a negative view of politics, widening rather than bridging the affective gap between citizens and political representatives, even when citizens may find alternative instruments for their perspectives, claims, and demands to be represented in decision-making.

- The final issue we wish to raise concerning the affective disconnect is related to the momentous changes of the last couple of decades in media and digital communication. We touched on this in relation to the media and the public sphere. Still, it is worth observing the rather counter-intuitive way in which such developments have affected political participation and representation. Once again, a proper discussion of this question would require much more space than we can give here and much more in-depth research than possible within the economy of our research project. At this stage, we simply want to raise the issue that, contrary to the general expectation, the new technological revolution may open the possibility of a more participatory and deliberative phase in representative democracy. It would allow ordinary citizens to be more regularly and continuously involved in direct political deliberation and decision-making. At the same time, social media would democratise opinion formation in the public sphere and break monopolistic tendencies in the information process. However, things have not unfolded quite as expected. Instead, the new landscape appears more troubling, marked by a fragmented, polarised, divisive, and intolerant debate within the public sphere, along with an uncontrollable and chaotic realm of news, knowledge, and information—one that seems increasingly vulnerable to harmful forms of dominance and manipulation. It is very difficult to predict how all this will develop and affect politics and the ecosystem of democratic representation. Still, for now, the technological transformation may further alienate many people from poli-

tics rather than re-engaging them. Much also depends on the strategies of reconnection and re-direction that can be experimented and promoted in the ecosystem of democratic representation. This is the main objective of the second part of our research project.

6 Conclusion

As suggested at the beginning of this report, this may seem like a long list of changes and phenomena affecting the institutions and processes of the ecosystem of democratic representation. As such, it is difficult to manage, control, and redirect. In a sense, this is very true and part of our approach. Representative democracy is not a simple, stable set of institutions governed by precise mechanisms or universally accepted principles. Rather, it is an institutional system and an ecology of democratic representation, where political cooperation, struggle, and contestation continuously shape and reshape the relations that sustain it. This dynamic ecosystem's capacity to deliver a broadly legitimate form of democratic governance in complex modern societies is constantly being produced and reproduced under specific conditions. As Hannah Pitkin (1967) suggested, democratic representation is a "fragile institution." In this report, we have only been able to (very schematically) identify some of the main aspects of the disconnect that makes such a fragile institution—and the broader ecology in which it operates—more fragile than usual, to the point perhaps of becoming dysfunctional, partly illegitimate, and incapable of reproducing itself.

We should also be clear that, as part of our research project, we neither pretend to be able to cover all aspects of the representative disconnect we have outlined nor develop an in-depth analysis of many of its features. Realistically, our approach can only be selective and explorative. Similarly, regarding remedial strategies—whether aimed at repairing and reconnecting the traditional aspects and functions of the institutional "zone of engagement" or fostering new ways to revitalise it—we can only suggest a few illustrative models and solutions. However, we hope our research may contribute to a different and perhaps more productive way of looking at the present state of representative democracy and its ecosystem.

In more concrete terms, the Work Packages comprising REDIRECT are meant to develop the study of the representative disconnect here outlined in the following directions:

- Based on data, surveys, and experiments, WP2 and WP5 are intended to provide a more accurate picture of the changes in how citizens and political elites currently perceive representative politics, the levels of trust in institutions, and the sense of legitimacy that the institutions convey. Together with WP6, they are also meant to provide a picture of the most common and tried forms of reconnection experimented on within the institutional system.
- WP3 intends to offer a more precise picture of how supranational governance may contribute to certain forms of governance disconnect, as well as understand how some can be addressed. At the same time, WP 7 and WP8 focus on the younger generations. Such a focus should also allow us to study the extent of the affective disconnect and understand how this may also derive from deep-seated social changes that may affect new genera-

tions, who may have been socialised to politics in different ways. Such an understanding may be crucial for redirection strategies.

- WP4 examines governance and affective disconnects from a more internal, national perspective on representative politics, focusing on how social and political emergencies increasingly dominate and shape it. These emergencies tend to erode crucial elements—such as time, dialogue, deliberation, and common identity-building—that have traditionally supported the zone of engagement between citizens and decision-makers.
- WPs 3 and 5 specifically look at how the representative disconnect affects the more traditional institutions of political intermediation, such as parliaments and parties, and, together with WP6, what strategies of reconnecting may be available to address the intermediation disconnect. WP7 and WP8 are more focused on the strategies of redirection operating at the level of the representative ecology while also aiming to capture the extent of the affective disconnect.

The research conducted within these WPs, along with the proposals we aim to develop in collaboration with stakeholders, is also intended to test and refine some of the ideas presented in this report.

7 References

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