1. Delivering public services in multi-ethnic societies: the challenge of representativeness

B. Guy Peters, Eckhard Schröter and Patrick von Maravić

POLITICS, REPRESENTATION, AND BUREAUCRACY: HOW TO CONNECT THE DOTS

The politics of representative bureaucracy highlight the procedural, political, and conflictual nature of representation in public organizations. In very general terms “representative bureaucracy” can be described as the “body of thought and research examining the potential for government agencies to act as representative political institutions if their personnel are drawn from all sectors of society” (Dolan and Rosenbloom, 2003, xi; see the chapter by Bas van Gool on the intellectual history of representative bureaucracy). Understanding the politics of representation prompts us to take a closer look at the conditions under which public organizations act as representative institutions and when they do not. Questions of representation, whether seen under the label of diversity management or representative bureaucracy, are per se political. Representation as seen through political lenses means viewing it in the light of manifest or latent social conflicts (Lipset and Rokkan, 1967: 5). Political considerations determine who is represented and who is not, who is included and who is excluded, and to what extent individuals or groups acquire and exercise power, status, or authority in order to act or stand for an idea or group in the public service. These issues are important in any society but are especially relevant in societies that are deeply divided along religious, ethnic or class lines.

The clearly discernible trend towards greater cultural variety in what used to be more rigidly defined “nation states” emphasizes the need to understand the politics of representative bureaucracy (von Maravić et al.,
2013; Joppke, 1998). With the fast and widespread growth of geographical mobility in almost all OECD-countries and a globalized economy that has resulted in more and more people migrating for work, but also on humanitarian grounds or to find political safe havens, attention has increasingly shifted towards the role of large public service systems in increasingly heterogeneous societies (Hooghe et al., 2008; Castles and Miller, 2009). This pressure is most strongly felt in large urban conurbations that serve as centers of gravity for both migrating low-skill and high-skill workers (see the chapter by Robin Hambleton in this book). The global flows of migration – coupled with intensified European integration and amplified by prospects of an ageing and shrinking European population (Tassilo Herrschel in this book) – is likely to catapult the question of opening up public sector workforces to more ethnic and cultural diversity to the top of the political and administrative reform agenda. And with emerging political and normative considerations, which follow the discourse of the “politics of identity” or “politics of recognition” debate (Taylor and Gutman, 1994; Benhabib, 2002; Parekh, 2006; Kymlicka, 2010; Vertovec and Wessendorf, 2010), focusing on bureaucracies as representative institutions, the inclusion of any kind of minority is no longer contingent on functional necessities or politically opportunistic behavior but rather has turned into a manifestation of minority rights per se. From this flows a politically powerful symbolic meaning attached to pressures to open public sector organizations because working for “government” can be interpreted as a strong signal of a successful integration of minority groups into the State and into normal social roles.

This volume (in conjunction with its sister publication Representative Bureaucracy in Action), as with its assembled authors, sheds light on a core theme of the study of public administration. By seeking a more profound understanding of the causes, facets, and consequences of the politics of representation in the public sector, the authors not only underscore the necessity of a pluralistic and interdisciplinary perspective, which ties in insights from history, sociology, urban politics, political, and organizational theory, as well as public administration/management, but highlight this by reaching out to different theoretical perspectives and empirical insights in order to understand a phenomenon that transcends not only our distinct academic disciplines but also our traditional focus on public organizations. By seeking answers to questions about the origin and evolution of the concept of representative bureaucracy (Bas van Gool), the comparative study of representative bureaucracy (the editors), the role of politics, identity, and structure in cross-nationally studying
representation (Kenneth J. Meier and Tabitha S. M. Morton), the relationship between representativeness, the merit principle, and patronage (B. Guy Peters), the link between urban politics and migrants (Tassilo Herrschel), the potential myths of the performance claim in the field of diversity management and representative bureaucracy (Eckhard Schröter and Patrick von Maravić), and the role of leadership in managing multi-cultural cities (Robin Hambleton), this volume delivers new perspectives on these challenging questions and defines gateways for further research.

This introduction aims at stressing three distinct arguments that can be read as intending to move the debate about representativeness in the public sector forward. First, we argue that the study of representative bureaucracy will eventually profit by breaking it loose from its traditional anchoring in the dichotomy between passive and active representation and opening it up for perspectives that allow us to capture additional and other “channels for the expression” (Lipset and Rokkan, 1967: 5) of interests. In particular, we wish to broaden our perspective so as to include aspects of both political and bureaucratic representation. Second, and related to the first claim, we hope to throw light on the institutionalization and freezing of different types of representation and draw attention to factors that may help us to explain this variation among administrative systems in the future. And thirdly, we elaborate on the lessons for theorizing public organizations, arguing that public sector bureaucracy plays multiple and potentially competing roles. On the one hand, public organizations are political simply by virtue of implementing public programs, and they therefore face pressures to be representative and to foster public participation. On the other hand these organizations are responsible for managing and implementing policy and therefore must have some concerns with efficiency and effectiveness. All public organizations have some of these contradictory pressures, but they may be exacerbated in societies with fundamental social cleavages.

CONCEPTS OF REPRESENTATION IN MODERN DEMOCRACIES: POLITICAL AND BUREAUCRATIC

Approaches to Political Representation

The concept of representation is one of the cornerstones of the architecture of modern democratic theory, just as much as the empirical-analytical body of research on political representation constitutes a
defining component as political science as a discipline – past and present. From this productive line of thought, however, the study of representative bureaucracy appears to be oddly disconnected. Within the academic “public administration” and “public management” communities too, issues of “representativeness” in the civil service as well as questions about the representative role of public agencies are all too often considered to be a sideline to the major flow of research on public sector organizations, and is typically associated with a narrowly defined set of normative assumptions and research questions (see also below). This apparent, though hardly uncommon, lack of communication between neighboring and yet separated research communities produces – as we see it – significant losses for all parties and academic (sub-)disciplines involved: students of representative bureaucracy, comparativists in public administration and management studies, or political scientists and sociologists analysing the theory and practice of political representation in modern democracies. A brief look into their respective research discourses and debates – showing the existing degree of overlap, but also their specific limitations and omissions – might help to illustrate the potential benefit in approaching issues of representation more comprehensively, thus acknowledging the capacity of public bureaucracies to act as representative institutions.

Put at its simplest, representation is the act “of make present again” (Pitkin, 1967). The author’s penchant for the study of the use and origins of words also reminds us of the fact that “representation” is something indirect (hence its recurrent clashes with advocates of direct democracy), something that involves delegation or trusteeship, and is closely associated with more differentiated societies and complex institutional rules and structures – in short, arrangements in which mediators or representatives are needed “to present again” what escapes our immediate observation or experience. Most of our conceptual tools that we currently refer to in our discussion of representativeness in politics and administration were introduced about half a century ago (borrowing, of course, from philosophers of the classical era and the age of enlightenment, see Dahl, 1989, for an overview of the genealogy of the concept) and with Hannah Pitkin’s work (1967) being one of the most influential contribution to this debate. Her discussion of four analytical dimensions help to meaningfully define the relationship between representatives and those represented: formalistically (pertaining to the formal status of representatives and the way they are chosen, e.g. in elections), descriptively (with an eye to the extent to which representatives are like those represented), symbolically (asking about the degree of acceptance that representatives
enjoy in their constituencies), and substantively (focusing on the activities of representatives and the extent to which they serve the interests of those represented). Interestingly, students of political representation and representative bureaucracy were at this point conceptually rather well-aligned as they both addressed similar dimensions: descriptive and substantive representation or – in Frederik Mosher’s terms – passive and active representation. Conventionally, however, the mainstream of political science research would portray the process of political representation first and foremost as a legislative affair, based on formal authorization of representatives by way of elections (e.g. in single-member constituencies) and conceptualized as a retrospective principal–agent relationship. In the face of new political challenges and empirical research findings, it has been increasingly difficult, however, to capture the full scope and depth of representative processes using that classical model. One of the first critical questions raised was prompted – not much different from the debate about government bureaucracies (Kingsley, 1944) – by the concern about the class bias of legislative institutions (Schattschneider, 1960) and later refined in order to acknowledge the diversity within constituencies (Mansbridge, 1999): how can the effective representation of disaffected citizens and of marginalized constituency members be improved? Another problem arises if public policies are more and more shaped and determined by international actors, institutions and decision-making processes that transcend the reach of national legislatures, let alone the boundaries of parliamentary or congressional districts. On top of that, elected representatives enjoy no monopoly to the claim of aggregating and articulating collective interests, and in fact a flourishing associational life (e.g. social movements, self-help groups, and civic associations) as well as powerful organized interests are strong rivaling factors. In response to these critical observations and comments, theorists of political representation have suggested interesting deviations from or refinements of earlier concepts: In the context of deliberative democracy, the idea of “discursive representation” has been introduced (Dryzek and Niemeyer, 2008) to capture the increasingly elusive nature of global governance where a well-defined demos is missing. From this perspective, in transnational public policy making it is not so much people, institutions or networks thereof that represent interests but discourses, defined as a set of categories and concepts with common assumptions and judgments. Other authors have addressed the capacity of citizens to represent themselves in voluntary associations and have ventilated the corresponding term of “citizen representatives” (Warren, 2009). In still other contributions to this complex debate, redefined and complementary roles and attributes of representatives have been floated so as to move
away from traditional formalistic and retrospective relationships. From those vantage points, for example, political representation is also conceptualized as *advocacy* (Urbinati, 2002) or “surrogacy” (Mansbridge, 2003) in order to cater to underprivileged interests or constituents outside their districts. While a great many of new concerns and recent political changes have been sought to incorporate into contemporary notions of representation, one major transformation of modern political systems appears to be conspicuously missing from this discourse: the extent to which public bureaucracies – in varying degrees as regulators, owners of government property, or purchasers, if not providers of public goods and services – have come to affect the day-to-day life in modern societies. As a matter of fact, public agencies, as Chris Ansell (2012) has put it, find themselves in a difficult position: on the front end of problem solving, but “on the tail end of the chain of representation” (p. 2).

**Public Bureaucracies as Representative Institutions?**

Consequently, rather little attention has been paid to the potential capacity of public bureaucracies to act as representative institutions. It is only at the fringes of a rich and productive stream of theoretical and empirical scholarship on political representation that – under the rubric of non-democratic forms of representation – members of the bureaucracies have been recognized as potential representatives of the citizens they serve. As if the mainstream of “political representation” research had adopted a predominantly instrumental and passive view of public bureaucracies, the role of the administrative machinery of government in this context is primarily reduced to executing the will of political leaders (as authorized by the legislature) without being involved in the political struggle over power. To be sure, this image of public bureaucracy, of course, conforms best with the formal orthodoxy of the constitutional chain of democratic legitimacy – starting at the ballot box and – funneled through legislative and executive institutions of government – eventually leading to street-level bureaucrats. And yet, the widespread neglect for public agencies and their members in the discussion of representation seems all the more surprising as a broad movement in public administration and policy research has demonstrated how actively public administrators are involved in all phases of the public policy-making process and the extent to which a seemingly passive function such as policy implementation is politically charged and constitutes an integral part of a political process.

What is more, students of public administration (and later: public management) have not rushed in significant numbers to fill that gap in
the representation literature. Owing to the bureaucratic paradigm – modeled upon Max Weber’s ideal-typical depiction of the administrative staff organization under legal–rational authority – the supposedly rule-bound, impersonal behavior of officials moved to the center of attention and left little room for an image in which personal attributes of officials – other than their exam qualifications, perhaps – would play a larger role in assessing the quality of administrative performance. In a similar vein, the normative concern with the fight against corruption, nepotism and cronyism, the effort to stem the tide of “agency capture” and, last but not least, the necessities of dealing effectively and efficiently with complex and knowledge-based policy problems has highlighted – for good reason, to be sure – the benefits of having a professional, impartial and merit-based career civil service based on expertise and loyalty to the government of the day. In turn, alternative ways of selecting, recruiting and promoting administrative staff, including party-politicization or patronage, tend to be seen as deviations from the norm and have been given a bad name (for an in-depth discussion, see Peters in this volume). Without explicitly referring to issues of political representation, however, a number of major research themes in comparative public administration can easily be linked to our discussion. Picking-up on the question of party-political considerations in filling civil service positions, much of the literature suggests that the representation of party members in public bureaucracies is not only a widespread phenomenon, but may also serve a legitimate concern on the part of political leaders and societal interests. By the same token, neo-corporatist arrangements between organized interests and government institutions can also be interpreted in terms of the representation of specific occupational groups, social strata, and political interests in and by the bureaucratic apparatus. Also, couched in terms of decentralization, de-concentration or regionalism and localism, the territorial base of administrative structures reminds us of the fact that the very meaning of this principle of organization is to represent local and/or regional interests and – given the fact that oftentimes local and regional identities are also defined by linguistic, religious and other socio-cultural characteristics – that it can conveniently serve as a vehicle for representativeness in national administrative systems. Finally, findings from comparative research into role understandings and job-related attitudes of senior civil servants strongly support the view that administrators in significant numbers adopt role perceptions of advocates of both diffuse and organized interests and see themselves in their official capacities as interest mediators.
REPRESENTATIVE BUREAUCRACY: CORE CONCEPTS, VALUES, AND CONSEQUENCES

Core Concepts: Passive and Active Representation

The term “representative bureaucracy” has traditionally been used when referring to the relationship between the demographic makeup of the public sector workforce (particularly with regard to class, gender, race, ethnicity, as well as cultural traits such as language and religion) and the society it is supposed to serve (Kingsley, 1944; Meier, 1975; van der Meer and Roborgh, 1996). Conventionally, the theorems of representative bureaucracy are couched in terms of a search of control over administrative power. Sparked by the concern to keep public bureaucrats responsive to the public at large (Subramaniam, 1967) and further fuelled by the deeply ingrained belief that existing external constraints of bureaucratic power are inherently inadequate, the design of representative bureaucracy was meant to serve as an effective internal measure of controlling government officials’ behavior. In contrast to the logic of external control mechanisms, protagonists of representative bureaucracy tend to see achieving attitudinal congruence between administrative officeholders and the general public as key to their approach. In this tradition, the concept of representative bureaucracy directs the attention to the relationship of the socio-demographic, -linguistic, and -ethnic compositions of societies and the workforce of the public sector and raises questions about the extent to which public sector workforces mirror the composition of the societies – passive representation – they are supposed to serve. It also examines the consequences of representativeness for the quality of service delivery, the management of large organizations, the legitimacy of the state as such, as well as questions of sharing power among societal groups (Peters, 2013). One central empirical question in this field of research is not only whether the bureaucracy looks like a given segment of the population in terms of its ethnic, racial, social, gender or occupational characteristics (Meier, 1975; Selden and Selden, 2001; Sowa and Selden, 2003), but also whether these groups – active representation – actively promote the interest of their groups (Mosher, 1968). And a prior question, centrally addressed in this volume, concerns the extent to which public sector organizations or entire civil service systems embark on representation strategies, why they do it or not, and through which means representation actually occurs (compare Meier and Morton, Schröter and von Maravić in this volume). The puzzle is essentially about making sense of the variety of forms and mechanisms...
of representation, which we encounter when comparing representation across countries and time.

The argument for researching representative bureaucracy comes often from a normative position assuming that the question of having or not having an ethnically representative public bureaucracy has implications for fair and effective policy-making and implementation, and the associated aim of integrating minorities into society by giving them the opportunity to become part of government, or even to control a bureaucracy that is dominated by a (ethnic) majority group and which does not care for the problems of minorities (Dolan and Rosenbloom, 2003; Subramaniam, 1967; van Gool, 2008). This notion that groups can hold regimes accountable by becoming part of them (Subramaniam, 1967; Mosher, 1968) has long been present in the literature. But access to the civil service is not always automatically given but depends, as Guy Peters argues in his chapters, on a number of factors, for example group belongings, access to education or just think of the different traditions of citizenship (Brubaker, 1992; Joppke, 1998), which do not automatically favor newly arrived migrants and their entry to the public service. This situation gives rise to fundamental questions about the universal appropriateness of merit-based recruitment (see Peters in this volume).

Value Base and Competing Paradigms

Arguably, the prevailing notion of human nature, as argued in greater length in the chapter by Eckhard Schröter and Patrick von Maravić in this book, employed by the advocates of representative bureaucracy serves as a good starting point of our overview of their value and belief systems. Clearly, the anthropological picture of (wo)man that guides most of the normative debates and empirical studies on workforce diversity is that of a social animal or zoon politicon, defined by a strong sense of group identity and driven by a strong impetus for communication and interaction with other members of their community. It flows from this identity politics that a strong collectivist undercurrent can be discerned in the representative bureaucracy approach – not unlike the dominant strand of the participatory democracy literature. Starting from this value base, we can contrast the notion of representative bureaucracy with competing ideal-typical models of organizing public sector agencies, starting with classical Weberians’ views and moving on to highly individualist and market-driven principles of organization.

The classic Weberian ideal of the career public servant recruited on merit and capable of acting sine ira et studio with both superiors and clients pervades discussions of public bureaucracies (Gerth and Wright
Politics of representative bureaucracy

Mills, 1948; Weber, 2002). This model is assumed to produce the most capable public servants and also to provide for the greatest possible equality in the recruitment, promotion, and retention of public servants. Further, the equality implied in the merit system can be justified in democratic terms, with all citizens having equal opportunity for public employment. While the model of political neutrality and merit recruitment has a powerful normative standing, we should not assume that it is necessarily the best means of attaining all the goals of personnel management in the public sector. In particular, we should not assume that merit-based recruitment will necessarily produce the most representative public bureaucracy. Legal mechanisms, such as affirmative action regulations in the United States or gender quotas in other countries, can help to break open traditional forms of recruitment and open up the access for traditionally non-represented groups but also nepotism and patronage, as Guy Peters argues in this volume, can be mechanisms, despite the well-known ethical and democratic problems, to overcome the under-representation of minority groups.

In stark contrast to what representatives of the bureaucratic school of thought have to offer on that account, advocates of public organizations representative of the society they serve hold organizational values that are diametrical opposed to the concept of impersonality as manifested in ideal-typical Weberian bureaucracies or, in other words, organizations that are structurally and culturally geared to let real people and their feelings, identities and non-work related qualifications vanish behind the veil of abstract rules and neatly delineated office structures (Dolan and Rosenbloom, 2003). In a similar vein, protagonists of market-driven social coordination (cf. Lindblom, 2002; Self, 1993, 2000) – based on assumptions of man as a rational actor – tend to be just as far away from the core values of the “representative school of thought”. It is not the uniformly defined model of man or woman with externally pre-set utility functions and cost–benefit calculations to guide their behavior that appeals to advocates of diversity strategies in public, or for that matter, private sector organizations. Rather, their belief system rests on the assumption that organization members are defined by their ethnic, linguistic, or religious backgrounds – to name just a few sources of identity – and that they rely on social interaction with other individuals to develop their own preference structures as well as for the purpose of self-actualization.
Consequences of Representative Bureaucracies: Intended Benefits and Improvements

As noted above, the lion’s share of the “representative bureaucracy” literature is propelled forward by a strong normative impetus. The mainstream of this strand of research shares the general assumption that it is in essence good to be provided and will eventually lead to better decisions, more effectively implemented policies, and higher levels of service quality as well as customer satisfaction. More “representative” and “diverse” staff is also believed to be a boost to employees’ morale and motivation and thought to unleash innovative and creative potential. Clearly, the question of staffing public organizations according to social, ethnic, racial or linguistic characteristics – to name but a few – of a given segment of the population seems to carry important implications for the delivery of public services as well as the sharing of power in society. What is often obscured by a general claim to the improvement of administrative performance (see also Schröter and von Maravić in this volume) deserves a more differentiated and detailed treatment to which we turn below.

The majority of scholarship on diversity and representativeness in public (and private, for that matter) organizations focuses on the improved quality of organizational output. Seen from this perspective, good administration – particularly in multi-cultural environments – depends on the diversity of judgment, information and social skills that bureaucrats bring to the administrative apparatus – not unlike Kingsley (2003: 18) who called for the “pooling of diverse streams of experience” or Mosher (1968: 16) who advocated bringing together “different perspectives, knowledge, values, and abilities”. The key message of this argument is echoed by advocates of increased diversity in the management of for-profit organizations who show in their work how workforce diversity is positively associated with higher creativity, better problem solving, and a more flexible adaptation to organizational change. In a similar vein, empirical research in public service delivery has demonstrated that the output quality significantly increases if the socio-demographic and cultural traits of service providers match those of their target groups.

The intended consequences of representativeness, however, are not limited to the output dimension. While representativeness may make it easier for service providers to accomplish their service mission, it is also said to have a positive impact on organizational behavior more generally. In particular, the working climate – so it is argued – will considerably benefit from a more diverse workforce, with all the positive ramifications...
for human resource management in its wake. In particular, this “inward-looking” perspective on representativeness and diversity highlights research findings that report increased employer attractiveness, workers’ loyalty and job satisfaction, but less personnel fluctuation and absenteeism. While representation is still a major factor in all of this, attention seems to shift in this segment of the discussion towards “diversity” as a goal in its own right. To be sure, it is likely that employers (public or private) will try and capitalize – as a way of employer branding – on the suggested positive corollaries of having a diverse workforce as it radiates a sense of open-mindedness, tolerance of minorities, equity and fairness, multi-culturalism, and modernity.

A third dimension of improving administrative performance through strategies of representativeness zooms in on external relations with specifically defined stakeholders and constituencies. In addition to questions about the quality of service output, it adds an interesting twist to the discussion as it acknowledges the value of having close and deeply rooted relations with customers or clientele groups as a quality of public organizations in its own right. This perspective also recognizes the profound political nature of external relations. Not only can representative bureaucracies contribute to higher levels of trust and legitimacy, they can also opportunistically use their well-established ties with supportive citizen groups as a resource for political bargaining and bureaucratic politics to strengthen their own cause. In essence, this category of functional justifications of representativeness falls into two subcategories: one being primarily concerned about customer relations as defined by the private-sector service management literature, another being more interested in questions of democratic accountability and responsiveness as discussed in political science circles. As for the former, diversity is presented as a quality that allows for more tailor-made products, opens up new markets, gives better access to specific clientele groups and helps focusing on customer demands. If seen from the latter perspective, a bureaucracy that mirrors the composition of society it serves tends to be more responsive to public interests.

What runs across most of these arguments discussed above is an implicit claim that representative bureaucracy would not only improve performance, as spelled out before, but enhance the legitimacy of public sector organizations overall. Though overlapping with expectations about improved external relations and better quality of services rendered and decisions made, the concern here does not lie with specific outputs or clientele groups. Rather, a more diffuse and systemic level of support seems to be at stake that exists independent of individual experiences of administrative performance. A passively representative bureaucracy, so
the argument goes, carries “independent and symbolic values” (Mosher, 1968: 17) that are prerequisites for democratic societies: it signals a “commitment to equal access to power” (Selden and Selden, 2001: 309), serves potentially as a vehicle for upward social mobility, thus integrating minorities or marginalized groups into the mainstream of society, and manifests the “consensual and equalitarian ethos of the community” (Subramaniam, 1967: 1014).

Consequences of Representative Bureaucracies: Unintended Drawbacks and Potential Pitfalls

While advocates of representative bureaucracy as a major principle for organizing public agencies tend to present the effects of this reform strategy in the most favorable light, any more comprehensive perspective cannot overlook a series of potentially significant drawbacks and ramifications.

Most fundamentally, any effort of making public organizations look more socially representative in terms of “passive representation” is almost bound to pit – in principle – group rights of minorities or marginalized collectives against individual rights of other contenders for civil service jobs. In this context, decision-makers are likely to face at one point the ethical question of whether (and if so, how?) to discriminate against a member of an already well-represented group in order to advance the cause of an underrepresented societal group. Concomitantly, this problem is often accompanied by the potential conflict between meritocratic standards of selecting, recruiting, and promoting public officials. If the top priority of organization principles is accorded to maintaining formally equal access to civil service positions, and to preserving the predominance of formal qualifications, expertise, and professional standards, the quest for representativeness will probably be perceived as an attempt to open the gates for political patronage, cronyism, and to put the expertism at risk. If highest emphasis, however, is placed on the economy and efficiency of public organizations, the concern with representative bureaucracy is more likely to lie with the extra costs associated with this approach. In fact, personnel numbers may be driven up – well beyond the limit of the required minimum – in an effort to accommodate additional requests for representation. Also, expenses for running human resource management systems might go up as the composition of the workforce is becoming more complex and services have to be offered to different groups with different needs (language or otherwise).
Assuming, however, most if not all of these problems can be avoided, we still face another category of potential problems – problems that appear to be the flipside of what representative bureaucracy is meant to achieve. As personnel departments aim at recreating the socio-cultural complexity of modern societies, they also invite additional degrees of fragmentation into their own organizations, including the extra challenges for intra-organizational coordination that come with them. Seen from a wider angle, this possible side-effect reminds us of the in-built tension between the general welfare that public bureaucracies are supposed to serve and those particular group interests that representative bureaucracy is all about. In fact, the pursuit of effectively including hitherto non- or underrepresented groups might even backfire. The recognition of “minority status” or “preferential treatment” in public organizations can be interpreted as a way of creating its own constituencies, so that social cleavages may be cemented and perpetuated. Rather than “re-presenting”, i.e. making present again existing social cleavages, strategies towards representativeness might actually create new divisions (or reinforce and revive older ones) in society as the move towards representativeness can be opportunistically used to set new incentive structures for organized interests. And, finally, those additional divisions are perhaps even more forcefully felt inside public organizations as “intra-minority” competition seems to be one of the more frequently observed (unintended) consequences of representative bureaucracy.

Again, let us assume that these repercussions are adequately addressed and dealt with – as they, within limits, can be with an extra effort to the management of human resources and institutional change. A more fundamental category of open questions – related to basic assumptions of the “representative bureaucracy” concept and its relations with “political representation” – has still to be discussed. Theoretical reasoning as well as empirical research findings suggest that public policy making processes may inch closer and closer to the state of “ungovernability” if more and more actors, including non-elected officials in public bureaucracies, lay claim to legitimately represent specific constituencies. (This problem brings back to memory the role perception of policy-driven and highly politicized senior bureaucrats – or “pure hybrids” – who are likely to compete for the same turf as politicians.) On top of that it creates conceptual problems for the notion of accountability, if we deal – lacking any recall mechanisms or re-election requirements – with administrators and their relations with external stakeholders and constituencies.

So far we have worked on the assumption that bureaucratic “representatives” actually intend to perform their roles as prescribed by the mainstream of the “representative bureaucracy” literature. A new picture,
however, opens up, if we take issue with the proposition that “active representation” is primarily or exclusively sought after to promote the standing of marginalized groups. Rather, measures to improve “active representation” can just as well be used as a way of tokenism – a way to comply formally with popular expectations or legal requirements without addressing the question of substantive representation seriously. In other cases, to bring this discussion to full circle, it may be a vehicle for rewarding old – or buying new – political friends and supporters. Besides, the hypothesized link between “passive” and “active” representation is not as strongly established as much of the “representative bureaucracy” literature seems to suggest. Research on professional or elite socialization has shown how earlier socio-cultural attachments to minority groups may over time give way to new social identities, attitudinal patterns, and role understandings so as to conform more closely with their professional or organizational peers. As a matter of fact, minority members have been known for occasionally over-identifying with values and behavioral patterns of majority groups in order to blend in more easily. Even if members of marginalized groups in administrative positions still identify strongly with their socio-cultural inheritance, their propensity to act on their behalf as trustees, delegates, or stewards of their collective cause in their official capacity may be very low or non-existing.

THE CONTINGENCY OF REPRESENTATION OR, WHAT IS TO BE REPRESENTED?

What representativeness actually means appears to be highly contingent on the prevailing societal conflicts and cleavages, the specific function of the civil service within society, as well as its traditions and mechanisms of recruitment. The country studies in the volume Representative Bureaucracy in Action (von Maravic et al., 2013) illustrate not only why and how the issue of “representativeness” and “diversity” matters in public sector employment, but also highlight the driving forces that either keep the debate from moving forward or propel the institutionalization of some form of representation. Not only do traditional migration countries such as the United States of America, Canada or Australia cope with questions of the ethnic-cultural compositions of their societies but so also do European countries with a growingly diversified ethnic-cultural composition, often enough concomitantly to the existing linguistic–ethnic cleavages as for example in Switzerland or Belgium.
However, how issues of representativeness actually play out institutionally, what representativeness actually means, and to which groups it refers may vary among countries (see chapter by Peters, Schröter and von Maravić in this volume). Is it a question of geographic representation as in the case of Southern Italy, castes as in the case of India, an issue of indigenous groups in Mexico, people of African or European decent in South Africa, religious groups in the Netherlands and also formerly in Switzerland, entire regions as with Wallonia and Flanders in Belgium, or upper-middle class as in the case of Great Britain at the time when Kingsley wrote his account of the underrepresentation of the rest of society in the civil service? Thus, although government may attempt to produce more or less representative personnel systems, their efforts may be shaped in part by the nature of the surrounding society, (labor) market, and institutional setting. It is therefore not sufficient to focus the study of representative bureaucracy on ethnic diversity and migration alone but we must consider the societal conditions that establish the prerequisites for the nature of representation in a society’s administrative system. The question then is not just whether bureaucracies act as representative institutions but whom do they represent, how, and why (see also Wimmer, 1997).

What representation actually then means in an administrative system and to what extent public organizations are (see the chapter by Kenneth M. Meier and Tabitha S.M. Morton in this book) turned into representative bodies raises questions about the influence of a variety of institutional as well as socio-cultural factors that range from currently as well as historically existent cleavages, the traditional role the state encompasses in a society (liberal vs. organic) to the institutionalized forms of interest group articulation and mediation.

Social Conflicts

Considering the variation among countries of how representation essentially plays out, we propose that historical and salient social cleavages offer one explanatory factor for further investigation (Lipset and Rokkan, 1967: 1-64). Lipset and Rokkan understood “social cleavages” as arising “out of a great variety of relationships in the social structure […]” (1967: 6) but were also clear in seeing that “only a few of these tend to polarize the politics of any given political system” (1967: 6). In other words, we think that there are good reasons to believe that the extent to which a countries’ administrative system acts as a representative institution depends on the nature of prevailing social cleavages in a society. The type of cleavage, e.g. ethnic, language, or class polarization, appears to
be a necessary though not yet sufficient indicator for the type of representation we find in a given administrative system. And yet we lack systematic analysis across administrative systems that would allow us to move beyond hypothesizing causal relationships but determine to what extent a distinct form of representation can be understood as an expression of manifest or latent social conflicts (cf. Lipset and Rokkan, 1967: 5). The extent to which a country’s administrative system is a function of salient social cleavages depends furthermore on the ability of groups to articulate and advocate those conflicts over a significant period of time in the political arena. It is therefore plausible to assume that salient social cleavages play then a role in shaping the representative nature of a country’s administrative system, when specific issues, e.g. ethnic conflict, dominate the political agenda. Though social cleavages shape the nature of representation, there is no reason to believe in a deterministic relationship as other factors mediate this relationship.

Channels of Representation

One of these mediating factors can be seen in the different ways interests are being articulated and political preferences are being transmitted into a political system. The ability to organize the interests of a group and translate those concerns into the political arena by actively advocating a group’s concerns, seems to be a factor that shapes the way bureaucracies respond to the specific demands of a group. The related, though yet still open question, however, concerns the influence of more general features, such as the type of electoral or interest group system, of a nation’s system of political interest articulation. While majority electoral systems often lead to a two-party system, for example in Westminster democracies, the “winner takes it all” logic makes it difficult for minority groups to articulate their political will in the political arena (Lijphart, 1999). This could account for why the absence of proportional representation in the legislature is being (often) balanced by a tendency towards proportional representation in public sector organizations. This, at least, suggests the case of the United States as well as the case of the Canadian political system, though it is contradicted by the United Kingdom (Andrews, 2013; Turgeon and Gagnon, 2013; Peters, in this volume). Political systems, which determine the composition of the legislature by using proportional representation, tend to give more room for smaller parties to be represented with their ideas and agendas and therefore offer a channel for articulating societal conflicts. Does this automatically make representation in public organizations superfluous?
We may assume that this is not necessarily the case but it could make us think of alternative mechanisms of representation vis-à-vis the bureaucracy.

The two different logics of determining representation within parliament are not only related to the number of parties in parliament and the tendency to form coalition governments but also to interest group systems. While consensus democracies, to use Arend Lijphart’s (1999) term, do not follow the more antagonistic pluralist logic of interest group articulation of Westminster systems but instead incorporate a few selected interest groups into the policy-making process, which tends to lead to the exclusion of other interest groups, this corporatist style of policy-making (cf. Schmitter, 1974) is necessarily more dependent on finding a consensus among different groups. However, as indicated before, this more institutionalized way of interested articulation does not necessarily lead to a greater openness for less well-organized groups (Lehmbruch, 1977; Katzenstein, 1987b, 1985). Nevertheless, the ability of groups to articulate their interests in the political arena, the one way or the other, seems to be having an effect on either stabilizing existing institutional solutions or pushing them towards change. However, this form of “corporatist” representation may provide an alternative form of indirect representation of interests to the bureaucracy and could be more relevant in countries such as Germany or Austria. This specific type may provide a functional equivalent to the recruitment of “representatives” in the civil service as we see it in Canada or the United States. At least, the case of the German civil service suggests that the influence of relevant organized interest groups happens directly at the edge of relevant government departments, allowing them to institutionalize the partisan shaping of decision-making processes without being necessarily part of the civil service (Derlien and Mayntz, 1989; Katzenstein, 1987a). But this could matter for other countries as well. Lipset and Rokkan (1967) argue that the interest group system constituted a second pillar of democracy in Norway and other Scandinavian countries that enabled segments of society who were not well represented by the dominant Labor Party to influence policy. This representation was important for legitimation of the existing political order. As time and society have moved on, a third pillar of representation, within the public bureaucracy, may become increasingly important.

Pluralist systems of interest group mediation may offer similar mechanisms, though they are often less institutionalized.
Administrative Traditions and Forms of Recruitment

A third factor that seems to be worth further exploring concerns the influence of national state or administrative traditions. By “pooling diverse streams of experience” as Kingsley (Kingsley, 2003: 18) put it, or Mosher’s idea of bringing together “different perspectives, knowledge, values, and abilities” (Mosher, 1968: 16) citizens, they both argued, are better served as it improves the quality of governance. In principle, advocates of representative bureaucracy share the idea that a bureaucracy that mirrors the composition of the society it serves is more responsive to public interests and will therefore, as Selden and Selden point out, “better serve democratic principles” (Selden and Selden, 2001: 308). This very general argument, which seems to prevail in the representative bureaucracy as well as diversity management literature, provokes the question whether this might not only be true under very specific institutional, historical, and cultural conditions and is therefore difficult to generalize for all administrative systems. Our assumption would be that, when considering the variety of administrative traditions and cultures (Painter and Peters, 2010), the extent to which bureaucracies function actively as representative institutions is not only highly contingent upon different administrative traditions but also on the different roles the public service plays within societies. This idea is being nourished by the distinction between a liberal and an organic state tradition. The former, also labeled as a public interest state (Pollitt and Bouckaert, 2004: 53) is generally associated with Westminster political systems, whereas the latter Rechtsstaat model is more representative of the political systems of France, Germany, Switzerland, and Austria. This distinction, especially with regard to administrative system, rests on different beliefs of the role of state in society, the existence of administrative law, and the education and recruitment of public servants.

In the German and French administrative tradition, the state is a transcendent entity, its citizens members of an organic society. As bureaucrats personify the power and overarching capacity of the state, they take an essential role in shaping or even bringing about society. Their devotion, loyalty, and accountability is essentially a consequence of their specific training as professionals in the practice of law and administration of power. In this context it seems relevant to remind us of the different career systems that are embedded in the different administrative traditions. In the continental tradition, especially Germany and France, university graduates enter a career at an early age of their life and then proceed through the ranks often within the same organization. Attending specific training programs as in the case of the ENA in France
is often a prerequisite for entering a civil service career. Obviously, this
does not only form a specific expertise but is also the basis for a shared
set of values among elite member of the administrative class. Being
member of a state elite, especially in France (cf. Birnbaum, 1977;
Suleiman, 1984), carries the connotation of being able to take the right
decisions for society and all its members. The idea of representation is
officially non-existent in these systems, although the idea of “égalité” has
prevailed ever since the French Revolution in 1789, also, at least as a
principle, in the French civil service. Nevertheless, the idea of representa-
tion can be seen to exist in a different, rather indirect form as civil
servants perceive themselves, due to their expertise and training, to be
able to consider all necessary interests and take justified decisions as a
consequence of their competencies and social status. Representation is
therefore not so much a binary-coded issue of absence or presence but
rather concerns the institutionalized mechanisms, by which a civil service
system legitimizes and institutionalizes distinct forms of dealing with it.
Related to this, is, of course, the more general acceptance of hierarchy
and subordinance that legitimizes (to a certain extent) elite circle
decisions. This is quite the opposite to the notion of state and bureau-
cracy in Anglo-Saxon countries, though one should be quick to point out
that these are here very broad generalizations, which cannot do justice to
each country. Still, one must not go as far as Margaret Thatcher’s
observation, “there is no such thing as society” (in an interview, 1987),
but it underlines the importance of the individual in society and its
relationship to government. “Stateless society” (Stillman, 1991) expresses
the attitude that the state, especially within the United States, arises from
a contract among members of society and is being held accountable by
its members. The boundaries between state and society are more distinct
in the liberal tradition than in the Rechtsstaat tradition. In addition, as the
legal foundation of the state is less important compared to the Rechtsstaat
tradition the training of public servants rests less on law. Representation
is important in this administrative tradition as it defines a distinct form of
holding government accountable, as being a “mirror” of society, means
actually to be able to reflect all existing values and interest in society.

Social cleavages, forms of interest mediation as well as administrative
traditions are in our view relevant, though not necessarily sufficient to
understand why we observe variants of representation in administrative
systems. In some instances the social groups who may have something to
gain politically and in terms of employment simply do not mobilize, or
do not mobilize effectively. This may be from lack of understanding of
politics in democratic systems, or because the groups feel threatened in
some way. For whatever reason, simply existing may be insufficient for a
group to gain representation in representative bureaucracy. There is no “dearth”, as Lipset and Rokkan (1967: 6) pointed out, of well-founded hypotheses but making sense of them systematically and empirically will be a major task for the future, which will hopefully lead us to a more comprehensive understanding of the dynamics, facets, and contradictions of the politics of representation in the public sector.

IN CONCLUSION: LESSONS FOR A THEORY OF PUBLIC ORGANIZATIONS AND PATHWAYS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

Public bureaucracies are creatures of society and politics. The study of representative bureaucracy vividly reminds us of the fundamentally important and bidirectional relationship that exists between the dynamics of societal developments – be it class divisions, gender inequalities or other socio-cultural cleavages – and the most basic questions of how to staff public organizations. At the same time, the essentially political nature of the functions public agencies perform is highlighted. While public organizations – trusted with the task of the delivering public goods and services – will have to answer to questions about their effective and efficient performance, they are also inherently involved in those crucial processes of political interest mediation and representation, as well as generating system-wide public support and legitimacy. In order to fully appreciate these societal and political dimensions of public sector employment, however, our analytical lenses need to be adjusted accordingly. If we only employ ideal-typical bureaucratic models of organization or focus exclusively on purely efficiency driven managerialist prescriptions, our analysis of civil service systems will fail to see and recognize important societal and political implications.

While “representative bureaucracy” certainly qualifies as a contested concept in the field of public administration, it is also a highly relevant approach to advance our understanding of how public organizations work. One of the most significant lessons that can be drawn from what has been outlined above is that it does matter who is recruited into public sector jobs. Again, it is crucial to point out that the representativeness of public organizations affects both their internal and external affairs and has an impact on efficiency and effectiveness just as it does on legitimacy. As a consequence, it matters that those employees are capable of influencing policy and administration in ways that may advantage the social groups from which they are recruited. While this
form of legitimation may not always please members of the dominant
groups in society, it is crucial for managing the politics of contemporary
political systems, whether democratic or non-democratic.

Thinking about the importance of representative bureaucracy naturally
leads on to thinking about the importance of lower levels of the public
bureaucracy, and the face-to-face contacts between citizens and their
public servants. The familiar literature on street level bureaucracy has
pointed out that these interactions not only determine who gets what in a
material sense, they also affect the image of government and public
bureaucracy with the public. Most citizens have limited interactions with
their elected officials but they have frequent interactions with public
servants, ranging from police to school teachers to tax collectors and
beyond. This insight can just be added to the list of reasons why the
capacity of public bureaucracies to act as representative institutions
should be taken seriously.

Representative bureaucracy is not important only for political reasons,
however, and it has substantial relevance for the management of public
organizations (cf. Ely, 2004; Pitts, 2009; Pitts and Wise, 2010). The logic
of representative bureaucracy is to some extent the antithesis of the logic
of New Public Management that has dominated thinking about public
organizations for the past two decades. Representative bureaucracy
assumes that participation and involvement are more important for a
well-functioning organization than is the drive toward market efficiency
(see Pollitt and Bouckaert, 2004). While the market model of governing
assumes that citizens will be better off if services are provided efficiently
and at the lowest possible cost, more participatory conceptions of
management assume that citizens and employees will be better off if
more people can be involved in decision-making. With regard to the
broad and increasingly influential field of performance management in
particular, the lessons from the study of representative bureaucracy can
be condensed in a single message that appears simple and yet difficult to
digest: organizational performance is a multi-dimensional concept, rang-
ing from the quality of output and the effects on internal management to
the consequences for the building-up of political support and public trust.

The above having been said, however, having multiple social groups
within public organizations may also generate some management issues.
As has long been apparent for both public and private organizations
informal organizational structures exist alongside the formal structures
and provide alternative forms of control. If these informal structures are
defined by ethnic or gender characteristics then cooperation within the
organization may be impeded if the various informal structures and
groups are in conflict with one another. It flows from this that
representative bureaucracy as a reform strategy may indeed be the source of new challenges for public personnel management that have to be addressed by comprehensive measures of “diversity management”.

Representative bureaucracy may also raise important questions about the accountability of public organizations. Positive representativeness has been lauded as a mechanism for providing some differential consideration to minority group members and women. If indeed that is a consequence of increased representativeness then decisions being made within the bureaucracy may not apply the law equally to all citizens. While we can make a case that the more disadvantaged members of society should receive special consideration if that is indeed done then the average taxpayer and citizen may believe that his or her interests are not being served adequately. Thus, there is a need for some balancing of principles of equality and compensation when attempting to determine just how much representativeness should be linked to policy choices.

Despite a long-standing intellectual tradition and a rich body of literature that refers to representative bureaucracy as a field of scholarly work, our knowledge of the conditions under which public organizations are more or less likely and able to act as representative institutions and what the consequences for administrative performance are going to be is still underdeveloped. How exactly reform approaches towards “representative bureaucracy” play out in different institutional contexts, cultural settings and for various types of public agencies is still an agenda item for further research in comparative public administration. To what extent citizens and their voices, opinions and interests can be represented by members of public bureaucracies and how this channel of interest representation relates to other forms of political representation can in turn be best answered if we wed the still rather separated research traditions of political and bureaucratic representation together. Why does passive representation in public bureaucracies translate into active representation in certain cases but not in others? What role perceptions and attitudinal dispositions towards their clientele groups do public administrators hold? These questions apparently require further research into the sociology of public sector organizations and their members. As illustrated by this shortlist of research questions and approaches, we supposed that much can be gained in this field of inquiry if we pursue a distinctly comparative and interdisciplinary research agenda that frees itself from narrow normative limitations and recognizes the inherently political nature of public bureaucracies. It is to this research agenda that this publication as well as its sister volume seeks to make a contribution.