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Reaching out to the People?

Assessing the Relationship between Parliament and Citizens in Finland

Abstract

Despite the Open Government (Parliament) initiatives and notions of a 'democratic parliament', the relationship between legislatures and citizens remains seriously under-researched. This article introduces a comprehensive analytical framework, combining the normative principles of visibility, accessibility, and permeability with practical indicators (parliament as public space, sharing of information, contact with MPs, media and digital engagement, transparency of legislative process, and actual participation in legislative decision-making), for assessing the public engagement of parliaments. Applying this framework to the Finnish Eduskunta, the authors show that despite recent reforms that have partially 'opened up' parliamentary proceedings and attempted to connect citizens to democratic process, there remains scope for reforms and innovations. The Eduskunta should embrace a more positive approach towards new forms of civic participation, particularly regarding how its influential committees operate. The findings reflect the tensions between, or the difficulties in reconciling, traditional forms of representative democracy with alternative and more direct channels of political participation.

Introduction

Despite the challenges facing contemporary representative democracy, parliament still plays the central role in linking the national political system with citizens (Kelso, 2007; Norton, 2013). However, the relationship between parliaments and citizens remains seriously under-researched. Parliamentary scholars have mainly focused on legislative-executive relations, while the linkage between the legislature (both parliament and parliamentarians) and the electorate has not been sufficiently addressed (Leston-Bandeira, 2012a; Norton, 2002). Fortunately recent years have seen more interest in this 'ignored' agenda. Public disengagement with established representative institutions, rapid developments of information and computing technologies (ICTs) and expanding democratic innovations have urged scholars to study the transforming relationship between the governors and the governed. Also, the international Open Parliament initiative has emerged, following the Open Government movements calling for more transparent, participative and collaborative governance by using 'Gov. 2.0' technologies (Granickas, 2013, Lathrop & Ruma, 2010). Several parliaments have indeed tried to enhance public engagement through providing more information to the public, improving physical, technological and personal accessibility, and embracing more direct involvement of citizens in legislative decision-making. In many cases, such innovations have not been pursued in a comprehensive and strategic manner, and it appears that there is a gap between public expectations for reforms and the reality of parliamentary operations (IPU & UNDP, 2012).[1]

There is a paucity of systematic parliamentary audits that would empirically examine whether and how legislatures connect with the electorate. The volume edited by Norton (2002) focused on the MP-constituent linkage, but some of the articles did also examine public engagement

beyond conventional electoral participation and party democracy (e.g. Della Sala, 2002; Saalfeld, 2002). Since then scholars have studied newer forms of parliamentary interaction with citizens, such as an e-petition system or MPs' use of new ICT-tools (Carman, 2010; Lindner & Riehm, 2011; Norton, 2007). The Hansard Society has published annual audits of 'public engagement' since 2004 and various policy reports about evolving representative democracy, connecting citizens to parliament, and civic education. The reports of the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU 2006; IPU & UNDP 2012) have also identified good practices regarding the responsiveness of the parliament to the public. However, these are more practical documents, lacking a theoretical examination of the issues.

A significant step forward was the special issue of *The Journal of Legislative Studies* in 2012 which focused exclusively on the legislature-citizen relationship. Leston-Bandeira (2012a, pp. 271-272) presented an analytical framework combining structural variables with practical indicators. Structural variables included 'historical context', 'institutional context', 'political culture of expectations', and 'perceptions of parliament', while practical indicators suggested scrutinizing (1) parliamentary engagement programmes or resources, (2) access to parliament, parties and MPs, (3) contact mechanisms between parliament and citizens, and (4) the institutional design and functions of petition systems. The articles in that collection showed that parliaments have enhanced institutional communication with the public by using new ICT tools but also revealed considerable variation in actual linkages with citizens (Leston-Bandeira, 2012b). Griffith and Leston-Bandeira (2012) found that despite the potential of new media for making traditionally 'closed' parliamentary institutions more open and accountable, the complex and slow processes, 'political' character of parliamentary institutions and limited financial-organisational resources acted as barriers for effective communication. Arter (2012) in turn connected the practical indicators presented by Leston-Bandeira to normative principles. He

adopted 'transparency' (visibility) and 'accessibility' from the five standards of the 2006 IPU report (IPU, 2006), and added 'permeability' to measure the extent to which citizens can influence the legislative process. Moreover, the practical indicators in Leston-Bandeira (2012a) have room to be developed further to cover the full scope of parliamentary public engagement practices.

This article contributes to that literature in two ways. We first develop a comprehensive analytical framework, combining normative principles with practical indicators and then apply the framework to the Finnish Eduskunta. Finland is a particularly interesting case, as it has experienced significant constitutional changes which have elevated the roles of government and the Eduskunta while at the same time introducing the citizens' initiative in 2012. Against the backdrop of particularly decreasing turnout in Eduskunta elections, Finland has also seen both societal debate and government initiatives about fostering political participation (Ministry of Justice, 2014). Our findings in turn underline the tensions in reconciling traditional election-based representative democracy with newer, more direct forms of alternative political participation.

Analytical framework: normative principles and practical indicators

There are various documents and standards to guide legislative activities towards open and participatory democracy. The 2006 IPU report presented five basic values – representative, transparent, accessible, accountable and effective – with practical indicators (IPU, 2006). Although the report provides a general guideline for democratic legislatures, the indicators about 'representativeness' seem too broad, engaging with basic features of constitutional and electoral systems. 'Accountability' focuses on ethical behaviour of parliamentarians to restore public trust, while the 'effectiveness' is largely about legislative capacity for overseeing the executive

and international cooperation. The Open Government initiative (www.opengovernmentinitiative.org) adopted transparency, participation and collaboration as key principles. It focuses on transparency and open access to public sector information, although it also emphasizes the importance of collaborative and participatory governance in implementing open data strategies. Similarly, the Declaration on Parliamentary Openness (www.openingparliament.org) presents detailed criteria for (1) 'promoting a culture of openness', (2) 'making parliamentary information transparent', (3) 'easing access to parliamentary information', and (4) 'enabling electronic communication of parliamentary information'.

Arter (2012) offers a more useful and comprehensive framework, since the three principles, visibility (transparency), accessibility and permeability, cover the core dimensions of the parliament–citizens relationship. Though they are to some extent overlapping, the three principles correspond to different roles of citizens in contemporary democratic systems. Following Arter (2012, p. 276), we hence adopt three normative principles required for legislatures to be more open and responsive to the public.

- *Visibility*: The extent to which parliamentary proceedings and the activities of MPs can be viewed by (are visible to) the public. This corresponds to the role of the citizen as spectator and the question asked is 'when can citizens spectate (in person and/or electronically) and what can they view?'
- *Accessibility*: The degree to which citizens have access, physical or digital, to MPs and the legislature. This corresponds to the role of the citizen as constituent and the attendant question is 'when do citizens have access to the parliament and their elected representative(s) and how readily available are MPs to citizens?'

- *Permeability*: The degree to which parliament is open and responsive to legislative initiatives and policy input from outside the legislature. This corresponds to the role of the citizen as policy partner, participating in the process of legislative change individually or collectively and the relevant question asked is 'are there structured mechanisms allowing citizens to participate in law making and does the political culture facilitate such participation?'

In order to arrive at a robust and generalizable operationalization of the normative principles, we then propose six practical indicators covering a wider range of public engagement with parliamentary affairs: (1) parliament as public space, (2) sharing of information, (3) contact with MPs, (4) media and digital engagement, (5) transparency of process, and (6) actual participation in legislative decision-making.[2] The indicators cover physical, psychological and virtual engagement, collective and individual linkages, and procedural and substantial aspects of public participation (Table 1).

1. *Parliament as public space*: Despite the normative perception of parliamentary role as the central public space of national democracy, there are tensions between the roles of legislatures as 'historical sites, deliberative sites, working buildings, and ceremonial sites.' (Hansard Society, 2011; Parkinson, 2013, p. 439) Moreover, security concerns may result in increased control measures. The British House of Commons installed a 'thick, bullet-proof glass' between the public and MPs' seats, while the Canadian parliament is praised for allowing public demonstrators to be present in the parliamentary *plaza* inside the perimeter. (Parkinson, 2013, pp. 446, 449) Whether the parliamentary sites are genuinely open and accessible to citizens is an important dimension of the citizens-legislature relationship.

2. *Sharing of information*: Information sharing is nowadays regarded as a clear requirement of open governance. Legislatures can disseminate information through various means, such as operating a visiting center, publishing material online and offline, or having parliamentary libraries open and accessible. Moreover, parliaments are now required to publish open parliamentary datasets in easily available formats for public re-use, implementing their own open data policies. (*Declaration on Parliamentary Openness,* www.openingparliament.org)

3. *Contact with MPs*: Individual legislators can influence the public image of the parliament, and active communication or constituency work by MPs can contribute to improving the psychological access of the public to the parliament. However, the MP-constituent linkages can vary between countries, not least depending on the rules of the electoral system (Leston-Bandeira, 2012b; Norton, 2002).

4. *Media and digital engagement*: Media and digital technologies are commonly regarded as the most efficient tools for enabling citizens to engage with the democratic process. In particular, new (social) media has great potential for interactive communication between legislatures and citizens. However, this may require reforming parliamentary procedures, while increasing the resources and media skills of MPs and parliamentary staff (Coleman & Blumer, 2009; Griffith & Leston-Bandeira, 2012; IPU, 2013).

5. *Transparency of process*: Depending on the standing orders of legislatures, parliamentary processes may be designed quite differently regarding the publicity of the proceedings and the related documents. Distinctive characteristics are observed particularly in the publicity of committee meetings, for example between Westminster-style 'debating' parliaments and Nordic 'working' parliaments (Arter, 1999). Despite the advantage of

trust-based negotiations in closed settings, limited committee transparency can be a

serious barrier to the public to engaging with the legislative process.

6. *Actual participation in legislative decision-making*: This criterion relates directly to

‘permeability’, the extent to which citizens can influence parliamentary decision-making

(Arter, 2012). Civic participation in legislative processes can take various forms, such as

initiating a legislative agenda through signing a petition or a citizens’ initiative, enhanced

public / online consultation by committees, deliberative citizen forums linked to

legislative mandates, or direct involvement through popular votes.

TABLE 1

Methods and Data

The empirical analysis is based on three sets of data. We first scrutinized a wide range of

documents, such as parliamentary rules and procedures, related legislative documents including

government proposals, committee reports and statements, and parliamentary administrative

documents. The websites of the Eduskunta and of other legislatures were also consulted. Second,

we collected statistical data to show the actual scope of parliamentary engagement activities, for

example about use of social media, public consultations in committees, and implementation of

citizens’ initiatives. Third, we conducted around 30 semi-structured, in-depth interviews with

MPs, parliamentary staff and civil society actors, including two committee chairs, eight

parliamentary civil servants, and five initiators of citizens’ initiatives. Although not fully cited

here due to limitations of space, the interviews were highly useful, particularly regarding the

political culture inside the Eduskunta.[3]

Applying the framework: empirical analysis of the Eduskunta

Parliament as public space

The main building of Eduskunta in central Helsinki was inaugurated in 1931, when a new space was needed for a unicameral parliament with 200 MPs that had been operating since 1907. After an expansion of parliamentary buildings in 1978, the Little Parliament was built in 2004, which also accommodated the Ombudsman Office and the Citizens' Information Centre. Eduskunta operates moderate-level security measures; people can visit the parliamentary building to watch the plenary debates in the gallery, passing a security check system. People are allowed to demonstrate in front of the main building of the Eduskunta or in a square across the road.

The Citizens' Information Centre, opened in 2004, stages around 250 public seminars or conferences per year in which MPs meet citizens. The centre also operates a guided tour programme in which more than 40,000 people participate per year (interview with Tiimonen). Eduskunta holds an annual open day in September and has hosted the Youth Parliament (www.nuorteneduskunta.fi/) since 1998. In addition, the commercial TV station MTV3 and the city of Pori have been organizing the event '*SuomiAreena'* since 2006 in cooperation with the Eduskunta. It is a public debate forum benchmarked from the Swedish *Almedalen Week* (*Almedalsveckan*), with active participation from MPs and ministers. In 2016, around 63,000 people took part in over 150 events (http://suomiareena.fi/info/tata-on-suomiareena).

Regarding physical accessibility of people with special needs, the classical architecture of Eduskunta building is problematic. In 1983, when Kalle Könkkölä, one of the first Green MPs in Finland, entered the Eduskunta in his wheelchair, there was no lift or ramp for wheelchair users. Since then, the situation has gradually improved (interview with Könkkölä). A working group

for the accessibility of Eduskunta published its final report in 2006.[4] Wheelchair users can now join the tour of parliamentary buildings or sit in the public gallery. The Eduskunta buildings were recently renovated as a whole and unveiled on September 2017 to celebrate the centennial of independent Finland. However, there was no fundamental change in terms of public participation and accessibility since the main goal of renovation was to preserve the historical heritage of parliamentary properties while improving technical functioning. The Swedish Riksdag opened a modernized chamber after a renovation in 2004-2006 which also facilitated better accessibility for the disabled (http://rundvandring.riksdagen.se/en/, accessed 28 February 2014).

Sharing of information

The Citizens' Information Centre also plays a central role in disseminating information to the public. A basic information brochure about Eduskunta is provided in two national languages and 10 foreign languages, while online basic information is available in Finnish, Swedish and English. Multi– lingual translation of parliamentary information is an indicator of an accessible parliament (IPU, 2009), and the Swedish Riksdag website (www.riksdagen.se) offers similar information in 22 foreign languages. It also produces more diverse materials, in terms of both form and content.

The Eduskunta library has been open to the public since 1913 and parliamentary documents have been available online since 1995. The library has adopted the principles of openness and good interaction with citizens as strategic values. It offers an information service on parliamentary, legal and political issues including information packages on legislative projects. It recently released data on expert consultation in the committees (1997-2014), which provides important information on whom the committees have heard when scrutinizing governmental initiatives.[5]

However, the library does not operate any more regional info-kiosks through public libraries (interview with Korkeila).

A new emerging dimension of enhancing transparency and accessibility is the Open Parliament movement. Joining the Open Government Partnership Initiative in 2013, the Finnish government has implemented national action plans (2013-2015, 2015-2017) and Finland was ranked fifth in the 2015 Global Open Data Index (http://index.okfn.org/place/finland/). A Declaration on Parliamentary Openness has been endorsed by a global network of parliamentary monitoring organizations and many parliamentary bodies (Granickas, 2013). Several legislatures, including those of Sweden, Denmark, Norway, France, Italy, the UK, and the European Parliament, have established their own open data portals. The Swedish Riksdag's open data has included approximately 300,000 documents and materials since 1971. (http://data.riksdagen.se/) The Eduskunta remains left behind such international movements. It is yet to establish its own open data policy with an online platform for sharing open datasets. It is currently considering what kinds of parliamentary data should be provided as open datasets, while operating an open data project (2015-2016).[6]

Contact with MPs

An open and intimate relationship between politicians and citizens is regarded as a common feature of Nordic democracies. MPs who were interviewed commonly said that they communicate with ordinary citizens in everyday situations. 'Open. We parliamentarians are contacted much through phone and email. MPs move alongside citizens in squares, markets, and wherever always in daily lives' (Vahasalo, NCP, Chair of Education and Culture Committee). 'Phone, email, text-message and Facebook. Now I learn Twitter, but Facebook … I receive around 50-70 emails, sometimes even 100 in a day' (Rehula, Centre Party, Chair of Social

Affairs and Health Committee). MPs frequently invite some targeted groups from their constituencies to the Eduskunta guided tours, but also sometimes to give evidence in committee hearings.

MPs are nowadays highly active in utilizing new social media such as Facebook and Twitter, which make their activities more visible while forcing quicker responses to citizens' demands (interviews Kiuru; Niikko; Rehula; Tiimonen; Toivola; Vahasalo).

According to a recent media survey, around 75 per cent of Finnish MPs use Facebook and Twitter and around 25 per cent of MPs use Instagram while 10 per cent do not use any social media at all. MPs of the Green League, Left Alliance, Christian Democrats, and Swedish People's Party are active users of Facebook and Twitter, while the populist Finns Party MPs are least active. All 15 Green MPs use Facebook and Twitter, while 10 of 38 Finns Party MPs do not use any social media. First-term and younger MPs are likely to be more active in social media. However, political communication through social media diminishes after elections to a considerable extent. Our interviews also identified a gap between different parties and age groups. A young Green MP (Tynkkynen) emphasized that 'most comes nowadays from online communication through email, Facebook and Twitter', while a senior NCP representative (Vahasalo) evaluated that '(offline) meeting with citizens is more important than online communication' (interviews with Tynkkynen; Vahasalo). In addition, most Finnish parliamentarians (176 of 200 MPs) have their own blogs.[7]

Previous studies indicate that Finnish MPs do not usually hold 'constituency surgery' types of regular meetings with constituents even though the 'open list' electoral system should provide strong incentives for developing active constituency links (Arter 2011, 2012). However, this aspect of parliamentary work remains largely under-researched in the Finnish context (and is

beyond the scope of the analysis here) and hence we must refrain from making definitive conclusions regarding the level of contact between MPs and constituents in Finland. We included this dimension despite data limitations as it forms a key part of the analytical framework and the interaction between parliaments and citizens cannot be fully understood without incorporating MPs or their party groups into the equation.

Media and digital engagement

Eduskunta guarantees that journalists can work as freely as possible. There are around 250 reporters and 80 photographers registered to work at the Eduskunta, and they can easily interview MPs and ministers in the halls, lobbies and café of the parliament buildings (interview with Tiimonen). Besides everyday news reports and interview or debating programmes, key parts of the plenary such as question time on Thursday afternoons and interpellations (that are always followed by a vote of confidence) as well as topical debates, prime minister's announcements and the opening of parliament are broadcast live on the Finnish public broadcasting channel (YLE TV 1). However, there are no parliamentary TV or radio channels, nor a parliamentary magazine or journal.

The Eduskunta website was recently completely redesigned and relaunched, in April 2015. Adopting a more visual design, it aimed at addressing criticism of not being user-friendly (e.g., search functions difficult to operate, difficult language) (interviews with Korkeila; Tiimonen). Although the new website meets the basic Guidelines for Parliamentary Website by IPU (2009), it still leaves room for improvement. It is not easy to find legislative documents or statistical data of legislative activities, including public engagement work. The webpages of individual MPs are even less informative and do not enable citizens to interact directly with MPs online. Although interactive communication between legislatures and citizens is the least developed function in

most parliamentary websites (Papaloi & Gouscos, 2011), there are some positive examples. The Scottish parliament allows the public to send emails or leave online feedback to MPs directly through the parliamentary website (www.parliament.scot). The Brazilian parliament has implemented the e-Democracy platform with various functions for interactive dialogue between parliament and the public (Teixeira de Barros, Bernardes, & Rehbein, 2016).

Social media has already affected enormously patterns of political communication. However, usually parliaments are latecomers in utilizing new communication tools, and unconventional (personal, direct, quick and informal) styles of communication driven by social media impose various challenges on the legislature as a collective institution. In most countries parliamentary use of social media remains largely marginal, with simple provisions of information without engaging with public users. Leston-Bandeira and Bender (2013) investigated parliamentary use of social media in seven European parliaments and found that 70.5 per cent of parliamentary social media postings belonged to simple dissemination of parliamentary business and that public engagement-related postings formed just a small part. The Scottish parliament, which adopted a strategy for open, accessible and participative parliament was the most active in engaging in dialogue with citizens through SNS tools: 52.3 per cent of its postings were for public engagement.

This observation – limited parliamentary use of social media – is also applicable to the Eduskunta. It operates Facebook and Twitter accounts. The latter has 28,428 'followers' while the former enjoys 4,672 'likes' (as of 8 November 2016). However, it is hard to say whether the Eduskunta as a collective body interacts with citizens actively through such SNS tools when considering the content of the communications; they usually remain intermittent, short and formal announcements of parliamentary schedules, news and events, without real discussion and

13

feedback. To compare, the Swedish Riksdag and Norwegian Storting do not operate Facebook accounts, while the Danish Folketing has a much larger number of 50, 010 'friends'. Regarding use of Twitter, Folketing has 20,100 followers and Riksdag 16,000, while Storting has championed the use of Twitter with 51, 522 followers.[8] Eduskunta is hence located in the middle range of social media usage among Nordic parliaments. Eduskunta has also operated a YouTube channel (www.youtube.com/user/SuomenEduskunta) since 2012, but only several dozens of educational or introductory video clips have been uploaded. It has just 120 subscribers with 85,180 views (as of 8 November 2016). In addition, more experimental ways of using ICT, such as developing interactive online games or applications, have not been found yet.

A more interesting example of digital engagement was the 'crowdsourcing' law-making project in 2013 in which the Committee for the Future cooperated with the Ministry of the Environment. Drafting a new bill on off-road traffic regulations, the Ministry invited citizens to an online platform (www.suomijoukkoistaa.fi) to suggest, comment and vote on ideas for better legislation. Over six months (January–June 2013), around 510 ideas, 4 000 comments and 25,000 votes were generated. The project contributed to expanding citizen participation in the legislative process and the participants' experience was surveyed as generally positive, including the quality of online deliberation. However, the number of participants (700 registered users) was still small, and there were also problems regarding transparency and accountability in the communication process among participants, decision-makers and the wider public (Aitamurto & Landemore, 2015). The Committee for the Future in its report recommended that the government expands crowdsourcing processes (Aitamurto et al., 2014). However, the project has lost impetus since the minister responsible, Ville Niinistö, and his Green party resigned from the cabinet in September 2014. After the election held in 2015, the Greens remained in opposition

and it is not expected that current centre-right coalition government will utilize crowdsourcing methods.[9]

Transparency of process

The most distinctive feature of Eduskunta on this front is that while the plenaries are open to the public, committees meet behind closed doors. People can watch plenary debates in the public gallery. The events on the floor are broadcast on the Eduskunta website and the core proceedings are broadcast live on YLE. All plenary documents can be accessed, including verbatim transcripts. The plenary has become more important since the 2000 constitutional reform that weakened presidential powers and turned Finland into an essentially parliamentary regime. A good illustration of this transformation is the presence of prime ministers in the plenary. Whereas in the early 1980s the annual number of plenary speeches made by the prime minister could be as low as one or two, this number has increased rapidly since the early 1990s. The prime minister and other ministers now appear almost on a weekly basis in the Eduskunta to defend government actions. Also, question time has been reformed in the direction of more spontaneous and lively dialogue between the cabinet and MPs (Raunio & Wiberg 2008).

Meanwhile, committee meetings are mainly not open to the public. This is regarded as a common feature of Nordic parliaments, which emphasise the advantages of trust-based negotiation in closed settings in which an exchange of opinions can happen easily among committee members. Normally only a condensed version of committee minutes, containing agenda items and related documents, participants and final decisions, is publicized after a meeting. Only exceptionally when the committee decides to hold public hearings can proceedings be followed by the public. Committees have increased the number of public hearings, but their number is still very small with notable variation between committees. Except

for the Committee for the Future, most other committees seem reluctant to embrace more transparent legislative processes (Table 2).

TABLE 2

Actual participation in legislative decision-making

Referendum and deliberative participation

According to the constitution, national-level referendums are only consultative. There have been only two such referendums: the first in 1931 on the prohibition of alcohol and the second in 1994 on European Union membership; nor have there been any deliberative citizen forums connected to Eduskunta decision-making. This stands in striking contrast to Denmark, which is characterized by frequent referendums and a strong commitment to deliberative democracy. For example, the Board of Danish Technology provided a good model of consensus conferences institutionalized in connection with parliamentary decision-making. In addition, there is no parliamentary (online) petition system in the Eduskunta. Instead, it operates the Parliamentary Ombudsman with Human Rights Centre, through which citizens can file complaints.

Engagement with committee process

Committees allow civil society stakeholders, including interest groups and academic experts, to submit their statements on the bills, and selected experts are invited to make their voices heard in committee hearings. The scope and methods of committees' consultation activities can vary, ranging from standard (expert) consultation, co-consultation with the public, to a more extensive outreach process. Analysing the parliamentary data of committee consultation during 1997-2014; we found that 10,030 experts were heard by the committees in 2014; 60.5 per cent were from the

16

public sector agents and 2.7 per cent represented the private sector, while 27.4 per cent came from the third sector and 9.1 per cent were academic experts. The general scope of hearings can be considered to be quite wide, but they are staged in closed committee rooms with tight time schedules and restricted modes of communication (interviews with Mäkipää; Rehula) Moreover, the committees appear to have their own 'usual suspects' invited more frequently to consultations. The Constitutional Law Committee relies on several legal professors, while the Social Affairs and Health Committee frequently hears central labour market organizations. According to *Helsingin Sanomat*, representatives from business and industry sectors were heard twice as often as trade union representatives between 1998 and 2013. That data also suggests that organized interest groups are overall much more represented in parliamentary work than under-organized minorities or value-oriented non-governmental organisations (NGOs) (Peltomäki, 2013). Holli and Saari (2009) also showed that women (33.9 per cent) were heard less than men (66.1 per cent) by committees. Media and civil society activists have been arguing for introducing a transparent lobbyist registration system, but the Eduskunta is still reluctant to reveal the information about: "Who visits the Eduskunta to meet with which MPs on a daily basis?" (interviews with Pekkanen; Tynkkynen)

Besides the committee hearings, there are no additional processes allowing citizens to express their opinions or give comments on bills under committee deliberation. The British parliament, Chilean Senate and Brazilian Chamber of Deputies allow the public to submit their views about bills under consideration through an e-Consultation scheme, online forum or e-Democracy platform (Faria & Rehbein, 2016; Hansard Society, 2011, pp.40-42). In addition, the Eduskunta committees have not commonly practised outbound trips for field investigation and public consultation (Seo, 2017). The committees of the Scottish parliament exercise various public engagement practices, such as 'fact-finding visit, outreach meeting, round-table or seminar, civic

participation event, commissioned research, informal meeting, ICT initiative, etc' (McLaverty &

MacLeod, 2012, p. 461). Overall, the Eduskunta committees' engagement with civil society is

practiced mainly through neo-corporatist channels of 'functional representation'; individual

citizens beyond established organizations and professional experts can hardly influence the

normal legislative process in Finland (For more detailed analysis, see Seo 2017).

Citizens' Initiatives

Given the rather elitist mode of legislative process with limited visibility and accessibility, a

potentially significant reform took place in 2012 when the national-level citizens' initiative

entered into force. The Citizens' Initiative Act permits Finnish citizens to submit their legislative

agenda to the Eduskunta by collecting more than 50,000 signatures in six months. The reform

was a 'top-down' project of the Finnish government and was influenced by the introduction of a

similar procedure at the European level. Between March 2012 and September 2015, 12

initiatives passed the hurdle of 50,000 signatures; six initiatives were fully deliberated by the

Eduskunta and one of them, on gender-neutral marriages, was finally approved by the Eduskunta

(Table 3).

TABLE 3

The citizens' initiative is an agenda-type initiative without a link to a referendum.[10] The Finnish

government operates an online platform (www.kansalaisaloite.fi) for organizing such initiatives.

Citizens can easily launch initiatives and collect signatures through the online system. The

citizen's initiative has brought up various 'hidden' issues, from animal rights, the Copy Right

Act, energy certification system, crime and justice, Swedish language policy, to equal sexuality –

issues that are typically difficult for political parties as they tend to divide parties internally or

produce disagreements between ruling coalition parties. The initiators have diverse backgrounds from traditional interest groups, value-based NGOs, volunteer activists, local politicians, to ordinary people with specific grievances. Their campaign methods also vary depending on the issues. Internet and social media, particularly Facebook, have played a big role, while face-to-face campaigns are also important. The citizens' initiative has increased parliamentary transparency and accessibility to some extent since the committees have staged open hearings when deliberating the initiatives. Expanding political debates and citizen engagement with national politics, it appears that the citizens' initiative has become consolidated as an alternative channel for legislative agenda-setting besides government bills and MPs' initiatives. However, the citizen initiators clearly think that the Eduskunta needs to establish more interactive dialogue with citizens (interviews with Kiuru; Pekkanen; Toivola; Vahasalo; for more detailed information, see Seo,2017).

Concluding discussion

Societal changes and new demands for open governance are putting pressure on political institutions to 'open up' their procedures and to engage more actively with citizens. Parliaments are also facing challenges in combining traditional representative democracy with new forms of citizen participation, and we believe that scholars should pay more attention to how legislatures 'reach out' to citizens.

The primary goal of this article was to contribute to the literature through developing a comprehensive framework for analysing the relationship between legislatures and citizens. The application of the framework to the Finnish Eduskunta has produced mixed findings. We have identified a number of recent reforms that have contributed to transparency and accessibility, ranging from architectural renovations, an information center, better links with the media,

webcasts and TV coverage of plenaries, to occasional public committee meetings. On the other hand, the Eduskunta has not yet established its own Open Parliament policy including a separate open data platform. Its use of social media remains thin, and a more active digital engagement should be implemented with a 'thick' concept of transparency (Leston-Bandeira & Bender, 2013). A positive example was the 'crowdsourcing' law-making project of the Committee for the Future, but that has not been taken up by other committees. The Committee for the Future also remains a low-ranking committee with limited legislative powers and resources.

The most critical aspect is the closed nature of committee work. The Eduskunta along with other Nordic legislatures can be classified as a 'working' parliament as opposed to 'debating' parliaments like the House of Commons. Working parliaments are characterized by standing orders that emphasize committee work over plenary debates, with a legislative culture where MPs focus on scrutiny of documents in committees instead of grand speeches on the floor. In addition, debating legislatures are, on average, less consensual, with the opposition using the plenary to criticize the government (Arter, 1999, pp. 211-217; Bergman & Strøm, 2011). In line with the 'working parliament' thesis, committees are the backbone of the Eduskunta. They meet behind closed doors and are the central arena for constructive argumentation and party-political cooperation, including between government and opposition parties (Pekonen, 2011; Raunio & Wiberg, 2014).

We recognize the advantages of closed meetings: they allow confidential exchange of information, both between parliamentary groups and between the legislature and the executive, which in turn facilitates more informed decision-making (Fasone & Lupo, 2015). Nonetheless, openness can be seen as one of the core principles of modern democracy and reliance on closed negotiations with 'usual suspects' may cause a decline in legitimacy when they dominate access

to parliament at the expense of ordinary citizens and socially marginalized groups (Norton, 1999, p. 15). Hence committees should expand the scope of hearings by involving more diverse social sectors and enhancing engagement with the public (Seo, 2017). At least, expert hearings could be held open to the public as a rule unless there is special reason for secrecy. Moreover, mechanisms such as online consultation or 'e-Parliament' could be designed for citizens to submit their opinions to the committees.

A recent democracy policy report of the Finnish government, based on hearing the views of ordinary citizens, suggested a series of reforms: (1) tackling decreasing turnouts, (2) facilitating the citizens' initiative, (3) strengthening parliamentary oversight of the executive, (4) cultivating vivid parliamentary debates with an active role for the opposition, (5) increasing accessibility of the Eduskunta by opening up the parliamentary process, using civil panels, publicizing a list of lobbyists, and writing parliamentary documents in easy language, and (6) narrowing the gap between citizens and decision-makers while experimenting with new forms of participation (Ministry of Justice, 2014; Peura-Kapanen, Rask, Saastamoinen, Tuorila, & Harju, 2013). However, specific reforms to change the Eduskunta procedures were not highlighted sufficiently and the parliamentary discussion about the report indicated a lack of interest in the topic (Eduskunta, 2014: PTK 26/2014 vp).

While measuring the political will inside the Eduskunta is difficult, Finnish parliamentary culture does not appear conducive to embracing more participatory channels of influence. The Eduskunta focusses very much on controlling the government and specifically on scrutiny of government bills, not on 'reaching out' to citizens. There is a strong attachment to the traditional mode of representative democracy and a lukewarm attitude towards democratic innovations (Arter, 2012; Seo, 2017). The citizens' initiative might in the long run bring about a more

participatory legislative culture, especially in light of the success of the same-sex marriage

initiative. However, more deep-seated changes would be required to cultivate a more open and

inclusive relationship with the public.

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[1] Norton (2013, pp. 199-279) provides a useful overview of the multiple aspects of the parliament–citizen relationship.

[2] Additional indicators or criteria could include 'civic education and outreach', 'parliament as future forum', and 'strategy and leadership', but these are more relevant in terms of long-term parliamentary practices aimed at *inclusive and sustainable democracy*. For example, the Eduskunta operated, in January 2014, a programme where 150 MPs visited schools in their constituencies. On average, each MP visited three schools and about 110 students participated in a meeting in which students could discuss with MPs the work of parliamentarians. This event contributed to increasing the interest of students, teachers and MPs themselves (interview with Tiimonen). Moreover, the Committee for the Future has pioneered a democratic innovation of representing the future generations' perspectives in a national policy making process, based on scientific research and broader parliamentary consensus (interview with Tiihonen).

[3] Only those interviewees are mentioned in the references whose names are mentioned in this article.

[4] *Demokratia kaikille* (Eduskunnan esteettömyystyöryhmä, 2006), available at http://web.eduskunta.fi/Resource.phx/eduskunta/tervetuloa/esteeton.htx?lng=fi.

[5] Data available at:
https://www.eduskunta.fi/FI/tietoaeduskunnasta/kirjasto/aineistot/eduskunta/valtiopaivaasiakirjat-tietopaketti/Sivut/Valiokuntien-asiantuntijakuulemiset.aspx (accessed 1 October 2015).

[6] Eduskunta recently held a public conference of *Open Data and Open Democracy* in cooperation with the city of Helsinki (4 March 2016). Available at:
http://www.helsinkikanava.fi/www/kanava/fi/videot/video?id=2887 (accessed 20 October 2016).

[7] Data were gathered from the Eduskunta website (http://web.eduskunta.fi/Resource.phx/eduskunta/organisaatio/kansanedustajat/blogit.htx, accessed 16 September 2014).

[8] Data were collected from the three parliaments' websites (accessed 8 November 2016).

[9] It is notable that the Finnish government operates an e-Democracy portal (www.demokratia.fi), linking various online platforms for citizen engagement. The scope for civic engagement is broader during the drafting of legislation than during the parliamentary processing of the bills (interview with Wilhelmsson).

[10] On different institutional types of citizens' initiative, see Setälä & Schiller (2012).

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Table 1. Practical indicators of parliamentary engagement with the public

No.	Practical indicators	Indicators in detail
1	Parliament as public space	• What programmes and venues are offered for the public to explore their legislature including its history, system and process, MPs' working lives, and debating political-legislative issues? • How open and accessible is the parliament to the people with special needs, particularly people with disabilities? • Can the 'purposive' public approach to the parliamentary arenas? How strict is the security system or procedural requirement for public attendance at the chamber gallery?
2	Sharing of information	• Does the parliament operate a visiting center with professional staff to communicate better with the public? How is parliamentary information disseminated to the public? • How open and accessible is the parliamentary library system? Does the parliament operate regional offices or other channels to communicate with local people? • Has the parliament established its own open data policy with a separate online platform? Do the open parliamentary datasets satisfy the international standards in their scope, format and actual availability for public re-use?
3	Contact with MPs	• Do MPs organize regular meetings with their local constituents? Do MPs organize day visits or tours of parliament for 'hard-to-reach' groups in their constituencies? • Is there correspondence between MPs and constituents? How much time do MPs invest in answering questions sent by mail, e-mail or through social media? Do MPs give practical help to constituents? • Do MPs keep in contact with constituents via social media (Facebook / Twitter / blogs)? • What links are found between the country's election system and MPs' constituency roles?
4	Media and digital engagement	• What media channels are operated to inform the public of parliamentary affairs? Does the parliament offer a free working environment for the journalists? • Is the parliamentary website informative and user-friendly? Does it allow the public to engage directly with MPs or comment on the processing bills online? • How is the participatory potential of new ICTs such as new social media utilized by the parliament? What impacts are observed through the parliamentary use of them?
5	Transparency of process	• Are plenary proceedings (debates / question time etc.) open to the public, physically and digitally? How broad is the scope of broadcasting on parliamentary processes? • To what extent are the documents and records of parliamentary proceedings, including committees, available to the public? • Are standing committee meetings open to the public, including expert hearings? How does the level of transparency influence the effectiveness of legislative committees?

6	Actual participation in legislative decision-making	• Can citizens participate in initiating the legislative agenda, for example, through petition and an e-petition committee, or the citizens' initiative? • Does parliament open the legislative processes of scrutiny and expert hearings to the public – for example, through an online-forum (e-Parliament) and 'public reading stage', submissions or open seminars etc.? • Does the parliament utilize such methods of deliberative democratic forums as citizens' jury, consensus conference, and citizens' assembly? • Is there direct involvement of the public in final legislative decision-making, such as citizens' initiative linked with (consultative) referendums?

Table 2. Public committee meetings and hearings in the Eduskunta (2008-2014)

Committee	Number of public hearings and meetings	Public hearings on citizens' initiatives
Grand Committee	4	
Constitutional Committee	1	
Foreign Affairs Committee	1	
Finance Committee	2	
Audit Committee	6	
Administration Committee	0	
Legal Affairs Committee	2	2
Committee of Transportation and Communication	0	
Committee of Agriculture and Forestry	1	1
Defence Committee	0	
Committee of Education and Culture	2	2
Committee of Social Affairs and Health	1	
Commerce Committee	2	
Committee for the Future	15	
Committee of Employment and Equality	2	
Environment Committee	5	1
Total	44	6

Table 3. Citizens' initiatives deliberated by the Eduskunta during the first parliamentary term (March 2012- April 2015)

No	Issue	Initiators	Campaign methods	Signatures	Date of arrival in the Eduskunta (Bill No.)	Responsible committee	Decision of Eduskunta	Notes
1	Prohibition of fur industry in Finland	4 organizations in the area of environment and animal rights	Mainly face-to-face campaign	69,381	5 March 2013 (KAA 1/2013 vp)	Agriculture and Forestry	Rejected (26 June 2013, EK 19/2013 vp)	First initiative, aiming to raise public awareness
2	Changing the Copy Right Act	Individual volunteers	Relying on online campaign	51,974	26 November 2013 (KAA 2/2013 vp)	Education and Culture	Rejected (14 November 2014, EK 33/2014 vp)	Crowdsourcing ways of organizing
3	Legalising same-sex marriage in Finland	Individual volunteers with temporary campaign organization	Mainly online gathering of signature, but also active offline movements	166,851	13 December 2013 (KAA 3/2013 vp)	Legal Affairs	Approved (12 December 2014, EK 41/2014 vp)	Largest number of signatures (100,00 signatures collected in 24 hours)
4	Changing the Energy Certification Act	A major interest organization in the housing sector	On and offline campaigns half and half; utilizing 260 local branches and own magazine	62,211	25 March 2014 (KAA 1/2014 vp)	Environment	Rejected (17 June 2014, EK 18/2014 vp)	Two recommendations of Eduskunta for governmental measures
5	To make Swedish an optional subject in schools	A thematic campaign organization led by a local politician	On and offline by half and half	62,158	24 April 2014 (KAA 2/2014 vp)	Education and Culture	Rejected (6 March 2015, EK 54/2014 vp)	One recommendation of Eduskunta; political agenda of the populist Finns Party
6	Tougher punishments for drunk drivers	Individuals (a victim's parents)	Mainly online communication through SNS	62,835	6 June 2014 (KAA 3/2014 vp)	Legal Affairs	Rejected (10.3.2015, EK 56/2014 vp)	Six recommendations of Eduskunta